

**ASSESSING COLLEGE DATA: HELPING TO  
PROVIDE VALUABLE INFORMATION TO  
STUDENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND TAXPAYERS**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
AND WORKFORCE TRAINING

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND THE WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **ASSESSING COLLEGE DATA: HELPING TO PROVIDE VALUABLE INFORMATION TO STUDENTS, INSTITUTIONS, AND TAXPAYERS**

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**Thursday, September 20, 2012  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Washington, DC**

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The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:08 a.m., in room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Virginia Foxx [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Foxx, Kline, Petri, Platts, Hinojosa, Andrews, Davis, and Altmire.

Staff present: Katherine Bathgate, Deputy Press Secretary; Adam Bennot, Press Assistant; James Bergeron, Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Casey Buboltz, Coalitions and Member Services Coordinator; Heather Couri, Deputy Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Cristin Datch, Professional Staff Member; Amy Raaf Jones, Education Policy Counsel and Senior Advisor; Barrett Karr, Staff Director; Krisann Pearce, General Counsel; Dan Shorts, Legislative Assistant; Alex Sollberger, Communications Director; Alissa Strawcutter, Deputy Clerk; Kate Ahlgren, Minority Investigative Counsel; Tylease Alli, Minority Clerk; Meg Benner, Minority Education Policy Advisor; Kelly Broughan, Minority Staff Assistant; Brian Levin, Minority New Media Press Assistant; Megan O'Reilly, Minority General Counsel; Julie Peller, Minority Deputy Staff Director; and Michael Zola, Minority Senior Counsel.

Chairwoman FOXX. Good morning. A quorum being present, the subcommittee will come to order. Welcome to the—to today's subcommittee hearing. Thanks to our witnesses for joining us to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Federal Higher Education Data Collection System. That is a mouthful, is it not?

The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act included several provisions aimed at improving transparency in higher education. For the first time institutions were required to make information about higher education pricing and financial aid more readily available to students and families. Additionally, the reauthorization encouraged colleges and universities to provide the federal government with more information about basic institutional characteristics such as demographics and graduation rates to help students make well-informed higher education choices.

At the time, then Ranking Member Buck McKeon said the legislation would help our nation's higher education system "begin a transformation that will make it more accessible, affordable and accountable to consumers."

Without a doubt, the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act started a process of enhancing higher education transparency. But as tuition and student debt continue to rise, and at an astonishing pace, it is clear more work must be done to help students and families make informed choices about their higher education options without overburdening institutions with counterproductive red tape.

The Obama administration has recently suggested a need to make more data available to help perspective students and families better understand their post-secondary education options, as well as the financial commitment required by the schools they are considering. However, there is concern that newer additional data requirements could be duplicative or unnecessarily burdensome to higher education institutions. After all, the nation's 7,000 post-secondary education institutions already dedicate thousands of hours and millions of dollars on data reporting each year.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, institutions spent roughly 800,000 and more than \$28 million filling out surveys for just one of the Department of Education's five main higher education databases. Experts predict the burden will grow to 850,000 hours and \$31 million in the 2012-2013 school year. Again, these numbers reflect just a portion of the federal reporting requirements currently imposed on our higher education institutions. One can only assume the total investment in federal data collection is much greater.

Adding insult to injury, institutions may also be asked to submit additional data to creditors and state leaders. This information often differs from the federal requirements, adding to the burden facing the nation's post-secondary schools.

As I previously stated, those in Washington have a responsibility to weigh carefully any federal action to ensure that such actions will not create greater costs for students in schools, particularly in these tough economic times. In the next Congress this committee will be responsible for leading the charge once again to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. Today's hearing will allow us an opportunity to review the types of higher education data currently collected by the federal government, and discuss whether this information is useful to families, institutions and taxpayers.

We are fortunate today to have several expert witnesses with us who can offer their perspectives on data reporting. And I expect their thoughts will inform future discussions on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

With that, I would like to now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Hinojosa, for his opening remarks.

[The statement of Ms. Foxx follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman,  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training**

The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act included several provisions aimed at improving transparency in higher education. For the first time, institutions were required to make information about higher education pricing and financial aid more readily available to students and families. Additionally, the reauthor-

ization encouraged colleges and universities to provide the federal government with more information about basic institutional characteristics, such as demographics and graduation rates, to help students make well-informed higher education choices.

At the time, then-Ranking Member Buck McKeon said the legislation would help our nation's higher education system "begin a transformation that will make it more accessible, affordable, and accountable to consumers." Without a doubt, the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act started a process of enhancing higher education transparency. But as tuition continues to rise at an astonishing pace, it is clear more work must be done to help students and families make informed choices about their higher education options without overburdening institutions with counterproductive red tape.

The Obama administration has recently suggested a need to make more data available to help prospective students and families better understand their postsecondary education options as well as the financial commitment required by the schools they're considering. However, there is concern that new or additional data requirements could be duplicative or unnecessarily burdensome to higher education institutions.

After all, the nation's 7,000 postsecondary education institutions already dedicate thousands of hours and millions of dollars on data reporting each year. In the 2011-2012 academic year, institutions spent roughly 800,000 hours and more than \$28 million filling out surveys for just one of the Department of Education's five main higher education databases. Experts predict the burden will grow to 850,000 hours and \$31 million in the 2012-2013 school year.

Again, these numbers reflect just a portion of the federal reporting requirements currently leveraged on our higher education institutions. One can only assume the total investment in federal data collection is much greater. Adding insult to injury, institutions may also be asked to submit additional data to accreditors and state leaders. This information often differs from the federal requirements, adding to the burden facing the nation's postsecondary schools.

As I have previously stated, those in Washington have a responsibility to weigh carefully any federal action to ensure that such actions will not create greater costs for students and schools, particularly in these tough economic times. In the next Congress, this committee will be responsible for leading the charge once again to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. Today's hearing will allow us an opportunity to review the types of higher education data currently collected by the federal government and discuss whether this information is useful to families, institutions, and taxpayers.

We are fortunate today to have several expert witnesses with us who can offer their perspectives on data reporting, and I expect their thoughts will inform future discussions on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

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Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx. I appreciate everything that you have done to make this hearing possible. And I think it will be very, very productive; very informative.

I would like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for joining us today to examine the usefulness and quality of the data the federal government currently collects from institutions of higher education. It is my hope that our expert panel will provide us with a better understanding of the data reported, how students and families and policymakers use the data, and key areas that could be improved when this committee reauthorizes the Higher Education Act.

Data on post-secondary education are critical for a number of reasons. As the ranking member of this subcommittee, I believe that these data can help students and families to make informed decisions on which institution best meets their unique needs. Data on post-secondary education can provide colleges and universities the information they need to improve teaching and learning, the quality of education programs and student success, particularly for minority and low-income first generation college students and non-traditional students.

In my view, most policymakers find data on post-secondary education extremely valuable. Both federal and non-federal reporting and disclosure requirements, for example, are intended to hold colleges and universities accountable for rising tuition and the quality of educational programs. On behalf of students and families and taxpayers, we in Congress must ensure that the large financial investment that the federal government has made in higher education is making a difference for students and families.

While we must be aware of the administrative burden that data collection and disclosure and reporting requirements impose on institutions of higher education, we must collect data that allow the federal government to monitor the use of Title IV financial aid dollars and empower students and families to make informed choices.

In terms of the types of data that the federal government collects, I want to highlight one of the shortcomings of our current system. And I have said this for the 16 years that I have been in Congress. As you know, the federal government requires institutions to report college completion for first time, full-time students—only 14.6 percent of students enrolled in post-secondary coursework.

As a result, current data do not reflect the increase of non-traditional students enrolling in our institutions. This is clearly a poor and inaccurate measure of how colleges and universities are serving all those students I enumerated.

By collecting data on all students enrolled, including part-time students, colleges and universities and the federal government would have a more accurate picture of a student's academic progress and success. Importantly, as the composition and needs of post-secondary education students change and become increasingly diverse, institutions must not abandon their commitment to educate greater numbers of low-income and minority students.

In fact, I believe that we must do more to incentivize institutions that expand educational opportunity to some of our most disadvantaged student populations. The federal government has a responsibility to ask clear questions, to collect relevant data and to provide helpful information to students and families making the important decision of what college to attend.

And in closing I want to say that we have a lot to learn. And current systems could be greatly improved to reflect the diversity of today's higher education population. I hope today's panel will inform this committee so we can better understand how to improve the data we collect and what information is most useful for all of our students and families.

And with that, Madam Chair, I thank you for calling this congressional hearing. I yield back.

[The statement of Mr. Hinojosa follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rubén Hinojosa, Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training**

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx.

I would like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for joining us today to examine the usefulness and quality of the data the federal government currently collects from institutions of higher education.

It is my hope that our expert panel will provide us with a better understanding of the data reported; how students, families and policymakers use the data; and key

areas that could be improved when this committee reauthorizes the Higher education Act.

Data on postsecondary education are critical for a number of reasons. As the Ranking member of this subcommittee, I believe that these data can help students and families to make informed decisions on which institution best meets their unique needs.

Data on postsecondary education can provide colleges and universities with the information they need to improve teaching and learning, the quality of educational programs, and student success, particularly for minority, low-income, first-generation college students, and non-traditional students.

In my view, most policymakers find data on postsecondary education extremely valuable. Both federal and non-federal reporting and disclosure requirements, for example, are intended to hold colleges and universities accountable for rising tuition and the quality of educational programs.

On behalf of students, families and taxpayers, we in Congress, must ensure that the large financial investments that the federal government has made in higher education are making a difference for students and families.

While we must be aware of the administrative burden that data collection, and disclosure and reporting requirements impose on institutions of higher education, we must collect data that allows the federal government to monitor the use of Title IV financial aid dollars and empowers students and families to make informed choices.

In terms of the types of data that the federal government collects, I want to highlight one of the shortcomings of our current system.

As you know, the federal government requires institutions to report college completion for first-time, full-time students, only 14.6 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary coursework. As a result, current data do not reflect the increase of non-traditional students enrolling in our institutions.

This is clearly a poor and inaccurate measure of how colleges and universities are serving all students. By collecting data on all students enrolled, including part-time students, colleges and universities and the federal government would have a more accurate picture of a student's academic progress and success.

Importantly, as the composition and needs of postsecondary students change and become increasingly diverse, institutions must not abandon their commitment to educate greater numbers of low-income and minority students. In fact, I believe that we must do more to incentivize institutions that expand educational opportunity to some of our most disadvantaged student populations.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to ask clear questions, collect relevant data, and provide helpful information to students and families making the important decision of what college to attend. We have a lot to learn, and current systems could be greatly improved to reflect the diversity of today's higher education population.

I hope today's panel will inform this Committee so we can better understand how to improve the data we collect, and what information is most useful for all of our students and families.

With that, I yield back to Chairwoman Foxx and our distinguished panel of experts.

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Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Hinojosa. I will make one comment on what you have said. This idea of traditional and non-traditional students, I think we are going to hear a lot more about today. And I have been mulling over that term traditional student. I think we have to get rid of that because it is obviously inappropriate. I—yesterday I was thinking about that, and I thought maybe we need to use the term old-fashioned student. I have tried to think of a word for it. But anyway, we will talk some more. But we certainly agree that that is an area where there is a tremendous problem.

Pursuant to committee Rule 7(c), all subcommittee members will be permitted to submit written statements to be included in the permanent hearing record. And without objection, the hearing record will remain open for 14 days to allow statements, questions

for the record and other extraneous material referenced during the hearing to be submitted in the official hearing record.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our distinguished panel of witnesses. Dr. Mark Schneider is vice president for Education, Human Development and Workforce at the American Institutes for Research. He served as the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics from 2005 to 2008. He is also a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and distinguished professor emeritus of political science at the State University of New York Stony Brook.

Dr. James Hallmark is the vice chancellor for Academic Affairs of the Texas A&M University System. He began his career as an instructor of speech communication before proceeding through a series of positions at West Texas A&M, including dean of the Graduate School in research, federal relations coordinator and provost/president for Academic Affairs. He became vice chancellor in 2012.

Dr. José Cruz is the vice president for Higher Education Policy and Practice at The Education Trust. He oversees the National Access to Success Initiative. Dr. Cruz is former vice president for Student Affairs at the University of Puerto Rico System.

Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons has been president of Shenandoah University since 2008. She holds a faculty appointment as professor of political science. Additionally she serves on the board of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in the Powhatan School.

Before I recognize you to provide your testimony, let me briefly explain our lighting system. You will have 5 minutes to present your testimony. When you begin, the light in front of you will turn green. When 1 minute is left, the light will turn yellow. And when your time is expired, the light will turn red, at which point I ask that you wrap up your remarks as best as you are able. After you have testified, members will each have 5 minutes to ask questions of the panel.

I would now like—I now recognize Dr. Schneider for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. MARK SCHNEIDER, VICE PRESIDENT,  
EDUCATION, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE WORKFORCE,  
AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH**

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you so much. It is my pleasure to be here.

So, I just want to echo some of the comments that have already been made in the fact that the nation spends billions upon billions of dollars in our higher education system. And actually that is taxpayer money. When we think about the investment that students and their families make in this we are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars. It is poured into a system that we sometimes like to think about as the best in the world.

We actually have many, many world-class universities. But we also have hundreds upon hundreds of colleges that are not doing the job in terms of educating students, graduating students and helping them find employment after they graduate, which by the way is over 90 percent of American students now say that is job number one for the colleges that they attend.

So, we may not have the best university system in the world. But we certainly have the most expensive. According to OECD figures,

we spend more than any other OECD country and in fact twice as much as the OECD average. Despite all that money that we spend, we do not know which institutions are spending their money efficiently, and we do not know which universities are actually doing a good job in turning—in terms of returning—a higher return on the investment made by taxpayers or by students.

So, one of the problems that we have is that our data system, again as referred to, is actually pretty bad. And I am referring specifically to IPEDS, which is the nation's number one system of data collection for post-secondary systems of education. And actually IPEDS would have been a wonderful system in the 1950s, but it is not appropriate for today.

It does not work for the students that we have. It does not work for the enrollment patterns that we have. It does not work for the institutions that we have. And again, the fixation on first-time, full-time students is just—it is just crazy. It makes no sense at all, given the world that we live in.

So, I just want to quickly note some of the areas in which we are making some progress and the areas in which I think need to be addressed by this committee and the Congress going forward, and hopefully be addressed in the reauthorization of HEA.

First of all, student success while in college. IPEDS measures far too few students, measures far too few aspects of student success while in college; for example, no measures on student progression. We are making progress fixing that.

In particular I am talking about the NGA, the National Governors Association and Complete College America's metrics which I believe, a, are much more encompassing and accurate than IPEDS; and b, show that in fact these data can be collected without a heavy burden on institutions. And again, I am very mindful that we want to be really careful about imposing additional burdens on campus. But I believe that CCA and NGA are showing the way forward on that.

A second area that I think we really need to be much more careful about and thoughtful about is the labor market returns to graduation. Students in the nation need to know what fields, what schools, what programs are graduating students that are having success in the local labor market.

This is critical information for the wellbeing of all of us. We need to be able to link the wage data with the Student Unit Record data. States can now do this. Over 30 states have now linked their Student Unit Records and unemployment insurance data, wage data. And most of this—most of those linkages were paid for by federal tax money.

However, even though over 30 states can do this, the number of states that have made this data public is close to zero. So, one of the questions that I pose to all of us is what is the return on hundreds of millions of dollars of federal investment in these linked data, and why are not these data more in the public domain? This is a part of my life right now. But I think it is an important issue.

And I think the third area that we really, really need a lot of work on is the cost to degree. How much does all this cost? We are very expensive. But our accounting systems are really rudimentary.

So, for example, taxpayer subsidies come in so many different forms, and we are not tracking them correctly.

So, as a result, we can say something—a degree is cheap because the tuition is low. But when you take in all the taxpayer subsidies and you look, and you standardize by measure of success, the fact is that something that looks cheap could be really, real expensive. We need much, much better finance data.

I believe that we could address some of these issues in the reauthorization of HEA. I think, for example, that IPEDS can and must be approved—improved. I think that this is on Congress actually to identify the things that it really wants because most of the things at IPEDS are the result of legislation.

So, we need to figure out what still matters and what is still good. And I think we need to pay a lot of attention to ultimately the labor market success of students because I think that matters to all of us. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Schneider follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Dr. Mark Schneider, Vice President,  
American Institutes for Research**

The nation invests untold billions of taxpayer dollars in its higher education system. Students and their families pour even more into a system that often is thought of as “the best in the world.” While clearly the nation has the lion’s share of the world’s great universities, we also support hundreds upon hundreds of campuses that are not doing a good enough job of educating their students, graduating them, or helping them find jobs—which, according to a recent study by the Higher Education Research Institute of California, is the number 1 goal of today’s college students.

Further, we have only rudimentary knowledge about how well all those billions are being spent. We do know that the United States spends more on higher education than any other nation in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),<sup>1</sup> but we have only limited insights into which institutions are spending their money more efficiently than others and which are generating a higher return on investment for students and taxpayers.

Our inability to document student and institutional success all too often traces back to limits in the nation’s primary system of higher education data collection, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

IPEDS would be a pretty good data system for the 1950s, but IPEDS is flawed—perhaps fatally so—given our current system of higher education.

- When it comes to students, its coverage is too limited to represent the changing population of students enrolled in America’s colleges and universities.

- When it comes to capturing different aspects of student success in college, IPEDS measures far too few.

- When it comes to the crucial issue of how much higher education costs, IPEDS comes up short. Yes, we can use IPEDS data to tease out some rudimentary information about costs (thanks largely to the Delta Project started by Jane Wellman and now at the American Institutes for Research, where I work). But these insights don’t begin to meet our information needs.

- And when it comes to measuring taxpayers’ return on the investment (ROI), we have to make some heroic assumptions to even approximate what taxpayers get in return for the vast sums they invest in colleges and universities.

The nation can do better.

With that in mind, I will sketch some of the metrics needed to better measure the performance of our colleges and universities. I’ll use four categories to keep it simple:

- Student success while in college
- Student learning outcomes
- Student success in the labor market
- Costs of degrees

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<sup>1</sup>According to the OECD’s 2012 Education at A Glance, the United States spends around \$29,000 per higher education student compared to the OECD average of \$13,728.

I will zero in on what I see as some of the most promising developments in each category and discuss some of their benefits and costs. Then I'll take on the issue of risk adjustment to allow comparisons across institutions that serve different student populations. I'll end by comparing the present regulatory mentality of the US Department of Education's approach to measuring student success in the labor market with a consumer information approach that I believe works better with the data we have. A consumer-oriented approach could make it easier to find and use not only data on employment outcomes, but other types of information on college performance as well.

#### *Student Success While in College*

Improving student success in college requires addressing three related processes: retention, progression, and completion. To earn a degree or a certificate, students have to stay enrolled (retention), they have to accumulate enough credits in a timely way (progression), and ultimately they have to finish school (graduation). We need far better measures of all three processes and we need to track far more students than we do now.

As is well known, IPEDS concentrates on full-time, first-time beginning students. Unfortunately, this group represents fewer than half of all students in the country. And even for these students, IPEDS' measures of student success are limited.

While IPEDS does report first-year retention rates for both full-time and part-time students, it doesn't tell us the rates at which students stay in school after their first year, it has no information on student progression, it doesn't count most transfer students, it doesn't calculate student success metrics for many groups of students that are central to the nation's policy concerns (such as recipients of Pell grants) and has no information at all about student success after graduation.

Slowly (and, we must hope, surely), we are making progress on fixing these problems. Most notably, the National Governors Association is leading states to endorse Complete College America's (CCA) student success metrics, which will allow us to more accurately measure the success of far more students enrolled in colleges and universities than is possible with IPEDS. That's because these metrics are based on student-level data (held by the states, not the federal government), data that are much finer grained and more accurate and that cover more students than IPEDS.

One area of student success that CCA emphasizes is credit accumulation—an intermediate step between retention and completion. The aim of this measurement is to determine the proportion of undergraduates making steady academic progress during an academic year. Students can return semester-after-semester, but if they aren't completing courses and earning credits at a pace that will allow them to get a bachelor's degree within 6-8 years or an associate's degree in around 4 or so years, many will likely never graduate. Capturing the percentage of students who are progressing fast enough toward their degree is one measure to which IPEDS needs pay far more attention.

These kinds of student success measures are built on student-level data that most campuses and states should have and that can be compiled both relatively quickly and cheaply. Moreover, they can be produced now, without a long lead time. In turn, I believe that we can vastly improve our measurement of student success without imposing undue burden on states or campuses—something about which we all need to be mindful.

Despite its importance, the CCA effort isn't broad enough. Yes, over half the states in the nation now provide Complete College America with expanded metrics, but these cover only public institutions and currently the data are not reported at the campus or program level.

#### *Student Learning*

Higher education is about just that: educating students. However, the task of actually measuring how much college students have learned is just beginning to gain traction.

Critics have long suspected that far too many colleges are not improving student skills. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's book, *Academically Adrift*, elevated that concern from faculty office anecdotes to a headline issue.

Arum and Roksa show that during their first two years of college, almost half of the students in their study did not improve in critical thinking, complex reasoning, or writing. Moreover, they show that students are distracted by socializing or working and that many colleges and universities put undergraduate learning close to the bottom of their priorities.

One of the strengths of *Academically Adrift* is its empirical base. Rather than asserting that students are not learning, Arum and Roksa used the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to measure students' cognitive skills. Among the growing

number of college student assessments, the CLA has so far attracted the most attention; however, other assessments are available (such as the College Board's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency or ETS' Proficiency Profile test) and more will likely be coming to market as policymakers demand measures of the value added of college education.

My preference is for actual assessments of learning outcomes, such as CLA, not the less telling process-oriented studies such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CSSE). While some NSSE and CSSE questions are more valid on their face than others—for example, those on how often students wrote research papers or talked with faculty—overall NSSE and CSSE measure process, not outcomes, so their correlation with, say, graduation rates, is low.<sup>2</sup>

There are questions about the cost of CLA (and other such assessments) and questions about how students approach low-stakes tests. But even more important are questions about the role the federal government should play in college assessments. Within those constraints, Congress should continue to monitor the progress of efforts to evaluate how much students learn and how much college helps them build their skills.

#### *Student Success in the Labor Market*

While improving measures of student learning and student progress are important, ultimately we need to assess the extent to which labor markets are validating the level and usefulness of the skills college graduates possess.

About half the nation's states can now link student-level data that document each collegian's experiences (including major field of study) to unemployment insurance records that can track post-graduation earnings. These data let us compare the returns on the investment students and taxpayers have made in, say, a student with a bachelor's degree in sociology to the investments in a similar student who earned a bachelor's degree in English literature from the same campus.

Perhaps even more important, these linked data let us measure the returns to students with the same credential coming from different campuses. Students and policymakers can therefore compare how successful students with, say, a bachelor's degree in materials sciences from one school match up to students with the same degree from another campus. While higher education is about many other things besides labor market success, for most students, their families, and state policy makers, higher education is the ultimate economic development strategy. So all need to know how students fare after they graduate.

On September 18, 2012, I released data documenting the first-year earnings of graduates from programs across public institutions in Tennessee. These data document how much variation there is in the earning power of graduates from diverse fields of study—but the data also show how much variation there can be in the earnings of graduates from the same field of study across different institutions.

As this graph from the report shows, there is nearly a \$15,000 difference in first-year earnings of bachelor's degree holders in the same area of study, the health professions, from the University of Memphis versus graduates from the University of Tennessee. A smaller gap, but still around \$7,000 in first-year earnings, separates graduates from the University of Tennessee in Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies from graduates from East Tennessee State. Note also that while Tennessee State graduates in Health professions lagged every other campus, their graduates in Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies were the highest paid in the state, on average, for students with this major. This reinforces the need for information about specific programs—because, to repeat, success often is not uniform across programs or across institutions.

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<sup>2</sup>For example see FALSE FRONTS? Behind Higher Education's Voluntary Accountability Systems by Andrew P. Kelly and Chad Aldeman. Available at: <http://www.educationsector.org/usr-doc/False-Fronts.pdf> and Assessing NESSE by Mark Schneider. Available at <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/11/24/schneider>



Tennessee data, not presented here, also show how well many students with technical two-year degrees from community colleges do in the job market—where often their wages exceed those of students earning a bachelor's degree. And, like the chart above, the data also show how much earnings variation there is between graduates of different community colleges in the same field of study.

Students and their families should have this information at their fingertips so they can make better informed decisions about where to enroll, what to major in, and how much debt they might comfortably take on relative to their likely earnings. About half the states have linked their student-level data with the unemployment insurance wage data (an effort supported by the federal State Longitudinal Data Systems grant program). But while many states have linked these data, few states have made those linked data known or easily available to the public, to individual campuses, or their state legislatures.

I am working with six states—Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia—to get measures of the economic success of graduates into the public sphere. The Tennessee data and an accompanying report were released September 18th. Arkansas data were released in August, and the Virginia data will appear in October. The data for Arkansas and Tennessee are easy to search and compare at [www.collegemeasures.org](http://www.collegemeasures.org) and the other states' data will be made available in the next few months.

#### *Cost of Degrees*

Finally, we need more accurate data on the cost of producing college degrees. And let's not confuse cost with price here.

Most consumers worry about price and know little about cost. If we go to Wal-Mart to buy a roll of paper towels and the price is \$1.00, the fact it may cost 30 cents to produce is rarely on our radar screens. Consumer ignorance of cost is even more prevalent when government subsidies cloud the difference between price (what we pay for something) and cost (what it costs to produce it). When we look at a highly subsidized service, such as higher education, the divergence between price and cost can be substantial. In short, a college diploma that carries a low price tag can cost far more than people realize.

Any discussion of the cost of degrees must be attuned to their full cost, including taxpayer subsidies, and must be standardized by success (e.g., number of completions). Without taking both factors into account, taxpayers will be left with the false impression that a degree or certificate is cheap (because tuition price is low), even though it may be quite expensive when all costs are totaled.

We know that costs are driven by such things as (a) the mix between upper division specialized courses versus lower division general education ones and (b) the mix of majors—after all, physics labs cost far more than language labs. And the mix of students and majors also may vary with each campus' particular mission. True degree costs, then, must reflect all these variables.

Many accounting issues also need to figure in any discussion of degree costs. For example, how should we allocate spending on research and administrative support? We have little information on capital costs, which in many campuses exceed operating costs. In short, the budgets of most higher education institutions are both sketchy and opaque, featuring little of the true grist needed to even start tabulating

what a student's education costs taxpayers or how much campuses spend per degree.

We also have no reliable way of estimating how much the tax exempt status of public and not-for-profit colleges and universities costs taxpayers. In more and more cities, for instance, conflicts are emerging between "town" and "gown" over payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTS). Fiscally strapped municipalities where tax exempt institutions represent a significant share of their potential tax base (Boston and Providence come to mind here) are looking to campuses for some form of payment—but under current law payment is at the campus' discretion. And tax exempt institutions pay no income or sales taxes—in contrast to for-profit education systems, for which corporate taxes are likely over 10% of revenues and sales taxes 1 or 2 percentage points. These exemptions are real taxpayer costs but are "off the books" so often go unnoticed.

Given these, and other related issues, we have no way of knowing how much taxpayers are investing in degrees through direct appropriations and through subsidies. And without an accurate cost accounting, it's hard to begin to assess the rate of return to taxpayers for their investment in higher education. I have been exploring this work with Jorge Klor de Alva, president of the Nexus Research and Policy Center. Last year we published a study of bachelor's degrees and are now studying taxpayer returns on associate's degrees.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Risk Adjustment*

Higher education institutions in the United States vary widely in their missions, the students they serve, and the resources they have to educate those students. Many argue that a "one size fits all" approach to any metric is unfair to the institutions that are serving "nontraditional" students—the majority of students in post-secondary education today. To compare students' college or labor market success in a highly selective not-for-profit college or public flagship school to that of students in a regional public four-year campus is clearly unfair. One solution to this problem is to establish risk-adjusted metrics that would allow us to compare individual campuses with their students' characteristics taken into account.

Risk-adjusted metrics are not a new idea. For example, hospital outcomes are often compared using measures that take into account their missions and clientele. It's understood that patient populations in community hospitals vary greatly from those in, say, trauma centers. In higher education, we need some agreement on which student and campus characteristics need to be taken into account, perhaps starting with the risk factors that NCES has identified,<sup>4</sup> but developing consensus around variables and methods requires more work. And we must take care so that risk adjustments don't let poor-performing campuses off the hook. A campus with a 25 percent graduation rate might have a "risk-adjusted graduation rate" of 35 percent, but is 35 percent good enough?

#### *Consumer Information vs. Regulation*

Let's assume that over time we develop better metrics to gauge the performance of our institutions of higher education. Then what? The U.S. Department of Education's effort to regulate based on Gainful Employment shows the risks of getting too far ahead of the quality of the data.

As is well known, a federal court ruled this past summer that the repayment ratio, one of the Department's three Gainful Employment metrics, was "capricious and arbitrary" and that no research backed up its 35% threshold for imposing penalties on campuses. While the Department's right to regulate on GE was upheld by the court, the current effort has once again hit a major stumbling block.

The problem here, I believe, is that the Department has been so focused on Gainful Employment as a regulatory issue that it has neglected an equally crucial role—getting the information it has collected into the hands of students and their families in an understandable format. The huge effort expended on the three regulatory ratios (debt to earnings; debt to discretionary earnings; repayment rates) meant that too little was paid to what is arguably the most important piece of information in the entire GE data release in June of 2012: the average earnings of graduates of covered programs. Indeed, I have been told that there was serious discussion about not even releasing earnings data at all!

<sup>3</sup>See *Who Wins? Who Pays? The Economic Returns and Costs of a Bachelor's Degree* by Jorge Klor de Alva and Mark Schneider. Available at <http://www.air.org/focus-area/education/index.cfm?fa=viewContent&content-id=1286&id=6>

<sup>4</sup>NCES has identified a series of risk-factors. These include delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, financially independent, having dependents or children, single parent, and no High School diploma. See <http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/showtable.asp?pubnumber=19&tablename=C&dir=2002168>

While the Department of Education has made some moves toward making its data more consumer friendly, its Gainful Employment efforts missed opportunities to be more useful to students. For example, in its June 2012 release of the Gainful Employment data, it had a column of data labeled “debt to earnings annual rate denomina.” In fact, this is the average earnings of graduates from thousands of programs throughout the nation.

These earnings data contain valuable information not conveyed by the ratios. Here, for example, are the average earnings of graduates from four of the most commonly offered programs in California covered by the GE data.

“DEBT TO EARNINGS ANNUAL RATE DENOMINA” (AKA EARNINGS)  
FOR FOUR OF THE MOST COMMON PROGRAMS IN CALIFORNIA

Program	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Cosmetology .....	\$11,119	\$7,141	\$16,912
Message Therapy .....	\$14,339	\$8,306	\$21,034
Medical Assistant .....	\$16,257	\$8,951	\$27,175
Licensed Practical Nurse .....	\$38,838	\$20,340	\$68,871

Earnings data reported in dollar terms convey information understandable by most people. Ratios don't. Indeed, the regulatory-based ratios could easily lead to poor decisions: consider that for cosmetology, the average debt to income ratio was 3.6%, lower than any of the other programs shown above, and the maximum ratio was 11.8%, below the 12% “trigger” of the GE regulations. Yet, graduates of cosmetology programs earned far less than graduates from other programs.

Unfortunately, these simple dollar figures can be hard to find. In its downloaded data set, the Department, as noted, unhelpfully labeled them “debttoearningsannualratedenomina.” And the entire Gainful Employment data base was released as a “flat file” consisting of almost 14,000 lines of data, so locating data for a program or comparing programs across institutions isn't for the faint of heart. That's why I created a far more user-friendly interface that can be found at <http://collegemeasures.org/gainfulemployment/>.

Clearly, given the amount of taxpayer money invested in our colleges and universities, the government has an interest in making sure that the money is not spent frivolously. And the rate of return on both student and taxpayer investments in higher education matters a lot. The problem is that most of the data we have now are not precise enough to let us pick firm cut-off points fairly—for example, it is difficult to justify disqualifying a school with a repayment rate below 35% from participation in Title IV programs but not a program with a 35.1% repayment rate. However, if we view these data as informing consumer choice and seek to create reliable tools to allow students, their families, and their government representatives to view these data within a comparative framework, we can increase accountability by empowering consumer choice.

I also believe that had we approached these data with a consumer information framework rather than a regulatory one, the Department might have been able to make progress resolving one of the most severe limitations on the current data: it could have expanded the coverage from just the for-profit sector to both public and not-for-profit institutions.

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)

Measurement of student success can be improved and IPEDS can and should be modernized. The reauthorization of HEOA provides such an opportunity. Some of the issues touched here may require more time to resolve and may need to be addressed outside of HEOA. (For example, some of IPEDS' value in documenting higher education finance is limited due, at least in part, to shortcomings and differences in GASB and FASB).<sup>5</sup> Assessing student learning is a step too far for Congress to undertake given the current state of the science of assessment and given legitimate concerns about the scope of federal intervention.

However, we can and should improve our measurement of labor market outcomes, and Congress has the right and the obligation to ask what hundreds of millions of dollars in state longitudinal grants has bought us in terms of information that helps

<sup>5</sup>Public institutions follow Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) standards, and private (for-profit and non-profit) institutions follow Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) standards. Each Board has a distinct mission and IHEs following these different standards report data differently, creating challenges in comparability.

students, their families, and taxpayers make the right to decisions about higher education.

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Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Dr. Schneider.  
Dr. Hallmark?

**STATEMENT OF DR. JAMES HALLMARK, VICE CHANCELLOR  
FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

Mr. HALLMARK. Madam Chair, Ranking Member Hinojosa, I am honored—and I am James Hallmark and I am the vice chancellor for Academic Affairs in the Texas A&M University System. And we use data in the A&M system across a broad range of endeavors from P-12 to traditional analytics to student learning outcomes. I have long advocated data-centered decision making, although often universities base decisions more on anecdotes and innuendos.

Furthermore, the research on human decision making indicates that we are more often likely to use data to confirm decisions we have already made, rather than base decisions on that data. An example in my system is that the students and parents often select Texas A&M University for the aggie ring and its traditions more so than the 92 persistence rate and retention rate of the institution.

Still, we cannot make data-centered decisions without data. And universities are awash in data. The challenge is less in developing data—developing data than in transforming the existing data into usable information. And while doing so we most commonly focus on a handful of student success metrics and efficiency majors.

Student success majors are items such as retention rates, time to graduation, graduation rates, number of graduates. For the public, understanding these terms is problematic in itself. I know that a retention rate refers to the percentage of first-time, full-time fall freshmen taking at least 12 hours returning the next fall. But I would assert that that nuance is not known or understood by consumers of the information.

I have a college freshman daughter and even I found the language confusing as I helped her negotiate college admission and FAFSA this past year. So, I cannot imagine how overwhelming it might be for someone out there who is not familiar with the game.

But even when understanding the terms, the data must be interpreted within context. For example, a university with a 48 percent, 6-year graduation rate might be performing better than a university with a 68 percent, 6-year graduation rate, depending on the demographics of the students admitted. Institutions can also manipulate those metrics by denying admission to students with the greatest needs, even though doing so would not be in anyone's best interest except the institution in reporting these metrics.

Also, the measures may not adequately address the full range of student goals. Many community college students seek a foundation for transfer or a skill necessary for a specific job. Yet, when those students leave before graduation they are classified as failures in our data systems, even though the institution provided exactly what that student needed.

We must also be careful in what we measure and what we reward when considering efficiency metrics. For example, expenditure per full-time student equivalent is a common efficiency measure. And some view this as a measure of quality.

In fact, U.S. News & World Report's rankings put a 10 percent weight on that particular measure, arguing that generous first student spending indicates that a college can offer a wide variety of programs and services. While others would argue the same metric is a measure of efficiency; that we must reduce expenditures to provide access and reduce student indebtedness. Another perspective is that this measure is a function of institution size, as larger institutions benefit from economies of scale.

The point is that we have to be wise in interpreting this data. We must understand the variances in institutional mission and the size and its impact on these variables.

In A&M Systems analytics project, all of our institutions have identified what we call stretch goals regarding expenditures. Some of our institutions seek to increase their expenditure per full time student equivalent, actually increase it because of needed additions in student support or an expanding, changing mission, while other A&M System institutions seek to lower their expenditure levels for efficiencies.

Now, I will close with some comments on the A&M Systems data project. And as well I want to mention the Voluntary System of Accountability. In the A&M System we have set forth as our first step in this project to prepare teachers differently, to transform how we are preparing teachers, educational administrators, focus on STEM education and our research across the broad spectrum of education. But it is not enough to say that we are transforming public education. We have specific measures to assess our progress and hold ourselves accountable.

Now, once a student enters an A&M System institution we follow their progress to meet our student success metrics, and our metrics are common to those used across the country. But in addition we track what we call governance metrics outcome based funding metrics and excellence metrics. And the key data in each category is accompanied by stretch goals with targets for 2015 and 2020.

Finally, the A&M system is addressing what most projects are not, and that is student learning outcomes. It is tricky, but we are doing it anyway. It is not enough to graduate students. We are collecting data to know if we adequately prepare our graduates for the next stage in their life.

Finally, I only have 20 seconds, but I want to mention the Voluntary System of Accountability. I do not know of any better national collaboration to standardize data and make it understandable. It is a continuous tweaking process. But it is an excellent model.

VSA is sponsored by APLU and ASCU and eight of the 11 universities in the A&M System participate in VSA. And much like the A&M System's effort, the VSA is completely transparent with links to the VSA data on the front page of every VSA member's Web site.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Hallmark follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Dr. James Hallmark, Vice Chancellor for  
Academic Affairs, Texas A&M University System**

Good morning. I'm James Hallmark, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for the Texas A&M University System (the A&M System). The A&M System consists of nearly 125,000 students spread across our 11 universities and our Health Science Center. In addition, we count 7 state agencies among our number, all aligned to serve the education, research, and service needs of Texans.

I am particularly pleased to visit with you about university data projects, and more importantly using data to provide valuable information to students, parents, institutions, taxpayers, and elected officials.

I have long advocated data-centered decision making. Taxpayers, regents, law-makers, parents, and students all need data to make good choices with their money, their policies, and their futures. And while every university leader asserts decisions are based on data, my experience has been that university decisions are most often based on anecdotes and innuendos. A good story often outweighs a hundred pages of statistics indicating otherwise. And certainly the research on human decision making indicates we typically use data to confirm decisions we have already made. For example, I am confident parents and students select Texas A&M University for the Aggie ring and traditions more so than for the 92% persistence rate.

Though we will continue to be influenced by non-data based factors in making choices, we cannot make data-centered decisions without usable data.

Universities have long been awash in data. The challenge is generally less in developing data than in transforming the existing data into forms understandable to the public and decision makers. Only then can we understand the data and use it, and also recognize any gaps in our existing data.

The A&M System has embarked on an ambitious data project across a broad range of endeavors—literally everything from PK-12 to traditional analytics to student learning outcomes—with a goal of being accountable to the public and transparent in that accountability. We employ data to help us more wisely use finite resources with which we are blessed to serve our students and our state. Significantly, this project has the full support of Chancellor John Sharp and the chair of the Committee on Academic and Student Affairs, Regent Elaine Mendoza, and the project is led by a vice chancellor, myself. This is important as it requires powerful and influential leadership to guide a major data project from infancy to maturity. We would not be successful in the A&M System without it.

I will provide what I hope are useful insights into the use of data in aiding constituent decisions, while also providing information on the A&M System's project. I will also comment briefly on the "VSA" project (Voluntary System of Accountability) a comprehensive national effort using data to aid students and parents in making choices. I will, of course, be happy to address any of these matters during your questions.

Accountability in higher education typically focuses on a handful of metrics, such as persistence rates, time to degree, graduation rates, and number of graduates. It may be useful to reference these as "student success metrics." These are reasonable measures, and are important. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, only about 30% of 8th graders will obtain a higher education credential in 11 years (the equivalent of a six-year graduation rate). In Texas, only about 20% of 8th graders have a higher education credential in 11 years. The deficiency in Texas is even more alarming for African-Americans (11.4%) and Hispanics (11.6%). Simply, for the good of our society we must be held accountable for moving the needle on these metrics. We can only move the needle if we measure and track the information and systematically apply the findings as part of our decisions on how we structure our institutions and processes.

For the public, the greatest challenge in using these student success metrics may be in understanding the language. In higher education, we know that a retention rate refers to a specific measure, but I would assert the term is not meaningful to consumers. The retention rate references first time full time cohorts of freshmen entering the institution in a fall semester who remain enrolled at the same institution the following year. This is a useful and important measure for lawmakers, university administrators, and regents, but for first generation students and their parents the language and utility of the measure is not readily apparent and even confusing. Personally, I am a higher education professional, and yet I found—as my college freshmen daughter negotiated college admission and FAFSA—my knowledge of the game had its limits.

Beyond understanding the key terms, the data cannot—or at least should not—be interpreted without context. For example, a superficial understanding would conclude a university with a 68% six-year graduation rate is performing better than

a university with a 48% six-year graduation rate. However, the reverse may be true. The 68% university may be underperforming based on the academic preparedness and socio-economic status of its incoming students, while the 48% university may be over-performing based on the input characteristics. Allow me to explain: if an institution is primarily drawing its students from white non-Hispanic households, where both parents are college graduates, and where few are Pell eligible, a 68% six-year graduation rate is poor. Meanwhile, an institution drawing primarily from underrepresented populations with a high percentage Pell eligible and mostly first generation, a 48% six-year graduation rate is remarkable. Lawmakers, regents, parents must understand the different missions of these institutions in interpreting this data.

It is also important to prevent institutions from “gaming” the metric. For example, institutions can artificially improve persistence, retention and graduation rates by truncating the freshman class, eliminating those students with the greatest needs. An access oriented institution could choose to limit admission to those with an ACT score (or equivalent) of 20 or higher and dramatically increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates, even though doing so may not be in the best interests of the community, the region, or the nation.

It should also be noted that the standard measures for student success do not adequately address the full range of goals of all students. This is most evident in community colleges where a significant number of students seek a foundation for transfer or a skill necessary for a specific job opportunity. Current data reporting metrics often underreport the community college’s success, even though the institution provided what the students needed, because common data metrics only report retention and graduate rates at the students’ first institution. Similarly, one institution in the A&M System is a special purpose institution focused on maritime disciplines. A student at Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG) who chooses to major in something other than maritime will transfer to Texas A&M University and is reflected in TAMUG’s data system as a “failure,” even though that student may graduate and become the world’s next great agricultural engineer. Again, the shortcomings of the standard measures do not account for the progress and success of many students. (The Voluntary System of Accountability addresses this challenge by tracking students across any institution.)

Moving from a discussion of metrics associates with student progression to a discussion of efficiency measures, higher education, like all facets of society, must do more with less. We must be publicly accountable to those who are providing resources, whether that source is public funding, tuition and fee dollars, or philanthropy. We must demonstrate that we are being efficient with those resources, that we are investing our resources not in frivolous activities—however that may be defined—but in activities targeting appropriate service to the education, research, and service needs of our students and our service area.

Much like student success metrics, efficiency measures must be interpreted with caution. For example, “expenditure per full time student equivalent” is a common measure of efficiency that is also viewed by some as a measure of quality. (And to revisit the concern mentioned above, it is also a measure that may not immediately be understood by consumers.) Some view this measure as a means of assessing quality. For example, the ubiquitous U.S. News and World Report ranking places a 10% weight on their version of this measure, arguing that “generous per-student spending indicates that a college can offer a wide variety of programs and services.” Others may use this same metric as a measure of efficiency, arguing that we must reduce expenditures to provide access and reduce student indebtedness. Furthermore, expenditure per full time student equivalent may be more a function of an institution’s size than anything else, as larger institutions benefit from economies of scale.

The issue I seek to address is not to avoid data reporting or accountability related to efficiency, but rather to use the information wisely, understanding the variances in institutional mission and size and its impact on the variable. In the A&M System’s analytics project, our institutions have identified “stretch goals” for selected metrics, including expenditures per full time student equivalent. Some of our institutions seek to increase their expenditure per full time student equivalent to expand student resources in support of student success or in pursuit of a changing mission such as “downward expansion” from an upper-level only institution into a four-year institution. Other institutions who may already offer a full range of services have stretch goals to lower their expenditure levels as they are seeking efficiencies within their systems.

My final set of comments will focus on a more complete overview of the A&M System’s data project. First, we firmly believe we have a responsibility to improve public education (PK-12) in the state of Texas. No other entity in Texas produces more teachers than the A&M System while supporting innovation and leadership through

groundbreaking research. We at the A&M System have an obligation to continue to improve, to transform how we prepare teachers, to better prepare educational administrative leaders to support and lead these transformations, to renew our focus on STEM education particularly in the primary grades, and to expand the research we conduct across the broad spectrum of education.

But it isn't enough to say we are going to transform public education through our focus. We have specific metrics and targets that tell us how well we are performing in preparing and supporting teachers, in preparing and supporting educational administrative leaders, in improving performance in STEM disciplines, and in education research. These data are essential in helping us transform public education.

Once the student enters an A&M System university, we begin to measure their progress via analytics. We collect and analyze data for typical metrics used by universities across the country (detailed breakdowns of enrollment trends, for example, such that I can tell you how many Hispanic females from Coleman county are majoring in a STEM discipline at the A&M System's Tarleton State University campus—the answer is 2). We track about 50 variables in this manner, with significant “drill down” capability to aid students, parents, regents, and lawmakers in decision making. With this data, students and parents can make decisions on the likelihood of quick progression to graduation, or regents can track trends in research expenditures, among other possibilities.

We have also organized our data to reflect specific interests within Texas. One set of data focuses on “Governance,” data our Board of Regents has identified as central to their decision making task. Another set of data focuses on “Outcomes Based Funding,” data the state of Texas has proposed for influencing institutions' state funding. Yet another set of data focuses on “Excellence,” data that tracks how each institution is moving toward better fulfilling its mission. Key data in each category is accompanied by stretch goals, targets for 2015 and 2020.

Finally, within the A&M System's paradigm, we are addressing what most projects are not—student learning. Too often data projects neglect to systematically measure the knowledge and skills of the students who graduate from our institutions. It is not enough to graduate students. Instead, we must collect evidence to know we are adequately preparing our graduates for the next stage in their life, whether that is graduate school, professional school, or the workforce.

At the A&M System, we are collecting data to demonstrate a value added to the student via their encounter with our universities. Our identified outcomes are not unique, relying heavily on national models, such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities' “Essential Learning Outcomes” within the “LEAP” initiative. These models provided a foundation for us to choose to hold ourselves accountable that our graduates will communicate well, have outstanding critical thinking skills, be ethical decision makers and engage responsibly in society, have a global perspective and an appreciation for cultural diversity, problem solve well, integrate the broad knowledge obtained through their undergraduate experience, and possess the knowledge specific to their discipline of study. We are entering into a data management and reporting project assessing each of these learning outcomes.

I will close with a brief reference to the VSA—the “Voluntary System of Accountability”—mentioned earlier. The VSA was developed in 2007 to better demonstrate public university accountability and transparency, particularly in the areas of access, cost, student progress, and student outcomes. The VSA is sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and includes 60% of all public 4-year universities.

Eight of the 11 universities in the Texas A&M University System participate in the VSA and publicly report a common set of data on the VSA College Portrait. The VSA College Portrait provides common, understandable and useful data for students, families, state officials, policy makers, and accreditors. As an example of national collaboration to provide common, understandable and useful data, I know of no better model. And much like the A&M System's effort, the VSA is completely transparent, with links to the VSA data on the front page of every VSA's member's website.

Ultimately, it is up to the student to succeed, and many in higher education blanch at being held accountable for the behaviors of 18 year olds. Regardless, given the resources devoted to higher education and the demands and needs of society for higher education to produce contributing members of society, accountability is unavoidable. The wise approach to accountability assures we are being accountable for the right stuff and interpreting the data wisely.

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Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much.  
Dr. Cruz, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. JOSÉ CRUZ, VICE PRESIDENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE, THE EDUCATION TRUST**

Mr. CRUZ. Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning.

My name is José Cruz. I am the vice president for Higher Education Policy and Practice at The Education Trust. And I am a former vice president of Student Affairs at the University of Puerto Rico System.

Going to college has always been a major financial commitment. But given the cost of college today, the consequences of that decision have grown exponentially. Yet, access to quality, relevant information to inform that decision is grossly limited. Fortunately, current federal databases provide a foundation upon which to build a data system that will not only better inform parents and students, but also help decision makers develop effective policies that benefit students, and help institutions operate more efficiently.

One such database is the National Student Loan Data System, NSLDS. The NSLDS compiles data on federal student loans, but it has two major shortcomings. First, it does not compile data on private student loans.

And second, it does not include a flag to indicate whether a particular student has completed his or her program of study. By expanding this data system to include information on private student loans, and a completion indicator, NSLDS could provide much more useful information about the debt levels and types of debts incurred by student completers and non-completers alike.

The main source for post-secondary educational data is the Integrated Post-Secondary Education System, IPEDS. IPEDS has a treasure trove of information, but the usefulness of this information is limited because the data is incomplete. As Ranking Member Hinojosa stated previously, IPEDS does not provide graduation rates for anyone but first time, full time students. And the information it does provide on graduation rates of 2-year institutions is significantly limited.

IPEDS also does not provide graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients, nor does it provide graduation rates for Stafford Loan borrowers. And it does not provide information on student job placement rates and earnings.

Collecting and reporting these few additional pieces of information would go a long way toward ensuring that students and their families, as well as the institutions themselves, have a true picture of an institution's ability to support all, not just some, of their students through graduation.

Now, I know that when we talk about additional reporting, whatever the context, the issue of burden on the organizations tasked with that reporting always arises, and rightfully so. But we cannot let the fact that some effort is required to be the sole determinant in the conversation.

If reporting arms students with the information they need to make good decisions, and provides institutions insight into how they are doing and where they need to improve, then it is hard to

make the argument that such reporting is too burdensome. Rather, it is indispensable.

It is true that a lot of data already exists in federal databases, state longitudinal databases, state longitudinal data systems and system institutional research offices. So, we should use it to full effect. But we need someone to gather and validate the quality of such data and make it available in a simple and usable format for students, policymakers and institutional leaders to benefit from it. And this someone can and should be the federal government.

The fact is that we know that current reporting can be enhanced without overly burdening those doing the reporting. Dr. Hallmark has talked about the Voluntary System of Accountability. And Dr. Schneider talked about the Complete College America and NGA work in this area.

And we have also been working with some other systems and institutions in the past 5 years in a different initiative called the Access to Success Initiative where 22 public higher education systems with 312 campuses serving over 3.5 million students have developed a set of common definitions as well as metrics, protocols and tools to track overall enrollment and completion rates for the part-time, for the transfer and for the low-income students that are currently missing from IPEDS. And they have been voluntarily reporting this data for the past 5 years.

So, in closing, I would say that we have no time to waste. College tuition and fees are growing almost twice as fast as health care costs and about four and a half times as fast as inflation. And student loan debt now exceeds \$1 trillion, and outpaces credit card debt in this country.

This at a time when almost half of our students in our K-12 schools are low-income, and when our youngest generation is just barely better educated than their parents. Data transparency for students, parents, policymakers and institutional leaders of higher education has never been more critical. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Cruz follows:]



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training**

**September 20, 2012**

**Written Testimony of**

**José L. Cruz, Vice President, Higher Education Policy and Practice, The Education Trust**

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning on the importance of data transparency for students, parents, and institutions of higher education.

My name is José Cruz and I am the Vice President for Higher Education Policy and Practice at The Education Trust. The Education Trust is a nonprofit advocacy organization that promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially low-income students and students of color — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

Higher education has long been heralded as an engine of opportunity in America. Now more than ever, economic demands<sup>1</sup> are making a postsecondary degree the surest way into the middle class. But skyrocketing tuition rates and short-sighted policies that shift more and more financial aid away from those who need it most are rendering the decision to go to college a damned if you go, damned if you don't proposition for too many hard-working students.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, college tuition and fees are growing almost twice as fast as health care costs, and about four and a half times as fast as inflation.<sup>3</sup> Student loan debt now exceeds \$1 trillion dollars and outpaces credit card debt in this country. Going to college has always been a major financial commitment for students and their families, but given the cost of college today, the consequences of a bad decision have grown exponentially.

Yet we expect students and parents to make this incredibly expensive and consequential decision without all the information they need. If these same students and parents were buying a car, they could compare the price for different models, features, and dealers before making a decision. If they were buying a house, they could visit multiple places and conduct inspections. But when investing the same or more money in education, their access to quality, relevant information to inform that decision is grossly limited.

<sup>1</sup> Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce report, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018, June 2010*, available at <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>.

<sup>2</sup> Demos and Young Invincibles, *State of Young America: Economic Barriers to the American Dream*, Nov. 2011, available at [http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/SOYA\\_Stories\\_0.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/SOYA_Stories_0.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Darcie Harvey analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index - All Urban Consumers, 1982-2011 and American Community Survey, 1982-2009.

This is no way to increase the number of people with postsecondary credentials and ensure that we fill the workforce shortages we know are looming.<sup>4</sup> If the United States is going to continue to be a leader and competitor in the global marketplace, we need to ensure that as many students as possible are prepared to seek postsecondary education. But we also need to make sure they do it in a manner that benefits them and the country. One way to do this is to improve the data and information about institutions that is available *before* students make a decision about where to enroll.

#### Current Data Systems

Fortunately, current federal databases provide a foundation upon which to build a data system that would better inform parents and students, help decision makers develop effective policies that benefit students, and help institutions operate more efficiently. Enhancing these databases would also allow consistency and data quality to be maintained.

##### National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS)

The National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) currently compiles data on *federal* student loans, but not on *private* student loans. Additionally, NSLDS does not include a flag to indicate whether a particular student has completed her program of study. By expanding this data system to include information on private student loans (submitted by lenders or servicers) and a completion indicator (already being developed), NSLDS could provide much more useful information about the debt levels incurred by student completers. It could also provide better information about whether students tend to incur more debt with private loans or with federal loans. If provided to students in a usable, understandable format, these data could help them make more informed choices about their financial-aid packages.

##### Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

Beyond NSLDS, there is another federal database with a treasure trove of information, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). IPEDS is the primary source of information for the College Navigator system students can access for information about institutions. Yet the data IPEDS collects are incomplete. Expanding this system, unlike expanding NSLDS, would require additional reporting by institutions. I believe the value of this information to students and their families — as well as to institutions themselves — far outweighs the limited additional reporting burden.

First among these pieces of data should be outcomes for the full range of students currently enrolling in institutions of higher education. IPEDS only tracks graduation rates for first-time, full-time students. This misrepresents the diversity of our nation's postsecondary student body, which increasingly includes part-time students like working parents and second-time students like people going back to school after losing a job or those who started, stopped out, and returned after a couple years. These students, and their experiences, are not captured in the IPEDS graduation rates. Nor are transfer students. But all of these groups are significant segments of our postsecondary population. To have a true picture of an institution's ability to support its students through graduation, students (and institutions) need information on the graduation rates of all — not just some — of the college's students.

Collecting and reporting these data is doable. The 22 public higher education systems that participate in the Access to Success (A2S) network have for five years now been annually submitting data on the graduation rates of both their part-time and transfer students. I will talk a bit more about A2S later, but I

<sup>4</sup> Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce report, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018, June 2010*, available at <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>.  
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WW.EDTRUST.ORG

note here that it is possible to come up with consistent definitions that capture graduation rates beyond only those of first-time, full-time students. It is also worth noting that the A2S systems developed these definitions on their own.

Institutions should also report, not merely disclose, graduation rates for Pell grant recipients and Stafford loan borrowers. Currently, IPEDS collects graduation rates overall and by race, ethnicity, and gender, but it does not collect that data by income. Thus, low-income students trying to decide which institution offers them the best chance of earning a degree or credential have no way of assessing how well an institution does for students like them. Reporting these data should be relatively easy as institutions already know their students' financial-aid status. Reporting could be done by that status — one rate for Pell recipients, another one for those students who don't receive Pell but receive subsidized Stafford loans, and one for students who receive neither Pell nor subsidized Stafford loans. As a comparison, A2S systems currently report graduation rates by Pell recipient status. What's more, institutions already are required to *disclose* graduation rates for Pell grant recipients, so reporting these rates in a consistent manner to IPEDS should not create an undue burden.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, for programs below the bachelor's degree, graduation rates should be disaggregated by the degree sought, rather than the length of the degree, and institutions should report their transfer rates, disaggregated by level of receiving institution. At present, students get very limited information about two-year institutions' graduation rates — they don't know whether institutions are more successful at conferring associate degrees or certificates. Nor do they know the rates at which these institutions are able to generate transfers to four-year colleges or other two-year schools. Without such information, it's impossible for students to make wise and informed choices. Again, A2S systems report the transfer rates from community colleges to two-year and four-year institutions.

Also, as noted above, students need more detailed and accurate information about college costs and student debt levels. As college costs rise, students should have a sense of how much they will actually have to pay for school and the kind of debt they will incur either if they graduate from an institution or if they don't complete. The new net price data, which are broken down by family income level and reported to IPEDS, are a step in the right direction. However, these data omit many students. For example, any student who does not receive Title IV financial aid is not included. IPEDS also does not report the source of grant aid received by students of different income levels, information that would be helpful for policymakers trying to determine whether and to what extent states and institutions are supplementing federal higher education investments.

Finally, just as students need information about cost and debt, they also need data on how easy or difficult it will be to repay that debt. Students should have access to comprehensive and consistent data — not just disclosures — about the job placement rates and average earnings of graduates from the institution they are interested in attending. And for those programs where it is appropriate, students should have access to information about what percent go to graduate school and what percent pass licensure exams.

<sup>5</sup> These data also are vitally important for research. For instance, the recent report *Priced Out: How the Wrong Financial Aid Policies Hurt Low-Income Students* (The Education Trust, June 2011), looks at the four-year college options available to low-income students, as measured by access, affordability, and student success. While the data allow investigation of access and affordability (net price) for low-income students, outcome measures are only available at the aggregate level, rather than specifically for low-income students. With better data, such as graduation rates by financial-aid status, a report like *Priced Out* could provide a much more nuanced picture of the interaction between net price, graduation rates, and access for low-income students.

### **Current Federal Efforts**

#### Reporting vs. Disclosure

For the previously described information to help students, it must be disclosed by institutions through links in conspicuous places on their websites so students and their families have ready access to it.<sup>6</sup> It also must be reported and collected in one user-friendly location and made available in a usable and understandable manner so students, policymakers, and institutional leaders can access the data and incorporate it into their decision-making processes.

The existing mechanism for making these data available to students, College Navigator, is by no means perfect. A simplified version of that tool, or more user-friendly tools developed by technology entrepreneurs, would certainly be beneficial. However, even making these additional data components available in College Navigator would be better than not having them exist or having them exist four layers deep on an institution's website.

#### Consumer Protection

There have been some efforts to try and make more data available to students in a usable manner. The administration's scorecard<sup>7</sup> and its financial-aid shopping sheet, for example, both attempt to offer students more information about institutions in a simplified manner. These tools are good steps in the right direction, but they have limitations. The scorecard, for instance, gathers a good amount of basic information in one place. But in only one page, it cannot provide a comprehensive view of any institution. For instance, the scorecard does not include outcome measures like student loan debt and earnings potential because they are not currently calculated — although, as noted, they could be by using federal data sources. And the graduation rates on the scorecard are not disaggregated by race and ethnicity, an addition that could also be made with existing data. Finally, it does not provide meaningful benchmarks on other, similar institutions that could be used to measure an institution's performance.

The shopping sheet<sup>8</sup> — if used by all institutions to which a student is admitted — does allow for comparisons. That is its goal. However, its use is voluntary. Whether a student has access to uniform, comparable information on the cost of individual colleges depends wholly on whether an institution feels it is important to make its data understandable and comparable for students. We believe there is a lot of value in these standardized letters and that institutions should use them. But since their use is voluntary at the moment, their usefulness is limited.

### **Non-Federal Reporting Efforts**

When we talk about additional reporting, whatever the context, the issue of burden on the organizations tasked with that reporting always arises. Rightfully so. We should be cognizant of the effort required to produce additional reporting. But we cannot let the fact that some effort is required be the sole determinant in the conversation. If reporting arms students with the information they need to make good decisions and provides institutions insight into how they are doing and where they need to improve, then it is hard to make the argument that such reporting is too burdensome. Rather, it is indispensable.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Carey and Andrew P. Kelly, *The Truth Behind Higher Education Disclosure Laws*, Education Sector and The American Enterprise Institute, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/college-value-profile.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://collegecost.ed.gov/shopping\\_sheet.pdf](http://collegecost.ed.gov/shopping_sheet.pdf)

Further, the decision a student makes about whether and what kind of postsecondary education to pursue will have consequences for the rest of her life. Research has shown that there will be consequences for her future income, employment status, and even civic participation.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we need to make sure that her decision is as well-informed as can be.

Fortunately, current efforts demonstrate that it is possible to both report additional, useful data and to do so in a way that is not overly burdensome. The Access to Success Initiative, which I mention above, represents 22 public higher education systems, 312 two-year and four-year campuses, and 3.5 million students. It is a concerted effort to help public college and university systems boost both the enrollment and success of low-income students and underrepresented students of color.<sup>10</sup> The participating A2S systems developed, and for several years have been reporting under, a set of metrics, protocols, and tools that track overall enrollment and completion rates; *and* track these measures for many of the students, such as low-income, part-time, and transfer students, who are missing from or invisible in higher education data systems like IPEDS. Further, although many of these data points are missing from IPEDS, they are available in databases like the state longitudinal data systems. The federal government is well-situated to serve as a central repository for these key outcome measures — it simply needs to gather the information from existing sources.

Moreover, that these 22 public higher education systems have agreed on common definitions means it is possible to do, and that many institutions are already doing it. There are also other initiatives, like Complete College America and Achieving the Dream, that are working with states and institutions not in the A2S network to collect data beyond what IPEDS currently collects. Some of those initiatives, again like Complete College America, use the same definitions as the A2S institutions. Beyond these outcome metrics, Complete College America and Achieving the Dream also report on progression metrics to better understand student pathways through college and to help institutions identify and address choke-points that serve as barriers to student success.

A tool like Ed Trust's College Results Online uses IPEDS data but puts it in context,<sup>11</sup> allowing students to compare schools before making enrollment decisions. This free, easy-to-use interactive tool lets students examine and compare graduation rates, student demographics, and enrollment information from four-year colleges across the nation. College Results Online reveals that some colleges do a much better job of graduating students than others. It also shows that at many colleges, significant gaps exist in graduation rates between white students and students of color. But it also provides powerful examples of colleges that prove that low graduation rates and high loan default rates — especially for diverse students — are not inevitable.

### **Conclusion**

There is a lot of room for improving the data available to students and families about higher education institutions. But there is a relatively easy path forward. The addition of a few key pieces of information into existing federal databases — many of which can be gathered from existing sources — could complete the half-drawn pictures of institutions students currently see when making enrollment decisions, help

<sup>9</sup> Sandy Baum, Jennifer Ma, and Kathleen Payea, The College Board, *Education Pays 2010*.

<sup>10</sup> The Education Trust, *Replenishing Opportunity: The 2012 Midterm Report of Public Higher Education Systems in the Access to Success Initiative*, May 2012, available at [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Replenishing\\_Opportunity\\_2.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Replenishing_Opportunity_2.pdf), *Technical Appendix* available at [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/A2S\\_2012\\_Appendix.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/A2S_2012_Appendix.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *College Results Online* uses IPEDS graduation rate data, but contextualizes the data through peer groups, evaluating how institutions perform relative to other like institutions. These peer groups are developed through an algorithm that takes into account 14 factors that research shows are correlated with graduation rates.

institutions track progress and identify areas that need improvement, empower the federal government to better assess the return on taxpayer investment, and enable federal and state governments to design better incentives to improve institutional performance.

We have no time to waste. Today, low-income students are expected to contribute 72 percent of their annual household income for one year of a four-year degree. They face more hurdles when pursuing higher education and are less likely to graduate. This at a time when almost half of our K-12 students are low-income and our youngest generation is just barely better educated than their parents. Data transparency for students, parents, and institutions of higher education has never been more critical.

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Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Dr. Cruz.  
Dr. Fitzsimmons, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. TRACY FITZSIMMONS, PRESIDENT,  
SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY**

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. Good morning. I am so pleased to be here with you today.

I am president of Shenandoah University. We are located 70 miles to the west of here in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley in Winchester. We educate 4,000 students every year; half undergraduate, half graduate.

We are not a liberal arts institution. We are not a professional institution. We have a foot sort of firmly in both camps. So, we are concerned about educating broadly, but also about educating our students for a career.

I am here representing Shenandoah University and NAICU. I am also here as a PhD in political science, which means I believe deeply in data, and that good data helps inform great discussions and dialogue in the classroom and here in Congress. But I hope as you move forward in these discussions about data and higher education that you will think about data with the following questions.

First is, do we really need more data? I brought with me a stack—a representative stack of all the information that is available to the general public on just one institution, mine, Shenandoah University. Anyone in the public can read all of this. It has got financial information, student demographic information. It has got average class size and so many other things. We have got tons of data out there. Let us make sure that we are using it first.

If you want to add more layers, could you please take away some, because the administrative burden is tremendous. It is worth it if the information is well used by taxpayers and students. But it is a tremendous financial burden. That was the second area, the burden.

The third area is if you are going to move towards a common dataset, if you are going to push taxpayers and students to focus on one set of numbers that is generated centrally by the federal government, I hope you will be aware that you could be inadvertently creating a situation in which it would push colleges and universities not to take a bet on high-risk students, on low-income students.

Just this fall at Shenandoah University when we welcomed our freshmen class, one of our students came to us not from his home, but from a homeless shelter; straight from the homeless shelter to the dorms at Shenandoah University. He does not have family support. He does not have a family history of college. He is not a great bet to graduate. But he deserves a chance.

If you would force me to be compared all the time against other colleges and universities only focused on graduation rates, retention rates, I might not have been able to accept him. But he deserves an opportunity. We want to make sure not to create a common dataset that perversely leads us to exclude those who perhaps need college the most.

Next, students I find are actually really interested in the intangible. I asked my students in preparation for today, what is it that drove you to choose a college? What did you think about? What kind of data?

They wanted to know do we have the majors that they were looking at, that they were considering. Will we help them prepare for certain jobs? But they also have other questions.

Some students are looking for a highly Christian institution. Some want an institution that is not religious at all. Some want a left-leaning or right-leaning institution. Some want a place that is very environmentally focused. Others want to know that as a home-schooled high school student that they will feel at home at that institution.

It is very much for some of them, for many of them about the fit. Does it feel right? Will these faculty members motivate me, stand by me until graduation? That is going to be really hard to measure in a common dataset.

I would also like to remind you that we have an incredible peer review accreditation system in this country. In terms of accountability, both in terms of academic quality and also financial responsibility we are harder on each other than anyone could possibly be on us.

And finally, I would like to urge you to let the market bear some of the burden. We exist in this wonderful free and fair country politically and economically. And there is room for the market to do work here as well. I see it every day.

We know the faculty members that are not keeping current on the information, that are not offering courses students want or are not great engaging teachers. Students vote with their feet. They do not sign up for those classes.

The same thing happens for colleges and universities. If you are not offering the majors that students are looking for, if you are not paying attention to students' needs and parents and taxpayers as well, they will vote with their feet. They will not apply. They will not come to our institutions.

There is a lot of data available. I am happy to create more data for you to work with you on it if it is useful to the taxpayers and to the students.

I would end by saying I have the pleasure every day of working with the students that you help, the ones who could not go to school if it were not for your financial support. And I am grateful on behalf of those students, and all those across the country. But as you think of data, I also hope that you will use data, create data in ways that will urge American higher education to deepen, not dampen our commitment to provide ability and opportunity to students across our country, the many, many different kinds of students that exist. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Fitzsimmons follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons, President,  
Shenandoah University, Winchester, VA**

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate having the opportunity to appear today to discuss higher education data issues. I am Tracy Fitzsimmons and I am president of Shenandoah University, located 70 miles to the west of Washington D.C., in Winchester, Virginia—the top of the beautiful Shenandoah Valley.

Shenandoah University educates 4,000 students in its undergraduate, master's and professional doctoral programs. Shenandoah is not a liberal arts institution, nor is it a pure professional school. Rather, Shenandoah offers its students the broad education necessary to be active and informed citizens, while also training those stu-

dents for a specific career. The 68 degree programs at Shenandoah are housed across six schools: Business, Conservatory, Education & Human Development, Arts & Sciences, Pharmacy, and Health Professions.

In real-life terms, Shenandoah educates the students who will be the police officers and teachers and accountants of our communities; the nurses and physical therapists who will care for us as we age; the environmentalists and entrepreneurs who will compel our country to do more and better; and the performers of Broadway or the Kennedy Center who will touch our souls with their artistic performances.

Today, I represent not only Shenandoah University, but also the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), a public policy association for non-profit higher education that represents more than 960 private, non-profit colleges and universities and more than 70 specialized independent college associations. NAICU has long been involved with issues related to the collection and use of data.

My thanks to you for holding this hearing. Having a PhD in political science, I think good data helps inform good decisions—both in the classroom and in Congress. And I think that government has contributed to quality data across American higher education. However, the question of data—what the government should collect, and how it should collect and use it—is central to education policy. As you consider this question, I urge you to keep in mind several questions about additional levels and means of federal data collection:

*1. Will the benefits of new data requirements outweigh the costs?*

There are already reams of data easily available to the public to help them make decisions about how to assess colleges in the higher education sector.

For example, many data discussions involve longitudinal data systems. These systems are being built in the belief that tracking individuals throughout their schooling and on through the workforce can assist in developing more successful educational and employment strategies. At the same time, they raise serious concerns about student privacy—a longstanding concern of NAICU. In addition, we believe that some current information is collected without a clear policy purpose, retained long after its purpose has expired, and used for unintended purposes. Too much data, or out-of-date data, only serves to confuse or mislead those who were the intended beneficiaries.

Frequently, data issues center on the large and growing list of disclosures that institutions are required to provide. Like regulatory kudzu, it seems that every new problem gets a new proposed disclosure, but none of the old ones ever go away. We are concerned that such excessive requirements place a great administrative burden on institutions—a burden that I and other presidents are certainly willing to bear if it serves a productive purpose. I will address this issue later in my testimony.

For now, however, you have asked me to consider whether it is possible and cost-effective to identify a limited set of data upon which everyone can rely in evaluating institutions? Can policy gains be made while also saving costs in red-tape and money to our universities, to our taxpayers and to our students?

*2. In the effort to provide students, parents and taxpayers more data, will you implement measures that make it more difficult for colleges to give at-risk students a chance?*

Using retention rates and graduation rates as a be-all, end-all measure of institutional worth could lead to this result. The best way for any college or university to increase its graduation rate is to enroll traditional, high-achieving students—you know to whom I refer: the 18 year-olds who have stable families, attended the best high schools, flew through high school with an A average, and have significant financial means. I, and other presidents, certainly want those students to succeed in college—and the odds are in their favor. But many of us also want students from the broad spectrum that makes up America to be able to have a chance at college \* \* \* the 25 year-old single mother, the veteran suffering from PTSD, the C+ student who is bright and motivated but struggled to make good grades in high school because he was working two jobs to help pay the rent. Shenandoah, and many other schools, believe those students also deserve the opportunity to go to college. But if Congress takes measures to position graduation rates as the key indicator of institutional value, then you will force my colleagues and I to narrow the range of applicants we accept. Just this fall at Shenandoah, we drove two hours away to pick up one of our incoming freshmen students from a homeless shelter—his family had lost their home earlier this summer—and Shenandoah has committed to providing significant levels of financial support to him. But Federal rankings based on graduation rates might have led us to think twice. We also welcomed into our freshman class a student who is the youngest of six children, the first in his family to go to

college, from a household where Spanish is the primary language. Both of these young men had at least a B average in high school—and I believe in them—but I also know that both will face significant challenges in moving through college to graduation. But they deserve a chance at higher education. If you force colleges to play the graduation numbers game, we will think twice about admitting students who are not the absolutely best-bet to graduate.

Furthermore, are you assured of choosing the right measurements? Right now, for example, there is much attention paid to retention and graduation rates. Yet in fields such as nursing or physician assistant studies, completion of the degree program is not the key measure—the crucial measurement is how many of the students completing the program pass their board exams, because without passing they cannot practice in their chosen field.

*3. Will your use of data push higher education away from independent thought and creative problem-solving toward equating value only with financial return?*

A sound college education prepares our graduates not only to enter the workforce, but it also provides them with a deeper understanding of the world around them. Focusing on employment earnings as the primary measure of value diminishes the deeper benefits of education, reduces the flexibility to address new educational needs, and ignores the very real contributions to society by those who choose to pursue lower paid service occupations. Right now, in Virginia, the State Council of Higher Education is preparing to release to the public a website that lists Virginia's public and private colleges according to how much money their graduates earn 18 months and five years after graduation. While I am pleased that my institution comes out high on the chart, there are many institutions of high educational quality that end up at the bottom of this list. I am vehemently opposed to creating and pushing such data sets to students and parents. What is the message? That those colleges who educate future hedge fund managers and physicians are somehow more valuable than those who educate our future ministers, middle managers, teachers and part-time-worker-stay-at-home-mothers?

*4. Will your use of data shift the historical focus of need-based aid to students to a focus on institutional aid instead?*

If institution-based metrics such as graduation rates or alumni earnings are used to assign federal “rewards and punishments,” will that mean a shift in federal aid to higher education away from individual students to the institutions they attend? Is that really the direction that we want to go in a country that traditionally has put high value on the individual? As the parent of young children, I know well that rewards and punishments induce—whether intended or not—certain behaviors. Is Congress certain that it wants to send higher education the message that if you don't graduate all of your students, or if your graduates don't end up in high paying jobs, then you will reduce the financial aid we can make available to students? If so, then the behavior you will induce will be a narrowing of the field of students that colleges see as “admissible”. In essence, colleges will be unable to “gamble” on high-need but high-risk students because their potential failure could jeopardize the government aid available to all other students.

*5. Will your use of data fundamentally alter the role of the federal government in higher education—essentially federalizing what has been a pluralistic, local, and entrepreneurial network?*

We have an internationally-respected system of education because it is diverse and dynamic; students from across the globe flock to study in the United States—even non-Ivy League institutions and those colleges tucked away in rural communities have international student populations in the 2 percent to 10 percent range. They come because America's higher education system is rich in quality and diversity. If you create a system of rigid and well-defined data points, that diversity will begin to disappear as many institutions will feel forced to assimilate their programs and admissions policies to score well on the common data set. I caution you against creating a set of data that unintentionally will become the governmental version of the U.S. News & World Report rankings! If institutions must adhere to a set of narrowly-defined priorities and measures the federal government establishes, they'll do that, but lost in that approach will be the diverse models and creativity that have defined American higher education since before the nation's founding.

While I do not agree with many of these new directions, I encourage you to have a purposeful conversation about where Congress wants our educational system to go. Similarly, I encourage you to actively reach out not only to researchers, but also to practitioners on college campuses to get their feedback on what really matters. As Albert Einstein famously said, “Just because something can be counted, doesn't mean it counts.” I fear that many of the millions of us who work on college cam-

puses are not actively engaged in, or even aware of, the profound policy conversation taking place in Washington.

The challenge here is in recognizing that the chosen information will drive policy outcomes in ways both intended and unintended. There is the potential to find ourselves in the dilemma best outlined by the age-old fable, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. In short, it is the story of six blind men who each feel a different part of an elephant. Each comes to a different conclusion as to what they have touched (a rope for the tail, a spear for the tusks, etc.). Looking at narrow indicators of institutional performance could have the same misleading effect—especially when we apply those indicators to the diverse array of institutions in the United States.

Similarly, I fear some of the well-intentioned analysts advocating innovation in post-secondary education are unaware of the remarkable changes taking place on most college campuses. Technology is rapidly reinventing how, who, and where we teach. Colleges are offering new career programs and serving new student populations. And, more and more campus resources are being allocated to match the federal efforts in student aid, and helping to make college possible for our increasingly needy and diverse college population.

All of this innovation is happening in higher education because of the marketplace. The market has provided higher education with volumes of useful products and opportunities that drive our direction—and in turn, many institutions and faculty have contributed to the development of those new innovations. We academics sometimes like to think that we are somehow outside of the market, or exempted from it. But in reality, the market is the most important driver of educational creativity and quality. Inside the academy, we know which faculty members are the most engaging professors, and students “vote” with their feet by registering, or not, for their classes. Similarly, if an institution is of poor quality, students and parents will figure that out—whether through social media or through the thousands of data points currently available to the public—and they will migrate to other educational options, eventually causing the weakest institutions to close. In addition to the market, the extensive process of peer-review accreditation in this country provides an important level of additional quality oversight.

In order to be effective, markets need transparency in information. Today, I am presenting to you—literally—reams of paper documenting the information that is readily and openly available to the public on just one institution—Shenandoah University. Will more disclosure requirements or an over-arching data set really add more to what is already there? Or, will it simply add another layer or a narrowing of the information available to students and parents as they attempt to navigate the higher education sector?

As the president of a not-for-profit institution of 4,000 students, I am proud of working in a field that I believe is essential not only to our nation’s future, but central to who we are as Americans. The way we approach education at Shenandoah reflects not only our national traditions, but the history and challenges of our region, and most importantly, the unique needs of our students. Shenandoah would be different if we were in California or Maine. Shenandoah would be different if we were a public or community college, or a purely liberal arts institution, or a research university, or an Ivy League university. Yet, I am proud of our place as one shining tile in our national mosaic of higher education, and I am equally proud of my colleagues in higher education who serve different populations in different ways. Together we reflect a high quality and diverse system that is unlike that of any other nation.

As a college president, I can also tell you that every decision you make here affects us profoundly on campus, in more ways than you can realize. If you tell me to improve my graduation rates in a certain way, or that you will judge Shenandoah by the earnings of our graduates, I am going to respond to that. But if this is done under a rigid national formula, bringing the broad swath of American postsecondary education under one rubric, I worry that you will unintentionally federalize a system that is strong because of its diverse and non-governmental foundation. And, ironically, not only will choice suffer, but quality will suffer as well.

I recognize the difficulty here. You see a broad taxpayer investment in student aid. You need to ensure it is well spent and well used. I have the fun part. I see the human face of that investment. I see the low-income, first-generation-to-college student who makes it because of our student aid partnership with the federal government. I know it is working, but you don’t have that on-the-ground view. So you need proof. But I worry that your proof could become codified in a way that makes it less likely that low-income student is given a chance.

This, I believe, is the real policy conundrum for this reauthorization. We all have the same goal, but our needs for evidence are different from the top than from the

ground. The resulting requirements can also come at considerably higher costs to those of us on the ground.

In this regard, I have also been asked to address today two other aspects of the data question: burden and transparency. Specifically, if we could agree upon a narrow set of data points on which to establish institutional validity, could we then reduce some of the heavy regulatory burden and compliance costs for colleges that flow from federal, state and accreditor mandates? It is a question worth exploring, but one that I am not sure I can fully answer because it involves so many layers of independent decision makers, and so many entrenched rules.

Let me give you the campus view of just the federal role in this issue. I hear a lot of criticism from Washington that colleges are not transparent enough. For example, I was asked to address whether colleges should provide more fiscal transparency. From where I sit as a college president, we are drowning in fiscal transparency—and at today's hearing I am leaving with you a stack of sheets representing just some of the data available right now to the general public about any public or non-profit private, two or four year, institution in our country.

In 2008, the IRS decided they, too, wanted more fiscal transparency and so revised Form 990, the mandated annual filing for all non-profits. The new form, which took several years to revise, includes an 11-page, 11-part core form, and 16 schedules. The many reporting changes affecting colleges include governance, compensation of officers, fundraising, public support, political activity, and related organizations. The changes necessitated a major additional workload on every private, non-profit college, and added considerable auditing costs.

I have with me today, Shenandoah's Form 990. I will leave it behind, so you can look at it and tell me what you don't know from reading this that you need to know \* \* \* and recall that all of these financial data are available to anyone, since the 990s are public documents available on-line. Now that our auditors and CFOs are all trained on this, now that our compliance software is re-purchased and upgraded, are we to expect another new layer of fiscal transparency from the Department of Education?

The year 2008, when the new Form 990 went into effect, was a big year for new college regulations because it was also the year that the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act became law. Attached is an executive-level introduction, President's Quick Guide to the New Law, produced by NAICU for independent college presidents, to help us meet the massive campus-wide compliance requirements this legislation generated. The guidebook is just a bird's eye view; for example, it includes virtually none of the changes made to the student aid programs, because our financial aid offices generally know how to handle those matters. Simply skim the book to see the kind of changes affecting areas beyond student aid, including campus police, technology officers, CFO's, institutional researchers, and academic affairs—and this in legislation that called for two studies of deregulation—one of which has not even been started.

So, this is the dilemma. Even when Congress tries to deregulate, we end up with the new requirements, but no relief on current requirements. And, if those new requirements were to measure us by narrow standards, and make our system of higher education less diverse, we would lose more than we gain.

I don't want to close without offering some thoughts on emerging ideas I see as having good potential. I think the federal government can play a positive role in consumer information. There is much conversation right now, at the national level, about how to ensure that students and families have some basic information on all colleges to help them find a "best fit" school. I love this idea because, like so many of my small-college colleagues, I believe my institution is a hidden gem. Shenandoah is just a little more than an hour away from Washington, and easily accessible, but I'm sure many of you never heard of my university before today. We have capacity to serve more students who might find our university a good fit, but I don't have a big advertising budget. I love the idea that the federal government might help prospective students find us.

However, let's look at how the current federal consumer transparency efforts are playing out. Just last week, a Senate committee began consideration of a bill that would require institutions to collect a whole new set of detailed data for veterans. I wholeheartedly support our providing information that helps veterans to make smart choices, but I fear that many of the current proposals will not have their intended effect. For example, we estimate that the new Senate requirements include almost 30 new items, several of which would have to be further broken down by program level. Nearly all of this differs from the information that is already being collected by the Department of Education.

Also last week the House approved its own legislation dealing with information for students who are veterans. The approach in this measure avoids many of the

excesses of the Senate proposal, but is not without its problems as well. For example, it would require disclosure of median Title IV debt levels for all students at an institution, while another federal initiative is already calling for disclosure of median debt levels “for completers.” Having two numbers for the same institution that will appear to most consumers to describe the same thing confuses more than it enlightens.

And both of these bills come on top of several other current efforts to provide more consumer information by the Administration. Colleges have been asked to sign on to the “Principles of Excellence” included in an executive order (EO 13607) dealing with veteran- and military-related education programs. Among other requirements, institutions agreeing to the principles must provide all military-related students with a new Financial Aid Shopping Sheet for the 2013-14 award year. Although a final version of the Shopping Sheet has yet to be developed, the Department of Education is already pressing colleges to provide it to all incoming students. The Shopping Sheet is not to be confused with the College Scorecard or the Aid Offer Comparison Tool, also under development. And, all of these are in addition to the College Navigator, the Department of Education’s website intended to help consumers choose a college that best fits their needs.

My students have a term for this: TMI!

Not only is it too much information, but nearly all of these proposals are based on the various factors policy analysts want students to use when making a decision on where to go to college—rather than the ones they actually use.

Let me tell you how the college selection process goes from my vantage point: high school students, often with their parents, decide how far away from home they are willing to go for college. They get advice—solicited or not—about which college would be best for them from relatives, high school teachers and counselors, from peers, from Facebook “friends.” They narrow their search in so many ways! Some already believe they know what they want to study, so they look for a school that has their intended major or career path; while others feel more comfortable with a broad, liberal arts environment. Some settle on a place like Liberty University because it is strongly Christian and others lean toward Swarthmore because it is deeply academic. University of California at Berkeley attracts those interested in research—or often those with a particular political preference. Northern Virginia Community College is the obvious pathway for many in the region who want or need to live at home and save money while also presenting them with lots of opportunities. At Shenandoah, we find that students initially look at us and apply to SU because of our location, and also because of the variety and quality of academic programs. But in the end, those who choose to attend Shenandoah often say they do so because of the warmth and personal touch and faculty support they experienced while visiting campus. In effect, our 9:1 student-to-faculty ratio meant nothing to them until they experienced it. There is no data set that you can establish that will capture the personalized-approach or research-intensiveness or student-life or religious-commitment that in the end compels students to attend and strive to graduate from a particular institution.

My point here is not to disagree with the view that there are some important data points we might place in front of perspective students for an informed college selection. Rather, my point is that the selection process includes some very important factors that cannot be measured. And just as importantly, if we don’t keep it simple, we have accomplished nothing but more costs for colleges and more confusion for the student.

There are some better examples out there. In 2007, NAICU took all the ideas on consumer information swirling in Congress during reauthorization, and put them before focus groups of perspective parents and students. Attached is the simple, two-page profile on Shenandoah University that resulted from that process. It combines both elements of interest to policymakers and the information families told us they wanted. We are one of 827 NAICU schools that are signed up to participate in U-CAN. I’m citing this example not to promote U-CAN but to make two points: first, that less can be more, and second, that the needs and interests of real-world students must inform the development process or the end result can be the type of all-but-the-kitchen-sink approach we see emerging from the veterans committees.

I’m afraid I may have raised more questions than provided answers today. If so, it is because of where we are in the process. The data question is really the tip of the iceberg of the more profound underlying questions I have suggested. I want you to know that college officials care deeply about our nation’s educational future, and we are deeply appreciative of how much Congress has done to support our low-income students’ dreams to go to college. We welcome this conversation and are appreciative that you have asked us to be part of it.

I understand how tight the federal budget is. I am even more aware of how tight the budgets are for so many of our students' families. The funding to make their dreams possible does not come easily, nor without painful tradeoffs, but it does make a profound difference in so many lives. We need to ensure that we are accountable to the taxpayers who provide our students with this critically important support. However, we also must ensure that any accountability measures are appropriate and helpful, and don't have unintended consequences.

Let me thank you again for all you do for the students at Shenandoah University and for students across the country.

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Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much, Dr. Fitzsimmons.

I want to thank all of you for the excellent material that you presented ahead of time for the record. I had a chance to read it. It is full of great information. And I want to make it clear that your written statements are on our Web site. They have been sent to all of our members. And I am going to encourage them very strongly to read them because it is excellent.

And I appreciate the comments that you have made today, and the fact that you did not read your testimonies, but spoke of the concerns that you had. So, I just want to make a point about that because your material is really excellent and I appreciate it.

I wanted to ask all of you a question. It is a—the question is a little long. But I want to ask you to answer as quickly as you can. And then if you want to, again always submit additional information about it for the record, we will certainly get it in.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Will the chairwoman pause for just a moment? I have a question. Being that it is just you and me representing both sides of the aisle, would—

Chairwoman FOXX. Go right ahead.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Would you—I see Chairman Kline just walked in. Excellent. You count for five, Mr. Chairman.

Chairwoman FOXX. I was going to say, he is not chopped liver.

Mr. HINOJOSA. I looked over and noticed that it was just you and me. And now that Chairman Kline has come that may change the formula. But I was hoping that you would consider having a period of at least 30 to 45 minutes of questions to the panelists because this is very, very important to all of us. And I was just hoping that we would not just have one opportunity to ask 5 minutes of questions.

Chairwoman FOXX. If we do not have a lot of other members come I certainly intend to allow for more than one round of questioning.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. If you show up, you get to do things.

Now, back to my question; if you had to select five key data points the federal government should collect on all institutions of higher education, what would they be? Are these data points currently collected by the federal government, or by the states or by the crediting agencies?

Is anybody—I do not want to pick on Dr. Schneider all the time. Is anybody prepared? Are you prepared? Please start, and then we will go down.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Sure. I will be more than happy to start.

I think we could identify probably more than five. But I really think it is more the extent of the coverage that is fundamental,

right. And again, I think that we—clearly completion rates is fundamental. I think retention, progression and completion are the suite that it has to be, this is a compelling national interest, a compelling student interest. We just need to make sure that it covers more students than at the current time.

I believe that the other fundamental piece of information that is needed, and I will limit it to four, is two, student success in the labor market afterwards. And we can do that and we should do that. And I think, again, we need to have a broader coverage, if you will.

I believe that we have some—not I believe, I know we have information, for example, from the Census Bureau or the BLS at the aggregate level, very high level. But students do not get a bachelor's degree. They get a bachelor's degree from a program in a specific university. Students do not get an associate's degree. They get an associate's degree from a program in a specific university.

We need to know what the success rates of those students are at the program level. And I think we really—we can do that, and we need to do that.

Chairwoman FOXX. Dr. Hallmark?

Mr. HALLMARK. I believe your question was what should be collected at the federal government level?

Chairwoman FOXX. Yes.

Mr. HALLMARK. I think I will say—I am going to weasel out a little bit on this answer and indicate that I am not sure that this has to be done at the federal level. But I will say that we do need good information. And I would agree with the information that my colleagues here have mentioned.

We need completion data, good completion data. And I think the word completion rather than graduation, graduate should be used because there is various ways by which one can complete their educational goals.

I think we need to focus on at-risk populations, partly because that is where most of the federal money is being targeted, just by the nature of the process whereby one qualifies for financial aid. And so we ought to be looking at at-risk populations more carefully, seeing what their success rates are, what kinds of programs and opportunities are leading to their success and make sure that that is money well spent, and if not, redirecting that money in a manner in which it would be better spent to serve the goals of the state, nation, region and institution.

Student success after graduation I do think is a valuable—very valuable, very important metric that we all need to be paying attention to. And I believe that institutions are doing that much more so now than they were 5 years ago and 10 years ago.

I do believe that progress is being made in that way. It is not, perhaps, a slam dunk at this point in terms of institutions having the kinds of data as to what their graduates are doing. But I do believe the institutions have significantly increased what they are doing in that area.

Chairwoman FOXX. Dr. Cruz, the pressure is on. Not much time.

Mr. CRUZ. All right. So, I would say extend the graduation rates—

Mr. HINOJOSA. Push the button.

Mr. CRUZ. I would say to extend the graduation rates beyond first-time, full-time students to include low-income students, transfer students and part-time students. Also to report graduates by financial aid status, those that do not receive Pell Grant programs versus those that receive Stafford Loan programs and those that do not receive either of those.

Collect net price data for non-Title IV recipients, add private student loans to the National Student Loan Data System, and use the new completion flag to generate new cumulative student loan debt by institution.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you.

Dr. Fitzsimmons?

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. It depends deeply on what the information is used for. It is about accountability for Pell Grants. That is one data point that is important to the federal government. Otherwise, I am not sure that it is the federal government's job to collect that data on behalf of prospective students.

If you wanted to do that, I would urge you to look at the Ucan Web site that already exists. That is [www.ucan-network.org](http://www.ucan-network.org) because this was created through deep focus groups with prospective students and parents and others interested in education.

What we know is that they tell us that cost is important. Graduation rates are important, except that that matters, that is impacted deeply by the average—the median salary of the families that are attending, whether they are first-time college goers that are going there, et cetera.

Please, I urge you to not focus on graduation rates. In fact, there are a number of members of this committee that did not graduate from college. Clearly they have been highly successful. Others who went to institutions who have 31 percent, 48 percent, 51 percent graduation rates here.

I do not think you would want to put your alma maters out of business. In fact, they are doing a tremendous job. And they are taking risks on some who do not graduate, but at least they have been given the opportunity.

So, I would urge you to think about whether it is the federal government's role. We already have a Web site for private colleges and universities across the country called Ucan that was built on focus groups, and gives the information to students, not just measurable data, but the other things they are interested in.

There is a button. You can find out about the local community. Do you care about being in a big city versus a rural area? Does safety matter to you? Does what kind of spiritual life programs matter?

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you all very much.

Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

Dr. Hallmark, thank you for joining us today. My question to you is, are there any unique qualities to the A&M project that distinguishes this data from similar dashboard efforts?

Mr. HALLMARK. Thank you. Appreciate that question. There are some. I want to carefully use the word unique because I do not know what might be going on in all places everywhere. But cer-

tainly there are some things that we are doing in the A&M System's metrics project that is unique.

I think one of the things is our stretch goals where not only are institutions identifying where we are right now, but we are also identifying where we want to be in 2015 and 2020. And those are not necessarily increases or decreases, not necessarily predictable.

For example, an institution may say we need to downsize a little bit because of the nature of what our expanding—our changing mission might be. For example, I provided my oral testimony of research—or excuse me, expenditures per full time student equivalent. And institutions such as A&M at Texarkana has downward expanded to include freshmen and sophomore students, which require a tremendous amount of support that is not necessary for success for an upper division and graduate students.

So, they are increasing their expenditures per full-time student equivalent. And so majors like that I think are very forward-thinking and thinking through what the specific mission is of the institution and how it can best serve its public.

The only other thing I would mention, I would say there are several. But the only other thing I would want to mention at this time without further follow up is our excellence measures where each institution has said here is a core mission that our institution has.

We are targeting let us say Hispanic populations, and we are specifically tracking that for that institution. And I know that is common data, but the point is the institution is saying this is important and we are going to track that and be held accountable for improving our performance in that area. And each institution—

Mr. HINOJOSA. That is interesting. And I am going to come back to you on another question in the next round.

I would like to ask Dr. Fitzsimmons a question. If consumers are not informed and able to make comparisons across institutions, students' choices do not reflect a quality education. So, do not you agree that students can make more informed choices about universities when they have information on outcomes?

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. And in fact, Ranking Member Hinojosa, students do make those choices right now. There are a number of Web sites available where students can go and compare institutions. They can put in certain questions, you know I am looking for do they have this major, how much does it cost, is it a public or private, et cetera? So, they can do comparisons right now. It exists in a number of these datasets. Okay.

I think the challenge is, is that so much of what students are interested in, it is difficult to measure in terms of quantitative data. I am a political scientist by training. We rely on quantitative and qualitative data. We ask our students to do that in classrooms as well across this country. We have to find a way for both.

Mr. HINOJOSA. I will come back to you with another question in the next round.

Dr. Cruz, do you believe it is narrow-minded or unreasonable for the federal government to hold institutions accountable for the student's ability to repay loans?

Mr. CRUZ. I do not think that it is narrow-minded at all. I think that it is something that should be done. It is important for students to understand not only sort of the value or the qualitative

value that it will get from an institution, but also the cost and the risks associated with not graduating from that institution because it might be that that institution is not doing as much as it could to support that particular student.

I do not think there is a disconnect between requiring institutions to provide more information to students, including the graduation rates for low-income students, and the ability of the students to also evaluate the qualitative aspects of particular institutions.

I have a senior who is in high school right now, and he gets more mail than anybody in the household; every day at least three or four very shiny mailings from different universities across the country. So, the fact that we would be requiring institutions to be more forthcoming about how they are serving their students and the costs associated with that service does not impede that there would continue to be these other mechanisms by which the students can get a broader picture of an institution.

Mr. HINOJOSA. I share with you the feeling that your son or daughter is receiving more mail. I have the same thing with my young girl, 18 years old, in my household. And it is the same way there.

I have more questions, but I will yield and come back at the next round. Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Hinojosa.

Chairman Kline?

Mr. KLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank our panelists for being here. It is not every day we get a panel where every name starts with doctor, but very impressive.

I was thinking about my own college-going decision many, many, many years ago. And at the time it would seem fairly simple for me. I happened to be living in Corpus Christi, Texas at the time. And so I was looking at different schools. And sorry to say, I did not look a whole lot at Texas A&M.

But you know I looked at the University of Texas. And at the time it was relatively inexpensive for a Texas resident to go to University of Texas. And so I was making my decision to go because it was relatively inexpensive. And then I was offered—got a letter from Rice University, and they offered me a full scholarship. And so free was better than cheap. And I went to Rice.

So, I do not—I think it is not quite that simple now, although it may be for some families. They are looking for free is better than cheap, and cheap is better than expensive.

But around here we talk about return on investment a lot. And so I want to go to Dr. Fitzsimmons first. Just because we are talking about return on investment does not necessarily mean that families and students are.

And my question is do you think they are? And if they are, what is the return on investment? What counts? Is it getting a job? Is it the pride of being part of winning football teams? What is the return on investment? And how are they—if they are including that in their calculations, what are they looking for?

What—I am impressed by that huge stack of paper to your side there. I want to get at that also in a minute.

What do you think? What do they—what are they saying on what return on investment means, if they are?

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. They are all talking about return on investment. The challenge is, is that how we each define return on investment is different. And so for a student who is entering into a music theater career, the return on investment might be that she does not graduate because after sophomore year she got an opportunity to perform in the national tour of *Beauty and the Beast*. That is a tremendous return on her investment if we prepared her for that.

Or the student who decided to major in business and after junior year she had a phenomenal idea and she left to start her own company. I hope she will come back to college someday. But that might be a great return on investment that we prepared her to be an entrepreneur.

For other families the idea of a great return on an investment is that their student will learn a lot and be well prepared for a career, while also being able to deepen his or her spiritual belief while in college. The return on investment for some is to have their child close to home because they need help in other ways on the weekends or on the evenings during the week. And for others it is that first kid that ever graduates from college in the entire family.

The challenge is I do not think it is the federal government's job to define return on investment for the young people of our country; helping provide lots of opportunities to access data, certainly.

And to what Dr. Cruz was speaking of, those kinds of data, I can tell you for Shenandoah University and so many other institutions across our country, right here in that big bottom part, that is the facts book. It is online. You can find answers to all those questions that you were asking for right on our Web site. So, if your son or daughter is a senior is interested, I would urge them to think about that.

Mr. KLINE. Let me interrupt if I could. Thanks for that answer. But I am curious as to why you said you hoped she would go back to college in your example. What would be the return on investment there? She left after a sophomore or junior year, was very successful. Why did she go back to college?

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. I guess I am one of those old fashioned people that believes that college is about both preparation for a career. That we would have done successfully in the example I gave you. But the other part is that we are preparing people for a lifetime of great decisions with the breadth of education available.

So, I think that a great course in political science helps us be better voters. I think it is important to know something about literature and science. And so I would urge her to come back to college so that she can broaden her thinking.

Mr. KLINE. I guess I am old-fashioned too. I see that my time is about to expire. Clearly, and so I do not want to get into another question here except that part of what seems to me we need to be doing is something about huge stacks of paper.

We have had hearings here before where people from different college and universities came in with binders full of regulations, many of them federal regulations that they have to deal with that probably do not help a single student either get a degree or get a

job. But it is a pretty big pile of stuff. And so we are always interested, many of us at least interested in how can we streamline things and make them simpler?

Madam Chair, I see my time is expired.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The word got out that this was a very stimulating hearing and people are beginning to show up.

So, Congresswoman Davis, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

I appreciate you all being here. You know we are talking about how each individual student would really value the cost of their education, and how difficult that is. But I think that the other issue is whether or not the information that they are looking at necessarily reflects information that is required, which is problematic on the one hand.

But on the other hand maybe it is just voluntary information so that there are some institutions or some other ways in which that information is getting out there, but does not necessarily reflect all the information that is out there so that it is a bit skewed. And students are having difficulty with that.

So, getting to the question of what the federal role is, because surveys are not enough probably in getting that information. If students are evaluating whether or not this is really going to be the best thing for their buck. If they are comparing and they are trying to look at those issues and they are trying to think through whether or not they will have higher employment opportunities or they are going to be paid more versus another school.

Is that important information to have? I know you suggested, and I would kind of go along with the fact that graduation rates per se may not be the best thing. Maybe it is not even how much they are going to be paid at the end, but whether or not they are actually employed.

What is it that really gives a student the opportunity to try and fully evaluate over and above whether I want to go to a certain school, you know all the things that come into a decision that a student would make? I mean what is the bottom line for that, if a family is struggling with what they can afford and they want the biggest bang for their buck, what is it? And who gets that? How do you get that information to students?

Mr. HALLMARK. I would be happy to provide some comment on that. It is difficult because every student who enters the institution comes with a very different goal. If you have got 10,000 students in your institution, you probably have 5,000 to 6,000 or 7,000 different goals.

Some, and I mentioned this in my oral testimony, particularly at the community college level, are seeking a certification or a set of hours that they need in order to get job x. And that is a very different goal than somebody who is seeking a bachelor's degree so they can get into law school or something of that nature; or accounting degree to pursue a particular—so, I think our goals are much more diverse than simply graduation or persistence or whatever the case might be. And that makes the data collection process considerably more complex.

I do not have an answer, but I do think that is an incredibly important part of this is that the students come to us with varying goals. And if we could figure out a way to tap what those goals are and plug them into some kind of measurement system then we would have a tremendous asset there.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. May I follow up? Yes, of course students have very complicated goals in attending college. And we could actually obfuscate and we could do all kinds of crazy things to say we are never going to get to a core set of metrics that we could emphasize. But the fact of the matter is that the return on the investment is an organizing principle that could cut through a lot of noise.

So, the return on the investment is actually I am going to go to this school; what is my probability? So, it has to be individualized. What is my probability of graduating? How long is it likely to take me to graduate? So, that is my investment. How much am I paying, my net price? Okay.

So, now I could actually, from the student perspective, I could actually figure out in fairly great detail what my personal investment in my education is. If we now extend this to what is a, my probability of having a job and b, what my likely outcome in terms of salary is, which we can do. Then we could get an organizing principle around the ROI.

I agree that students have many more things that they care about. Some of them may be really core to the mission. Some of them may be just you know personally interesting, a football team; I like the orange of the Longhorns compared to whatever—sorry, I do not know what TAMU's colors are. But anyway—

Mr. HALLMARK. Aggies.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Yes, Aggies, whatever. But I mean so those things matter. But from our perspective, I think from the perspective of data systems and the kind of issues that the Congress could deal with, I think that focusing on the ROI, computing it, making it easily available is fundamental to our task.

Mrs. DAVIS. Go ahead, Dr. Cruz.

Mr. CRUZ. I would echo what Dr. Schneider said. It is not about the extra data or qualitative issues around whether or not to go to college. There are just some fundamental questions that students should be able to get answers to. In the era of big data we should be able to provide every student an indication, a personalized, individualized indication of what the net price is, what the likelihood of this person graduating in X number of years will be, and what their ability to repay any student loans is. Those are fundamental questions that need to be answered, and are not right now.

Mrs. DAVIS. I guess part of it is, how do you know that you are getting relevant information within that if it is not just by anecdote or survey? The requirement piece of it is what I think we are all struggling with.

Mr. CRUZ. So, there are various initiatives that have already been able to define the data and the metrics and the tools that can be used to have sort of a uniform view of these issues. So, the Complete College America initiative with NGA has been mentioned; the Access to Success Initiative as well. There are already institutions that are collecting this data and reporting this data. The one element that we are missing is making it go beyond the voluntary

stage and having one place where people can see across the board comparisons.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you.

Mr. PLATTS [presiding]. I thank the gentlelady. I yield myself 5 minutes.

I do not have I guess a specific question; I apologize. I was coming in from one hearing and as soon as the chairwoman comes back I have got to run to another one. But glad to have a chance to get your written testimony. Thank each of you for your testimony and also your work day in and day out on this issue. And I guess I look at the issue in two different ways.

One is the individual return on investment, which is that job opportunity or that career, that entrepreneurial opportunity, and then the broader public return on investment. And really going back to our founding fathers, who in establishing some of our early institutions understood that as a new democracy a key to our success was having an educated citizenry if we were to be an effective democracy, and you know that return of investment is not a dollar amount.

But just a citizens that are well-rounded, the liberal arts education approach, that they are going to be therefore more engaged in the process of governing. On the individual side there is certainly data I think is relevant.

And the couple that I would highlight that as we look further into this, one that is very important to me, and what I am running is an Armed Services Committee hearing with the GI Bill and a record number of veterans now coming back into the education community that we are making sure that those true heroes of our nation have data to know that this institution, this degree is a good match for me, has a good record of success or assistance to veterans versus others that maybe are not as strong.

So, that data that we can highlight that relate to the veterans community I think is key. You know the data that goes to an incumbent freshman, a traditional freshman probably more so maybe than others, but not necessarily, but is looking at the typical student at an institution.

And I think it was in the Chronicle of Higher Ed just in the last edition or two where they highlighted that maybe as much—according to their—I think their review that about 25 percent of institutions provided different SAT scores to the Department of Education than to U.S. News & World Report for their ranking of their college or university.

That raises a concern that hey we are providing data, but why is it different that is going to the department versus the ranking entity that so many families look at to evaluate the quality of that school? So, there is data being provided, but not necessarily consistent data.

And then a final and also is that was already mentioned is how do you evaluate that return on investment from getting a \$50,000 a year education and having extensive debt for a job that you know up front maybe is a \$25,000 a year job because it is in social services? And making that informed decision. Is it still worth getting that top tier education? Or should we you know, maybe look at a less expensive still good education, but less expensive?

I mean, those are so many different factors that go into the type of information through the user that information is going to be, how they are going to use it. And you know taking a quick look at the written testimony you provide. And I apologize I did not get to hear your oral testimony here today. But you are helping with that dialogue of how do we hone in on this?

In the end, did it grow if it is an institution yourself, you know, to provide as open and transparent information to your possible students or those who attend. Or to the federal government as a provider of a significant sum of the taxpayer funds that we all kind of move the ball down the field that we get—hone this process as best we can to be as effective—excuse me.

I apologize. My first day back after being laid out for 3 days, so still trying to get over this. Hopefully I am not contaminating anybody. I will not touch anything.

I think I will wrap up because I am going to be able—I am not going to be able to continue to talk. And yield to my distinguished colleague from New Jersey, Mr. Andrews, for purpose of questions.

Mr. ANDREWS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope you feel better.

I apologize for not being here for your oral testimony, but I read your written statements, and I thank you for your diligence.

One of the problems that we have in higher education law right now is for purposes of tracking the value of our investment in Title IV money, we have two broad categories. We have gainful employment and everything else. So, if something fits the statutory definition of gainful, it is now subject to—sort of subject now to some convoluted new rules, most of which have been struck down by the courts about debt-to-income ratio.

It takes about 30 minutes to explain it. And I do not think it is a very good idea, frankly. And then we have everything else, you know, from a PhD in philosophy at Yale to a community college degree in accounting and sort of everything in between. Do you think that we should create some new gradations in those categories that would differentiate among the type of data we collect?

The premise of my question is this. I do not think you measure the quality of Yale's PhD program by what the PhD doctoral graduates do. I do not know how you measure that.

Speaking as a parent who has a daughter who might go to graduate school, I know you cannot measure success on these bases. But I think you certainly can measure an auto mechanic certificate training program as to whether someone gets a job as an auto mechanic.

There is a lot of in between. Do you think we need some new categories in the law to help us differentiate both in the collection and interpretation of data?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. So, I—the dreaded gainful employment word has finally come up. I think that to me was pretty much of a debacle. I think what happened in that was that there was a regulatory attempt that was far in excess of the ability of the data to support it. I believe fundamentally that—I understand the legislation and I understand why this was restricted to the for profits because of the terminology in HEA. But the fact of the matter is that I do believe that we need those data, the same kinds of data for every program in the nation. And I believe that we have—

Mr. ANDREWS. I completely agree. Uniformity of treatment on that—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Uniformity of treatment.

But let me go back to I think what is inherent in your question. And that is whether or not this is an informational exercise or a regulatory exercise. I think what happened with GE was that we put regulation in front of getting the data right. And this to me was really a fundamental misstep. And again, I understand you know the Department of Education regulation and, you know, the legislative language. But the fact of the matter is I do not believe that we are quite ready for the regulations.

Mr. ANDREWS. By the way, the courts echo your opinion. Their opinion in that case was that the department has the regulatory authority to do this, but they lack data to justify the rule that they in fact put forward, which is kind of the premise of my question. What data should we be collecting across the board?

And again, I want to say this; that I do not think you can measure a philosophy PhD program the way you do an auto mechanic training. You just cannot. And what I am interested in are your thoughts about what we ought to be measuring, for whom and for what purpose?

Well, ultimately—one of my favorite movies is the movie Accepted. Ever see this? This guy does not get into any good schools, so he invents a college. He has got this geeky friend and they invent a college so his parents are duped into thinking he is at a real college.

So, they have to put on this big front when the parents show up the first day and one guy's drunk uncle becomes the dean. This never happens in real life does it? And the parents walk in. And the father asks the dean what the purpose of the college is. And the guy starts sort of a long-winded explanation. The father rolls his eyes. You can tell he is ready to leave the campus.

Finally, the dean says, you know what? The purpose of this college is to get a job. Well, the father loves this. Okay. The father thinks this is the reason for being for higher education.

What answer should be given to that father? What data should we be giving him and his spouse and his son or daughter?

Mr. HALLMARK. I cannot speak to the gainful employment; do not know the law well enough to comment. But I do think I want to go to your broader issue there, and that is how do we assess a PhD or a bachelor's degree in history or some of these very important historical liberal arts kinds of degrees that right now are not as fashionable because they do not lead to a specific job as clearly as say auto mechanic kind of certification.

I think one of the things that we have to do is think longer term. When you look around, say, at a bachelor's degree in history, you are not looking at a gainful employment 6 months or a year or 2 years down the road—

Mr. ANDREWS. Maybe never, huh?

Mr. HALLMARK. Maybe never. But that student may very well be a great poet, or may very well be—goes to law school when they are 35 and becomes an elected official. I mean, there are so many variables there that you cannot look just at the immediate outcome, but rather look longer term. And also going to the issue of

the engaged citizenry, something I believe in, that we have a full range of outcomes that are not dollar-wise tangible.

Mr. ANDREWS. If I may, my time is about to close. I want to thank the chairwoman for having this hearing because it is a really dry, sterile topic, but it really needs to be looked at. Because we are investing billions and billions of taxpayer dollars every year, and we have very little idea what we are getting for it.

Now, I think intuitively it is a pretty good thing. And I think one of the reasons this country is the strongest country in the world, is it has got the best higher education system in the world. But I would like to be able to hone in on that and really understand a little more surgically. And I am convinced, as I think each of the witnesses have said, that the present data sets are in some cases over-inclusive, in other cases under inclusive.

They do not really let us make the kind of diagnosis that we need to make. And I think it is a very serious and very relevant topic that we can work on together to find data collection that is not overly burdensome on the institutions, but very valuable for the students and the taxpayers. Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. I want to thank Mr. Andrews. And early—late last night, early this morning I was reading an article called “Who Killed the Liberal Arts” by Joseph Epstein. I think it is in the Weekly Standard, recent Weekly Standard. And I want to commend it to you. It is—I was laughing out loud—

Mr. ANDREWS. I rarely read the Weekly Standard—

Chairwoman FOXX. Well—

Mr. ANDREWS. I will make an exception in this case.

Chairwoman FOXX. It has some really good articles in it. And this is a good one. But, I have to say, I do not know how many people are going to appreciate all the humor that is in it. There is a good bit of humor in the article. But I recommend it to you.

I believe now that we will do what Mr. Hinojosa wanted to do, which is to have a second round of questioning. And I would like to ask Dr. Schneider, given the constraints of current federal law, what options are available for the federal government and states to collect and provide useful post-secondary data without infringing upon the privacy rights of students and their families?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. The balance between what the states can and should do and what the federal government can and should do is one of course that is constantly evolving. And I think it is a very important discussion with no fixed answer, right. We have been at this for hundreds of years, and we will be at it hopefully for another hundreds of years trying to figure out the appropriate balance.

In terms of the federal data collection, at the current point in time I think that in the reauthorization of HEA I think that is an ideal opportunity for the Congress to start cleaning out the IPEDS attic. There is just stuff in there that you know may have been important at one time or seemed important at one time. And I think that we really need a systematic effort to do this. And I think we need to ask the question, what is the compelling national interest in collecting data?

And you know I—so you can tell that I did not even know what color the Aggies wore. So, I am not really much on sports. But you

know we collect a lot of data on athletes and athletics. Why? You know what is the compelling national interest in that? You know our HR collection is, again, needs to be rethought.

I think that—but again, I am going to lay some of this blame on the history of legislation. And one of the things that I think is fundamental is an inventory of what is the legislative requirement and what are just sort of things people made up along the way?

And if we want to clean out some of the attic then I think that legislation in the HEA, I think we may have the opportunity to get rid of some of the stuff. And I believe it is—you know given how long it sometimes takes to reauthorize HEA, maybe once in a lifetime. But we need to—we need to—I think we need to systematically work on that.

I also think, and this goes to the issue of burden. We now require a school with 100 students to report all the same data elements as a school of 60,000 or 100,000 students. And some schools, given the fixation on first-time, full-time students, there are many schools that have a handful of those. So, why are we forcing schools to report all the data on students that do not exist? And I think again what we really need to do is to be more mindful about the diversity in the admission and size of campuses.

And finally, as the ex-commissioner of NCES, I want—I really believe that that is a gem. They actually—you should engage them in a discussion about what they see on the ground about what is useful, what causes the campuses to pull their hair out you know? So, I think that that is a discussion that I think needs to be undertaken.

I think the states obviously have a lot more skin in the game than the federal government in terms of supporting especially public institutions. And I think that we have to be—you know when I was at NCES you know we dealt with states all the time. And I just sort of, cannot you understand? Can you not understand? Do this, do this, do this; and it is of course that is an unhelpful attitude.

The states actually have incredible—you know incredible amounts of money in this. They have incredible regulatory authority. And actually they are wonderful partners. It is just longer and harder. But we have to be respectful of states. And states actually have control of so much more data than we have.

For example, wage data, unemployment insurance data. They could link it at the current time. I think we have to explore those and then figure out what the limits of that are and build on that because for example the work that I am doing in Tennessee and Virginia using the state linked Student Unit Record and the unemployment insurance data we can match half of the students.

So, right now—it is not right now. We can do this right now. We are doing this, and reporting the wages from every program in a bunch of states. We can do that right now.

But there are these problems of coverage. And it may be ultimately that the nation decides that we really need a much more national approach to that kind of linkage than just relying on the states. But the states can and should do that right now.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. HINOJOSA. I am going to ask a short question, Dr. Hallmark. Once you have the data that we are asking that you all collect, then what? And how do you transform that data into meaningful information for parents and perspective students?

Mr. HALLMARK. I was struck by the huge stack down here and I think that is part of the problem is that when you have a fact book that thick, which I think we probably all do, it is so overwhelming to making any kind of decision. You do not really know where to go, how to approach that.

And so what the institution, state, whatever it might be, has to transform that data into something that is more meaningful to the decision maker. And I would say that is not just limited to a parent or a student, but that is true of a president or a provost or a dean as well. The data is overwhelming that already exists there and so it must be transformed.

What we have done in the A&M System is we have gone through and decided what metrics we believe are most important. And importantly we did that at a grassroots level and from the top. We had it going on, and fortunately it worked out quite well, so far anyway.

But we have had the institutions of folks through committees of faculty and staff to say what is it that is so important that we want to be tracking and measuring so that we can demonstrate that we are furthering our mission along and serving these students better? And we have done that at the institution level, at the system level so that we are focusing on those specific metrics instead of the huge stack. And I think that is a very useful way to go about it is identifying what it is.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you for answering my question. Do not be overwhelmed by that stack because in the first panelist's statement, Dr. Schneider, said the federal government spends billions and billions of dollars in higher education. And he referred to the 1950s and all the way through the 1990s.

But I want the record to show that unfortunately minority institutions of higher learning were getting the lowest percentage of those billions and billions of dollars. And I will give you something very specific.

In 1992 we created under the Higher Education Act the Hispanic Serving Institution designation. And the amount of money given to the HSIs was zero. In 1994 the appropriators gave them zero. I came here in 1996 and they were getting \$11 million for 36 HSIs. And in 1997 they got \$11 million for 37 HSIs.

So, as you can see, it was very, very little. So, now that we have a stack that size, I can tell you that we are doing a little bit better for all minority institutions of higher learning, including HBCUs, HSIs, and Asian-American colleges. So, we need some data collected now that there is much more money.

Okay. And few said that, as of 2010 and 2011, Hispanics make up the largest minority group that is now attending 2-year and 4-year universities. So, we need more data like that so that we can see just how women and minorities are being served in higher education.

We have a long ways to go to close that gap. But I am so glad to see a woman and a Hispanic were chosen to be our panelists. So, thank you for that, Chairwoman Foxx.

It is wonderful to hear all of you speak. But especially to have the woman's point of view and the Latino's point of view because that is the group that is really, really growing: about 55 percent of college graduates are women today, and about 55 percent or 56 percent of voters are women.

So, we need to really pay attention to why this data is being asked for by this panel—I mean, by this group of congressmen who have been attending the congressional hearing. It is a pleasure. And I will ask the last question of you, Dr. Fitzsimmons.

I recognize that 88 percent of your students in your college are 24 years of age or younger. However, single mothers going back to school part-time to increase their skills do not have a counselor like my daughter had. These students rely on user-friendly data that allow prospective students to compare institutions. How would these tools inhibit choice of college, they selected?

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. Of course, the challenge, Congressmen, for those single women raising children is that they frequently are not mobile. So, they have very limited choices. And they tend to focus on their local community college or the 4-year institution that is closest to them.

Mr. HINOJOSA. That is true.

Ms. FITZSIMMONS. So, the real question is what kinds of programs do we have available to be supportive to them? And frankly there are men who are in their position right now also.

We have got a veteran who is about to graduate from Shenandoah. He is a male. He is obviously an older student and he is recently divorced and he has primary custody for two of his young children. He is working and he is taking 19 hours, credit hours. And you know what? He is going to graduate with all A's and B's on his transcript it looks like.

But the question to all the colleges and universities should be not only what kinds of data do we put out to help them make decisions, but how can we help them through? What kinds—do we have childcare available? We have a childcare center at Shenandoah University available to faculty, staff and students, subsidized for them.

Many institutions, including my institution have special tutoring programs available to help. The chairwoman has started in her comments, and you echoed those as well, that the traditional student is not the typical student.

Our typical student in American higher education is older, is interested in some type of online learning, has some high-risk challenge. That might be that they have learning differences. It might be a student who has Asperger's who's going to school and needs some special support. It might be that they are a first generation college student and nobody is cheering them on. And so how can we all create that family environment for them?

The typical student looks very different now than it did 50 years ago. You should be encouraging us and finding us and finding out what we already do because it is amazing the programs offered to support students who are typical, but not traditional.

Mr. HINOJOSA. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Okay. We are going to try one more round.

Let us go back again to looking a little bit at the state and what the states are doing now. And if you all might respond to this; what factors are there that make up the high-quality state—state longitudinal data systems? And what factors are missing from the low-quality state data systems?

I think, Dr. Schneider, you said that some states are doing very well; others are doing it, but are not publishing it. Do we know why there are those problems with the states? Are there people in the state who are—are certain people resisting putting out that information or developing the systems? Is there any kind of pattern that you have seen?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Yes and yes and yes. I do not know how many compounds there were in your question, but the answer is yes to almost all of them.

I think one of the mistakes that we made, and remember, we are \$700 million into this process, was that we did not have a use requirement. And there is a long history on this. There was no use requirement on this data.

So, what has happened is that we have made this huge investment in these data warehouses, which I think of—I sometimes call them data mausoleums and going back to many years ago I think of them—you remember there was something called the roach motel. You know roaches checked in, but they never checked out. So, sometimes I think these data systems as the equivalent. You know data checks in and we never see them again.

So, we spend a lot of money on building these and actually very, very few concrete products that actually can and should help us inform consumer choice. So, and I must—you know some states are stepping up. And I spent a lot of time trying to get states to open up these data warehouses to make them available.

I am not the only person that is doing it. But you know I am one of the people out in the forefront. And Texas has stepped up and Virginia has stepped up. These are partners of—with us. It is a long, complicated process often because of the politics of data. It is not that the data do not exist. It is that the data do exist. And sometimes the results are not—do not make people all that happy.

So, in the Tennessee data, which we released earlier this week on Tuesday, there are—there are graduates from programs in the state of Tennessee where the average earnings of bachelor's degrees are \$25,000, \$22,000. And I think there are others in the exact same fields that are \$35,000 and \$40,000. So, some people have actually asked several times about, how do we compare across schools?

So, in my written testimony I talk about risk adjusted metrics. And I think one of the things that we need to do is mount a serious effort to get risk adjusted metrics right. And we can do it. Hospitals do it all the time, right? And I think that institutions of higher learning need to do this also.

But, I think that they are—at the end of the day there are programs that are going to do way better than other programs. And we could adjust for the characteristics of the students or we could adjust for the regional labor market. All fair points and we have

to—and ultimately we have to do this. But ultimately there are programs that are just not up to the standard.

Now, this is where the state—this is where we end up with the state versus the federal government in information versus regulation, right? So, this is at the junction of all these fundamental, these fundamental issues. Again, I believe that the federal government missed an opportunity by putting—by not putting use requirements into these data systems. And I care most about the higher ed. But it is the same thing with the K-12 system.

So, we missed that and we missed an incredible return on a lot of money invested. And I believe that in the regulation versus information side, we are not at the regulatory stage, right. And I believe that the GE process told us that we are not ready for the regulation. But I also believe that we need to figure out how to get this information in the hands of consumers in a usable way.

Now, that may be the state. That may be a private entity. There are all kinds of private entity companies out there that do big data, trying to push information out to students, guide them in the right way. And right now that may be as good as we can do, right. But I do not think we are at this junction between federal, state and information versus regulation. I do not think we are at a point where we can say this is federal, this is regulatory.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

I want to ask a question of Dr. Cruz, following up on one of the last comments that Dr. Fitzsimmons made about that young man who is single parent, with two children and carrying 18, 19 hours.

We have a problem in the state of Texas in that it is taking our students 6 or 7 years to graduate with a bachelor's degree. And there is talk about how we can improve that. What kind of incentives would you give us, Dr. Cruz, for colleges and members of Congress to promote so that we can graduate them in four, but not more than 5 years?

Mr. CRUZ. The actual incentives I think need to be informed by the data. And it brings us back to sort of some of the issues that we have been talking about today. So, we know that certain colleges and universities do better for their students than what similar institutions do for theirs.

So, it is important that as we define what the new data requirements would be, or the new additions that we would have to fill some of the gaps in the current databases, that we work hard to ensure that the data that is collected will then allow policymakers and students and their families to be able to see which institutions are doing a better job to educate students that look like them.

So, I am a Latino. I just graduated from high school and I have a certain socioeconomic background. And I am contemplating going to a particular school. I want to know if that school has the supports in place that will allow me to complete and will allow me to complete in a timely fashion, in 4 years if that is my goal. And it will allow me to complete in such a way that it will eventually, the value of that degree will allow me to get a job and to be able to pay back my debts.

So, we need to be able to have the data to be able to then devise the incentives. And going back to the gainful employment regulation discussion previously, that is something that the federal government tried to do for the for-profit sector.

The numbers of the sector as a whole indicated that something needed to be done. It is a sector that enrolls currently 13 percent of all the post-secondary students in the U.S., yet takes in 24 percent of the federal financial aid dollars and produces 43 percent of the student loan defaults. So, it made sense from that view of the data to try to figure out a way to identify those schools and programs that were not doing a good job.

Mr. HINOJOSA. That data certainly would help us. But let me just say this from experience, that some of our Latino students, men and women, who are given an internship while they are going to college and work 10 hours, 15 hours, no more than 20 hours often times can make it and they balance their time to be able to do it.

How could we have at least a third of the jobs that are available by the college or the university at the library, working and serving at the mess hall or wherever, and giving them that opportunity so that they could accomplish the goal that I am asking for, graduate in 4, 5 years? Can that be done?

Mr. CRUZ. That would definitely help them. I mean, I think that what we have seen is that the institutions that are intentional about graduating their students and figure out what are the types of supports they need to put in place. And one of them is really to help their students—

Mr. HINOJOSA. So, it is possible?

Mr. CRUZ [continuing]. More time in their schools.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

I wanted to ask Dr. Hallmark, Texas A&M was all men back in the 1950s. And now it is both men and women. And I want to talk about women in STEM majors, STEM careers. Because they are graduating much higher than 50 percent of graduates, what is A&M doing to recruit and help graduate women in STEM majors so that they can have those careers?

Mr. HALLMARK. Diversity at our flagship campus in College Station is not what it needs to be, and is a significant focus of the institution. I have a vice chancellor, in fact, of the A&M System is now devoted to diversity and recruitment efforts. That is focused primarily on College Station.

I am not personally familiar with all of those programs, but I would be happy to get back with you on that. I do not know the details of them well enough—

Mr. HINOJOSA. If it could be done at College Station, could not it be done in the other 11 satellite campuses?

Mr. HALLMARK. Diversity is not as big a challenge in those. We have good Hispanic female numbers, for example. In fact, at one of our campuses NSF right now, National Science Foundation is very interested in our success with female Hispanics in engineering. So, we are looking at how that is working well in our regional campuses, and we are also seeking how we can improve that at the flagship campuses.

Mr. HINOJOSA. So, there is hope?

Mr. HALLMARK. Yes.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you.

Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Hinojosa.

I want to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for taking time to testify before the subcommittee today. As I said to you earlier, I think we are beginning a long journey on this, and others of you have alluded to it in preparation for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. But you help us make the first steps, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Hinojosa, do you have some closing remarks?

Mr. HINOJOSA. Yes. Yes, I do.

In closing I also want to thank all our panel of experts for sharing your views on this issue. As we look to improve data on post-secondary education and reauthorize the Higher Education Act in the next, or the 113th Congress, it is important to closely examine what types of data are most useful, relevant and user friendly to consumers and institutions of higher learning.

And with that I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Hinojosa. I do not know how much the panel knows about my background, but I worked at Appalachian State University for many years, handled—was an Upward Bound special services director. I did academic advising and orientation for new—for freshmen as well as transfer students. I became a president of a community college.

I have been frustrated by this issue all my life. And am—thought years ago that we were going to do better at solving the issue of data collection and understanding what our needs were. The language of the—of your presentations and the material I have been reading brings back a lot of memories to me of concerns that I have.

I appreciate very much the emphasis that you have put on the issue of completion. Again, having seen students leave colleges without a degree, but having fulfilled needs they had and going on to be successful is an experience I have had. So, I agree with you on that.

I agree with you talking about the need to deal with at-risk students. I am particularly concerned with the point I think Dr. Schneider brought up that we spend more than twice as much money as any other OECD country. I read that in your material and I made a note to say something about it. I want to give you one little example of my own experience at the community college where I worked.

I went in one day—I do not remember exactly how long I had been there, but I went into the registrar one day and I have—we served three counties, primarily three counties and we had three high schools. And I went into the registrar and I said I would like to look at completion data by high school. And she said to me, we do not record which high school the students come from when they enroll here. I almost fell on the floor.

I thought we collect thousands of pieces of information. And to me the most basic piece of information you would have collected would have been which high school are these students graduating from? And we did not do that. It blew my mind. It just—you know

I am not a statistician although I love dealing with data. And that just shocked me.

And I think, again, that the American public is probably very—would be very surprised to hear so much of what you have talked about today. We have so much data, and we seem to know so little. What a tragedy for all the money that we are spending in this country. Yes, we have I think the greatest higher education system in the world. And I want to see it stay that way.

And I also want the consumers to get the best information that they can get so they can be making good decisions. So, it occurred to me as you all were talking, especially Dr. Schneider, maybe we need a consumer union like the consumer union we have on products out there for people. Maybe somebody will start a consumer union and they will test all these products, meaning the universities and colleges. And then publish real reports that tell people what is going on.

But anyway, I want to say thank you all very much for being here today and providing such enlightening testimony, both written and verbally.

There being no further business, the committee stands adjourned.

[Questions submitted for the record and their responses follow:]



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October 5, 2012

Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons  
President  
Shenandoah University  
1460 University Drive  
Winchester, VA 22601

Dear Dr. Fitzsimmons:

Thank you for testifying at the September 20, 2012, hearing on "Assessing College Data: Helping to Provide Valuable Information to Students, Institutions, and Taxpayers." I appreciate your participation.

I have enclosed additional questions for inclusion in the final hearing record. Please provide written responses no later than October 19, 2012. Responses should be sent to Amy Jones or Dan Shorts of the committee staff who can be contacted at (202) 225-6558.

Thank you again for your important contribution to the work of the committee.

Sincerely,

*Virginia Foxx*

Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training

Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons  
 October 5, 2012  
 Page 2

1. If you could eliminate any data collection or reporting requirements currently collected by the federal government, which ones would you select and why?
2. Are there data elements your institution, state or accrediting agency is collecting or reporting that are different from what the federal government currently collects or includes on College Navigator? Do you have suggestions about ways in which the federal government could streamline its data collection and reporting requirements with what you are already required to provide to your state or accrediting agency?
3. Are the federal government, states, and institutions currently providing the information students and their parents really want and need to make the right postsecondary choices? If not, what information should they be providing? Do you believe that students and families can be provided with too much information on their postsecondary options? In other words, is too much data problematic or confusing?
4. Are there more appropriate or accessible ways the federal government can present outcome data to students, parents, and taxpayers?
5. I agree with a lot of what you said during the hearing in terms of making sure institutional accountability and academic freedom remain in place. However, I'm also mindful of the vast amount of taxpayer dollars the federal government devotes to higher education. Many policymakers question what we are getting for that investment. How would you answer that question, particularly during a time when we have to make some tough choices about the future of federal student aid programs?

---

#### **Dr. Fitzsimmons' Response to Questions Submitted for the Record**

*1. If you could eliminate any data collection or reporting requirements currently collected by the federal government, which ones would you select and why?*

If I could eliminate one regulation, it would be the federal definition of credit hour. Let me say that I am deeply appreciative of the work of this committee in moving repeal legislation through the House. This federal definition is causing havoc for accreditors, is unnecessary, and not an appropriate federal role. The whole debate makes one feel like the federal government doesn't know how to enforce the rules it has, or to detect fraud and abuse, so is flailing around into academic issues instead.

*2. Are there data elements your institution, state or accrediting agency is collecting or reporting that are different from what the federal government currently collects or includes on College Navigator? Do you have suggestions about ways in which the federal government could streamline its data collection and reporting requirements with what you are already required to provide to your state or accrediting agency?*

It is difficult to answer this question precisely, as the individuals on campus who are responsible for collecting data often do not know the source of the requirement.

There are, of course, some differences. For example, one regional accrediting agency asks for Fall full-time enrollment (FTE), while IPEDS asks for an annual

unduplicated FTE. The accreditor also requests more detailed information about faculty than is requested by the federal government.

In general, slight differences in reporting requirements among different entities are not the main concern I've heard—particularly when the reason for the difference seems clear (i.e. an accreditor does have reason to take a closer look at faculty). Rather, the concern is the sheer volume of requirements—and the fact they grow with every new law and every new regulation and every new departmental interpretation.

Even if overlapping requirements were the biggest problem, attempts to address it could well lead to a cure that is worse than the disease. I say this because it seems that the only way to achieve consistency among the federal government, states, and accreditation agencies would be to develop uniform requirements. Of necessity, this would have to be done at the national level. I'm not convinced that would be wise—as the likely outcome would either be collecting too little information that a state or accreditor may need for a specific purpose or collecting too much, simply because the federal mechanism for doing so is in place. To a great extent, I believe this has happened with College Navigator.

Also, taking on the overlaps among the federal government, 50 separate states and the multitude of regional, national, and specialized accreditation agencies would quickly become overwhelming. It would make more sense to begin by looking at the overlaps within federal requirements or at the overlaps within the Department of Education itself. A good start would be funding the National Research Council study authorized in the Higher Education Opportunity Act—as has been done in the Senate version of the appropriations bill for the Department of Education. In addition, the idea presented by Mark Schneider at the hearing regarding “cleaning the attic” with respect to IPEDS data is certainly worth exploring.

*3. Are the federal government, states, and institutions currently providing the information students and their parents really want and need to make the right postsecondary choices? If not, what information should they be providing? Do you believe that students and families can be provided with too much information on their postsecondary options? In other words, is too much data problematic or confusing?*

As illustrated by the pile of reports regarding Shenandoah University I brought to the hearing, there's plenty of information out there. Different people want to know different things, and governments and institutions try to be responsive. However, once the government “starts a list,” so to speak, it gets hard to resist the temptation to add to it. College Navigator, which can be a great resource, can also be overwhelming. As I said in my testimony, it's TMI!

Another example is the new reporting requirements coming out of the Department of Veterans Affairs, possibly soon to be augmented by legislation in both the House and Senate. I wholeheartedly support our providing information that helps veterans to make smart choices, but presenting them with mounds of minute detail is not going to help. If we could at least use what we have before we require even more, we would have made a huge step in the right direction.

Now, on top of that, we're getting three new administrative initiatives: the College Scorecard, the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, and the Aid offer Comparison Tool. Colleges are being asked to adopt them basically “sight-unseen.”

*4. Are there more appropriate or accessible ways the federal government can present outcome data to students, parents, and taxpayers?*

Yes, and I think this would be a great federal role. We have so many great colleges in this country, and so many different types, families can be overwhelmed with the choices. It would be great if the federal government could help colleges and students find each other.

This question was posed in the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. In response, NAICU worked with the staff on this committee and the Senate education committee to develop what became U-CAN. We gathered the ideas coming out of the Administration and Congress, consulted broadly with our members, and ran focus groups of parents and students.

A big challenge, per your earlier question, was keeping the amount of data presented to a reasonable level. We addressed that by setting a firm rule that the final product could not exceed 2 pages; and we dropped ideas if parents and students weren't interested in the information. Other items, such as the community information on page 2, were added because that was something they wanted that hadn't appeared on any of the policy lists.

*5. I agree with a lot of what you said during the hearing in terms of making sure institutional accountability and academic freedom remain in place. However, I'm also mindful of the vast amount of taxpayer dollars the federal government devotes to higher education. Many policymakers question what we are getting for that invest-*

*ment. How would you answer that question, particularly during a time when we have to make some tough choices about the future of student aid programs?*

First and foremost, I want to say how deeply appreciative colleges are for all Congress has done to stick by low-income students during the recent economic downturn. As I said in my prepared testimony, I KNOW it is working because I know the students it has helped. I also know the federal budget is in a very, very difficult hole and every dollar has to be spent wisely.

I will skip the soft answer here—the one about human dignity and dreams and democracy—although I think it is most important. When you have to justify federal spending, you need some hard facts. So, here is what you are getting for our maximum Pell Grant investment of a little more than \$22,000 for the poorest student to get through college in four years:

- Demographically, that student is likely to be the first in his/her family to go to college. If either parent had gone to college, it is likely he or she wouldn't be poor enough to qualify for the grant.

- That student is exponentially less likely to ever need federal assistance in all its forms, if he or she finishes college, and the change is generational. In other words, the graduate's children are less likely to ever need government assistance, including Pell Grants.

- On average, the student who completes college will earn more and pay more taxes—past census data long ago put the figure at a million dollar differential in lifetime earnings, with varying private analyses claiming higher or lower differentials. A million dollars more in earnings on a \$22,000 federal investment at even a 15 percent tax rate provides an awesome return.

- It is estimated that increases in national educational attainment have accounted for almost 30 percent of the growth in national income in the 20th century.

- Your federal investment leverages many other resources: state aid, institutional aid, and private scholarship money. You are only the first domino in our national effort to let those who work hard earn their way out of poverty.



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October 5, 2012

Dr. James Hallmark  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
Texas A & M University System  
1122 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77840

Dear Dr. Hallmark:

Thank you for testifying at the September 20, 2012, hearing on "Assessing College Data: Helping to Provide Valuable Information to Students, Institutions, and Taxpayers." I appreciate your participation.

I have enclosed additional questions for inclusion in the final hearing record. Please provide written responses no later than October 19, 2012. Responses should be sent to Amy Jones or Dan Shorts of the committee staff who can be contacted at (202) 225-6558.

Thank you again for your important contribution to the work of the committee.

Sincerely,

Virginia Foxx  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training

Dr. James Hallmark  
 October 5, 2012  
 Page 2

1. If you could eliminate any data collection or reporting requirements currently collected by the federal government, which ones would you select and why?
2. Are there data elements your system, state or accrediting agency is collecting or reporting that are different from what the federal government currently collects or includes on College Navigator? Do you have suggestions about ways in which the federal government could streamline its data collection and reporting requirements with what you are already required to provide to your state or accrediting agency?
3. Are the federal government, states, and institutions currently providing the information students and their parents really want and need to make the right postsecondary choices? If not, what information should they be providing? Do you believe that students and families can be provided with too much information on their postsecondary options? In other words, is too much data problematic or confusing?
4. What type of manpower (number of employees, time spent on task, etc) is involved in collecting and analyzing data for the A&M analytics project and Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)?

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#### **Dr. Hallmark's Response to Questions Submitted for the Record**

##### *1. Are there data reporting requirements I would delete?*

In response to this prompt, I surveyed the Institution Research officers within the A&M System and none of these officers reported any difficulty in easily and promptly reporting the necessary data (referring to NCES/IPEDS data). Current Federal reporting is not problematic.

Furthermore, current data reported through NCES/IPEDS is useful for making decisions. As is noted in response to subsequent questions, we do believe some improvements are warranted.

##### *2. Differences in state, system, federal reporting, and recommendations for improvement, including additional data to be collected.*

I solicited responses from A&M System Institution Research officers. A few observations from these directors (arranged and edited for clarity):

- IPEDS focuses on students' headcount rather than on students' course-taking activities, such as semester credit hour production (SCH).
- SCH data helps predict/understand graduation/persistence rates and other performance measures.
- SCH data helps institutions prepare for course loads/resource allocation.
- Headcount is not particularly useful in charting either student performance or resource allocation.

- Measures of student success are limited in IPEDS to persistence and graduation. The A&M System Analytics project delves into more measures such as engagement and learning outcomes.
- The IPEDS 12-month period doesn't exactly fit the normal academic year defined by a typical public semester university. It also does not use the same period as in our state reports. This requires effort to consolidate enrollment of semesters and sessions.
- Data definitions between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and IPEDS are not the same. They are similar, but not identical, requiring adjustment as they report the same data to the state and to the Federal Government (race/ethnicity is a good example).
- If data definitions are aligned, it would be useful to have the option to enter at the State level and let it feed up to the Federal level as a batch State submission or conversely from the Federal level down.

3. *Are we providing information students and parents find useful? Is there such a thing as "too much" information?*

The information currently collected and provided is useful for students and parents. I will, however, assert the information is not in a useful format nor are the terms easily understood, particularly for first generation students/families.

The data, for example, may only include students who are first time in college. Students may assume based on the data that the "average" student will graduate in X number of years. However, the reported data only applies to first time full time enrollees, which may constitute only a portion of the total student population (in many cases, a small portion of the student population). A student could discern this caveat, but is not likely to do so without significant prior knowledge and understanding of how the data works, and even then only with knowledge of what other data to consider.

A project more useful to parents and students than collecting new data would be to transform existing data into more user friendly formats. I do believe the current IPEDS data reported/collected is useful for parents and students. A more visually appealing presentation of the data would be useful, with a focus on terms understandable to the consumer of the information.

More data is not necessarily more useful. It would be easy to overwhelm the consumer with so much data it is difficult for them to discern that which is important. They can easily be "buried" in the data such that they "give up" on finding that which they need. Our approach in the A&M System Analytics project (which is not primarily targeted to parents/students but rather to Regents/Legislators) is to separate out "Governance" metrics so that the viewer can go directly to those metrics most pertinent to their interests. A similar approach may be useful on other projects, where "tabs" on the website may direct consumers to the information relevant to them, thus cutting through data overload.

4. *What kind of manpower is needed to comply with data needs?*

Largely, the reporting is automated requiring relatively little manpower. The greatest attention must come from negotiating the differences in definitions such that the appropriate data is submitted specific to that report. As noted above, if the definitions were consistent across reports it might be possible for one report to be submitted and all entities pull data from the one database (e.g., some sort of omnibus database for multiple uses). This would save time and effort.

Some data collection organizations (such as VSA, Achieving the Dream & NSSE) have shifted data collection away from survey form entry to data flat file uploads, allowing the institution's data collection processes to focus on validation of requested reporting variables instead of running numerous summary extractions and placing individual numbers on multiple survey forms. This process streamlines the data collection and reporting processes, with institution-level efforts focusing on T-SQL script programming and less on presentation. Organizations relying on the flat file submissions, which is what NCES used for the recent NPSAS (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study), would then upload the flat files for inclusion into a database that could provide for the extraction and presentation of survey variables.

I cannot provide useful feedback regarding the VSA, as VSA reports are submitted by the institutions and not the System. IR officers in the A&M System report VSA is not particularly time consuming due to the automation mentioned above.

The A&M System Analytics project has been time consuming at the System offices. Since approximately April 1, one data analyst has devoted approximately 1/4 of his time to this project and the "lead senior software developer" has devoted approximately 75% of his time to the project. Six additional individuals (all holding professional positions) in the A&M System offices have devoted varying amounts of time to the project (e.g., additional programming, web design, accounting, adminis-

trative). It is important to note that this accounts only for time and effort at the central System offices. Each institution has contributed data. For most institutions, the contact person has been the provost/VPAA and the Institutional Research officer. I estimate that each has devoted a measurable but insignificant amount of time to the project, as the vast majority of data has been pulled from existing reports. This is possible only because Texas has a robust reporting system, allowing us to tap into existing reports to create our analytics site.

It is important to note that the above time allocations have primarily been invest in transforming existing data into more usable forms. If we were creating new data (which we anticipate doing in the coming months), the amount of time would/will increase commensurate with the project.

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 MARCIA L. FUDGE, OHIO

October 5, 2012

Dr. Mark Schneider  
 Vice President  
 American Institutes for Research  
 1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW  
 Washington, D.C. 20007

Dear Dr. Schneider:

Thank you for testifying at the September 20, 2012, hearing on "Assessing College Data: Helping to Provide Valuable Information to Students, Institutions, and Taxpayers." I appreciate your participation.

I have enclosed additional questions for inclusion in the final hearing record. Please provide written responses no later than October 19, 2012. Responses should be sent to Amy Jones or Dan Shorts of the committee staff who can be contacted at (202) 225-6558.

Thank you again for your important contribution to the work of the committee.

Sincerely,

*Virginia Foxx*

Virginia Foxx  
 Chairwoman  
 Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training

Dr. Mark Schneider  
 October 5, 2012  
 Page 2

1. If you could eliminate any data collection or reporting requirements currently collected by the federal government, which ones would you select and why?
2. What specific components of IPEDS do you think are the most useful for colleges and universities to collect and report? What data elements should be reconsidered or reformed?
3. What data points should the federal government request from the states now that many states have statewide data systems? Based on your work with several state data systems, is there anything the federal government could learn from the states in terms of streamlining its data collection in order to eliminate similar or duplicative data collection by institutions?

---

#### **Dr. Schneider's Response to Questions Submitted for the Record**

Following my testimony before you subcommittee on 20 September 2012, you asked me to address three questions:

1. *If I could eliminate any data collection or reporting requirement currently collected by the federal government, which ones would I select and why?*
2. *What specific components of IPEDS do I think are the most useful? Which data elements should be reconsidered or reformed?*
3. *What data points should the federal government request from the states? What lessons could the federal government learn from the states in terms of streamlining its data collections?*

I answer these questions below.

##### *1. Reducing the burden of data collection*

I will answer both of these questions from the perspective of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the agency whose data collections I have the most direct experience. I will start with IPEDS because this is the single largest data collection that postsecondary institutions are subject to, and the one that is most often at the center of complaint about burden.

Like IPEDS' antiquarian focus on first-time, full-time beginning students when it measures student success in college, other parts of IPEDS seem to be the equivalent of an archeological dig revealing layers upon layers of measures created by civiliza-

tions long gone. Many of the data items in IPEDS were created in response to what seemed like a good idea years ago or in response to legislation that is in need of updating, given the rapidly changing nature of American society and America's college.

A critical step in modernizing IPEDS is to make better use of the inventory of what is required by law or regulation that appears in *The History and Origins of Survey Items for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012833.pdf>

Taking this step is essential, since many items that campuses now report are rooted in legislation and NCES or the Department of Education cannot simply stop collecting the data or stop requiring campuses to report them. In the upcoming reauthorization of the HEA, with a firm sense of the basis for IPEDS items, Congress will be in a far better position to clean house.

The second step is to determine empirically which measures in IPEDS are used, by tracking the frequency of which measures are downloaded from the IPEDS data center. This empirical evidence could and should act as guidance for what can be removed from IPEDS. This is especially true if unused items are not rooted in legislation or regulations.

In terms of low hanging fruit, I believe that most of the human resources survey is burdensome (NCES estimates over 25 hours on average to complete) and not often used—but this supposition could be verified empirically. But even if the survey is not used, as made clear in *The History and Origins of Survey Items* report referenced above, most of its items are rooted in legislative requirements and NCES can't simply stop administering the survey without Congressional action. Also, soon information on academic libraries will begin to be collected by IPEDS. The federal interest in collecting this information is at best minimal. I suggest that it not be added.

While some items and perhaps some surveys can be dropped, others can be improved. Most notably, IPEDS finance data are among the most important data IPEDS collects but they are flawed. Some of this is rooted in GASB v. FASB reporting requirements—but also because institutions report similar expenditures in different categories, making comparability difficult. This is a particular problem given the different reporting categories used across the for-profit, not for profit and public sectors. As a quick indicator of the problem, consider that both public and not-for-profit institutions each report their expenses per FTE in seven categories, while for-profit institutions use only three reporting categories. Given the growth of the for-profit sector, the lack of comparability is a serious problem that has been recognized and some progress on this front may soon be coming. But given the centrality of these data, we need to monitor this carefully.

Given existing technology, many institutions impose heavier burdens on themselves than necessary. Far too few data reporters take advantage of technology options that could help reduce burden. A surprising number of data reporters enter the data screen-by-screen rather than in any of several automated routes provided by NCES.

Most institutions of higher education have their data systems handled by a small number of providers. These vendors have been slow to build modules onto their systems that might assist institutions in more easily reporting IPEDS data. However, NCES' current work to link IPEDS aggregate data elements back to Common Education Data Standards (student-level data elements) should allow vendors to use technology more effectively to reduce reporting burden, but only if the vendors find a financial incentive to do so.

Some of these technological fixes will show up shortly, others are here already. Nonetheless, some of the burden of IPEDS results from the fact that institutions must aggregate their data to fill in specific cells rather than report individual level data. I understand the concerns about the federal government holding student level data. However, there are solutions to this problem—including having states de-identify data before sharing with the federal government and new statistical techniques that can create "synthetic data sets" that mimic the original data but are divorced from personally identifiable information.

Approaching any data set that contains sensitive personal information presents both benefits and risks to any government holding these data. And at the current time, the federal government has decided that the risks outweigh the benefits. However, it is important for Congress to periodically consider the changing balance between risks and benefits. The coming reauthorization of HEA presents such an opportunity.

The benefits are clear—more accurate and more comprehensive measures of student success. We need to consider the risks in relationship to these benefits—and we need to see how far we can ameliorate these risks to reach a point where Con-

gress might feel comfortable with something like the Wyden/Rubio/Hunter Know Before You Go proposed legislation.

## 2. Disclosure requirements

So far, I have discussed reporting requirements, I believe that Congress should investigate further how campuses treat disclosure requirements. I suspect that colleges and universities are all too often treating these informational items casually.

Systematic evidence of this is found in a report by Kevin Carey and Andrew Kelly in November 2011 on institutional conformity with six disclosure rules. Entitled *The Truth Behind Higher Education Disclosure Laws* <http://www.thecollegesolution.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/HigherEdDisclosure-RELEASE.pdf>, Carey and Kelly found that compliance was often quite weak—most notably, only around a quarter of the schools disclosed the six-year graduation rate for students who receive a Pell Grant.

Another area in which colleges and universities have been less than forthright concerns Net Price Calculators, which are supposed to be displayed on campus websites.

I have spent hours on many campus websites looking for these calculators—and many of my friends have done the same thing, either for professional reasons or because they have children who are applying for college. There is agreement that while the letter of the law is being followed, the spirit of the law is all too frequently violated. On many web sites it can take as many as 10 “clicks” to find the Net Price Calculator and many of the calculators seem unnecessarily burdensome.

Given how important consumer information is to making our system of higher education work, Congress has rightly determined that some important information needs to be disclosed by institutions. Congress needs to determine how well that information is being conveyed to the public.

The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative issued two reports trying to provide guidance to institutions on how to make these consumer information disclosures easier to find, but as the second report indicates, the colleges still seem to fail to present the info in a way that allows it to be easily compared across institutions.<sup>1</sup> I would recommend that institutions be provided a template that outlines specifically how the information should be made available on websites and be presented consistently across institutions. (NPEC is working on such a voluntary disclosure template now).

Finally, Congress could suggest that ED develop a set of standardized micro-data tags that could be written into the html of institutions websites that would tag each data item and make it easier (1) to find via web searches and (2) to be collected and aggregated by researchers or other through web scraping technology. This is a far less burdensome option than turning all disclosure requirements into reporting requirements, which some suggest should be done—and would open up the data for creative aggregation and use by researchers and private companies.

## 3. State data systems

Many states hold student level data and these data could and should be used to generate more accurate measures of student success and cover far more students than covered by IPEDS. These state data systems can also be more effectively used to populate IPEDS reducing the burden on campuses. We may need to make it clear legislatively or regulation that states can act as delegated agents of institutions to populate IPEDS may

As Congress considers more complete measures of student success both while in school and after graduation, state data systems will play a central role. For example, as we move toward providing students with more information about the likely earnings outcomes of their college degrees, the nation will need to tap into state held unemployment insurance data that will allow us to map earnings data (held in state UI data systems) onto student level data (held by state student unit record systems). However, in work that I am doing with these linked data in several states, we have found that only about half of the graduates in a student unit record system are matched in the state unemployment insurance record system. This match rate is driven by several factors, but one the likely largest contributing factor is interstate mobility: because state UI data do not cover students who graduated within a state but are now working in another state, many students are not found. The Congress should thoroughly review progress on the Workforce Records Interchange System (WRIS II) to see if this could increase coverage. My impression is that

<sup>1</sup>The reports can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010831rev> and <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NPEC2012831>.

WRIS-II is under-used and most people working for state higher education agencies have little or no knowledge of this federally financed resource.

State data systems also vary in coverage. States with student unit records systems cover public institutions (although sometimes, as in California, there may be several systems), some cover not-for-profit IHEs, but I don't know of any that cover for-profit colleges and universities.

The federal government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to build state longitudinal data systems. It behooves the Congress to see that the nation sees a commensurate reward to that investment. One area in which the rewards can be realized is through reducing burden on institutions by having state data systems do more reporting for more students, more institutions, and better measures. The Congress should also investigate the extent to which these hundreds of millions of federal taxpayer dollars has actually been used to improve the flow of consumer information to students and their families to allow them to more wisely choose post-secondary institutions that are better doing their job of educating students who go on to be productive members of our society.

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[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

