



## Leading Colleges & Universities in a New Policy Era: How to Understand the Complex Landscape of Higher Education Accountability

Joshua Travis Brown

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# LEADING Colleges & Universities in a New Policy Era:

## How to Understand the COMPLEX LANDSCAPE of Higher Education ACCOUNTABILITY

By Joshua Travis Brown

**T**his article provides postsecondary leaders with a way to quickly develop a more thorough understanding of higher education accountability. It describes the complexity of the broader higher education accountability environment and then maps the seven accountability silos: assessment, accreditation, institutional research, institutional effectiveness, educational evaluation, educational measurement, and higher education public policy. Finally, it provides two strategies—integration and consolidation—that leaders might consider to more effectively navigate their own divisions and organizations as they comply with education policies and accountability standards.

### AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Colleges and universities are large organizations that must navigate an increasingly complex accountability environment. This accountability environment has developed over time and is comprised of multiple agencies, organizations, and processes within federal and state governments, private organizations, professional associations, and accrediting bodies.

Federal higher education policies on accountability have continually expanded since the 1960s. With the passage of any new policy, an organization or process was established to monitor compliance. Adding to the complexity, these organizations and processes were situated across multiple

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*Joshua Travis Brown (jtb8n@virginia.edu) is an Instructor in Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Policy at the University of Virginia. His research uses organizational theory to further understand how colleges and universities are influenced by and respond to broader social forces.*

federal agencies. For example, the Education Department oversees reporting of Title IX, FAFSA, IPEDS, and Clery Act data. In contrast, financial data are reported to different federal agencies depending on the legal status of a university: Internal Revenue Service (Form 990) for non-profits and the Securities and Exchange Commission (Form 10-K) for for-profits.

Similarly, state governments have established agencies and processes to monitor the use of financial resources they distribute to colleges and universities. The distribution of these funds has become increasingly complex due to performance based funding initiatives whereby colleges are awarded financial resources based on their ability to successfully track and report multiple student outcome variables such as degree completion and post-college salaries (Hillman, 2016).

Private organizations such as the NCAA or *US News and World Report* add a further dimension of complexity that impacts the public perception of a college or university. Given that the broader public uses college rankings to make sense of the overall “value” of a specific school, colleges and universities devote significant resources to ensure optimal performance within the various ranking systems.

Professional associations and accrediting agencies also exist that oversee the quality of learning in higher education. The associations and agencies examine sizable volumes of academic information provided by the schools on systematic cycles of review (e.g. annual, 3-year, 5-year, 10-year, etc.). These efforts create more complexity for schools as they must comply with the standards of multiple professional associations and accreditation agencies to signify the quality of their education.

## AN UNSPOKEN IRONY

The accountability demands to which a university must adhere are complex because they originate from numerous *external* sources such as accrediting bodies, federal and state agencies, rankings publications (i.e. *Forbes*, *US News & World Report*), collegiate associations (i.e. NCAA), and professional groups, among many others. The lack of coordination and integration across accountability stakeholders leaves administrators with the difficult task of making sense of and working with a complex network of external groups and agencies that each require its own specialized system of data collection and reporting.

At the same time, the lack of coordination across monitoring systems in the external environment has produced considerable *internal* complexity for colleges and universities as leaders make decisions as to how to respond to outside agencies. Each agency requires the submission of often distinct data reported on different timelines and cycles from one another, further complicating compliance processes for universities.

The inherent tension between myriad *external* monitoring agencies and the *internal* responses of universities has resulted in an unspoken irony in the field of higher education accountability. That is, the broader system that emphasizes the coherence, consistency, and effectiveness of individual organizations is one that is, itself, characterized by inefficiency and a lack of coordination. Thus, the broader system of higher education accountability expects what it does not embody.

The inefficiency and lack of coordination across accountability organizations and agencies makes it difficult for individual colleges and universities to manage their resources

### In Short

- University executives and postsecondary leaders at all levels must possess a fundamental understanding of assessment and accountability in order to effectively navigate the complex higher education environment.
- Higher education accountability is comprised of seven distinct fields—or silos: assessment, accreditation, institutional research, institutional effectiveness, educational measurement, educational evaluation, and higher education public policy.
- A further understanding of the components of higher education accountability will help university leaders address the unspoken irony within the field. That is, the broader system emphasizes the effectiveness of individual colleges and universities, but it is characterized by inefficiency and a lack of coordination.
- This article provides leaders with two strategies to address the complex policy context—the integration of processes and the consolidation of structures.

more effectively, assess outcomes in meaningful ways, and balance the many competing emphases involving what a university should be accountable to report. One might simply look at a short list of accountability requirements such as Title IX, campus safety, FAFSA, learning outcomes, faculty research, university ranking, or the return on investment for student tuition to see the multiple accountability demands colleges and universities must meet.

### MAPPING THE COMPLEXITY

University leaders have assigned different individuals with the responsibility to comply with the many competing accountability demands. Over time, these persons have cohered into several distinct accountability fields.

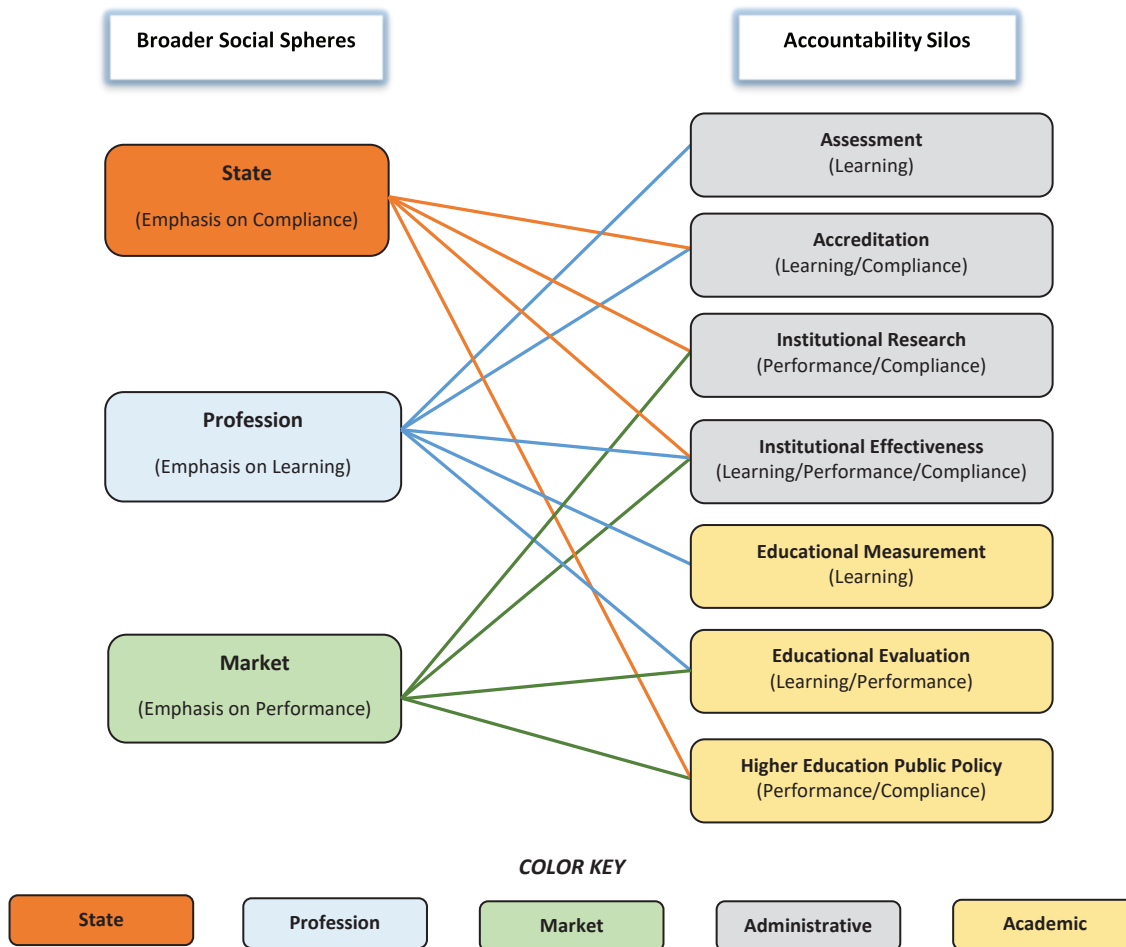
Prior research suggests that higher education accountability is comprised of seven unique fields—or silos—each with its own logic and approach toward accountability. The seven silos within higher education accountability are: assessment, accreditation, institutional research, institutional effectiveness, educational evaluation, educational measurement, and higher education public policy (Brown, 2017). Each silo has a community of scholars and practitioners that form professional associations around these areas, producing and reproducing its specific knowledge domains and practices.

As highlighted in Figure 1, four of the silos are found within administrative units of the university, while three of the silos are found within academic units of the university. The complex nature of the field of higher education accountability exists because broader social spheres encourage the persistence of each of the individual silos.

Figure 1 also illustrates how colleges and universities are organizations embedded within society, with society having different relationships with the various silos. Society is not uniform, rather it is made up of multiple social and cultural spheres including the state, market, professions, religion, and family. These broader social spheres influence the groups, organizations, and individuals in their environment (Thornton, 2004). Not only do the worldviews—or logics—of these spheres differ, but they often conflict with one another.

Scholars of higher education have consistently identified three social spheres that primarily influence universities—the state, the market, and the professions (Burke, 2005; Clark, 1983; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The social sphere of the state focuses on *compliance*, and its primary organizational form is that of a legal bureaucracy. This contrasts with the market with its focus on *performance* and increased efficiencies of production. The sphere of the profession of teaching focuses on *learning* and improving the quality of education.

**FIGURE 1. THE INFLUENCE OF BROADER SOCIAL SPHERES ON THE SEVEN ACCOUNTABILITY SILOS**



The seven different approaches to higher education accountability are driven by distinct combinations of the broader social spheres as administrators attempt to “give an account” of university outcomes to the different stakeholders in society. For example, a discipline specific accrediting agency (the professional sphere) will seek to ensure that a university is maintaining the quality of learning, while the Education Department (the state) will seek to ensure that a university is complying with policies that govern the use of funds allocated through federal financial aid.

### Administrative & Academic Silos

The internal responses toward higher education accountability can be found in two different parts of a university—administrative units and academic units. Specific offices, committees, and personnel exist within administrative areas that fulfill the myriad external accountability pressures facing colleges and universities. The individuals in these administrative areas are highly educated *practitioners* who collect and analyze data, file reports, and establish processes to ensure accountability measures are fulfilled by the organization.

As Figure 1 highlights, the four accountability silos shaded in gray are generally administrative in nature: assessment, accreditation, institutional research, and institutional effectiveness. The professional individuals who staff these four administrative silos inform their practice with the theoretical content from one of three academic silos—educational measurement, educational evaluation, and higher education public policy.

The academic silos shaded in yellow are comprised of individual *scholars* whose functions are two-fold: (a) to sustain and advance a specific body of knowledge, such as psychometrics, evaluation statistics, or econometrics, and (b) to develop educators and practitioners competent in these advanced areas of knowledge who will then apply them in various educational fields. Simply put, the primary role of the scholar is to think and write about higher education accountability, whereas the primary role of the practitioner is to do and enact higher education accountability.

### Assessment

Assessment, the first of the four administrative silos in Figure 1, focuses on student learning in all areas of the academy, the learning occurs within the classroom and beyond. It is understood as the systematic collection, analysis, and translation of evidence on a topic or outcome pertaining to learning (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Seclosky & Denison, 2012). The field of assessment is based in the broader sphere of the *profession* of education which emphasizes learning. The type of data collected often focuses on assignments from individual students as they engage with educators and the curriculum. Over the past 30 years the field has developed from an emphasis on standardized tests toward a focus on authentic assessment generated within individual courses using rubrics (McConnell & Doolittle, 2012).

Persons in assessment often have a strong commitment to the field given its emphasis on professional norms such

as “Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning” (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander; 1996). Many assessment professionals advocate that others within the college or university should adopt a mindset that encourages a “culture of assessment” (Fuller, Skidmore, Bustamante, Holzweiss, 2016). Assessment data are not often used in scholarly research—for example, in the scholarship of teaching and learning—because the information is specific to an assignment, course, and program, and therefore usually not generalizable beyond the specific university.

Given that the silo of assessment is connected mainly to the broader sphere of the profession, its approach toward higher education accountability often conflicts with approaches that emphasize compliance (state) and performance (market). Higher education assessment professionals often emphasize that the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning and not for purposes of accountability (Ewell, 2009). However, given that external systems of accountability seek to discern the extent to which colleges and universities achieve their intended mission, university leaders use the internal assessment data to highlight levels of student learning to regional accrediting bodies and other external agencies.

### Accreditation

Accreditation is the organized system of peer-review that examines postsecondary organizations to ensure they comply with established standards of practice (Eaton, 2012; Gaston, 2014). An added level of complexity distinct to the accreditation silo involves three types of accrediting systems: regional accreditors providing accrediting oversight for entire colleges and universities, specialized accreditors providing accrediting oversight for specific academic programs, and national accreditors providing accrediting oversight for postsecondary organizations that are not eligible for regional accreditation (Suskie, 2015).

In most instances a specific university must navigate the requirements of multiple accreditation agencies. Senior administrators follow the necessary procedures to ensure compliance with the sole regional accreditor (e.g. Western Association of Schools and Colleges) while academic deans work to ensure compliance with the respective specialized accreditors (e.g. AMA, ABET, ABA, etc.).

To achieve accreditation, a university or an academic department must be able to illustrate it is in compliance with the established professional standards set forth by one of the three types of accrediting agencies. Data and information are collected as evidence and assembled into reports whereby the university makes an argument that it is in compliance with a given standard. A team of external reviewers examine the reports and corresponding evidence to determine the extent to which the university meets a series of specified standards. While the processes are governed by the norms of peer-review, they also function as part of the organized federal regulation of academia—a hybrid between the logics of compliance (state) and learning (profession).

## Institutional Research

Institutional research is the third administrative silo highlighted in Figure 1. The role of institutional researchers is to conduct research that supports the strategic planning and decision making of the college or university. Institutional research, often referred to as “IR,” is comprised of four primary functions: (1) external and internal reporting, (2) planning and special projects, (3) data management and technical support, and (4) research and development (Volkwein, Liu & Woodell, 2012).

While the assessment professional primarily collects data from individuals (e.g. surveys, assignments, etc.), the institutional researcher primarily gathers and analyses data from existing information systems within the university. As such, most IR offices fulfill the external data requests for federal agencies (e.g., Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System), state agencies (e.g. State Council of Higher Education for Virginia), third party businesses (e.g. *U.S. News & World Report* rankings), and survey agencies (e.g. National Survey for Student Engagement).

The silo of institutional research is based on a hybrid rationale that blends together the logics of compliance (state) and performance (market). While early efforts in the field deemed these functions as supporting “organizational intelligence” (Terenzini, 1993), more recent advances in information technology and data management have expanded the scope of many institutional research offices to include practices that incorporate key performance indicators, data mining, predictive analytics, business analytics, and data dashboards (McLaughlin, Howard, Jones-White, 2012). As technology and analytics continue to advance, the role and functions of the institutional research office should be reexamined by university leaders as new data types may cross silos in ways that did not previously occur.

**The lack of coordination and integration across accountability stakeholders leaves administrators with the difficult task of making sense of and working with a complex network of external groups and agencies that each require its own specialized system of data collection and reporting.**

## Institutional Effectiveness

Institutional effectiveness, the last of the four administrative silos, is the most recent addition to the higher education accountability literature. In some organizations it refers to an office, in others it is a committee, and in still others it is a process, but most simply refer to it generally as “IE.”

The first use of the term in an accountability context occurred in the mid-1980s when the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) regional accrediting body used the notion to describe a new emphasis within its policy guidelines (Ewell, 2012). A former accrediting official with SACSCOC noted that “assessment” had become a particularly contentious term and that something “broader and more acceptable” was needed to articulate an approach toward accreditation standards (Rogers, 1997).

The silo of institutional effectiveness is the only field that blends all three logics from the three broader social spheres—learning (profession), compliance (state), and performance (market). It is distinct from assessment in that assessment primarily focuses on student learning outcomes and development, whereas institutional effectiveness adopts a much broader approach by blending three logics to emphasize all aspects of the university. More specifically, it addresses the systematic examination of planning and decision making processes across multiple departments of the university at multiple levels to determine the effectiveness of an organization in relation to its stated goals.

It is commonplace for some larger universities to place the assessment and/or institutional research offices under a single division of Institutional Effectiveness. This underscores the importance of a university leader understanding how a higher education accountability term (e.g. assessment, institutional effectiveness, etc.) is used within the specific cultural context of a given postsecondary organization.

## Educational Measurement

Educational measurement, the first of the three academic silos shown in Figure 1, focuses on employing standardized or normed testing instruments to collect student-level data for assessing learning in quantifiable ways (Secolsky & Denison, 2012). The testing instruments are developed using principles from psychometrics that include: item response theory, generalizability theory, classical test theory, scaling, norming, validity, reliability, and statistical modeling, among others. Although the field of educational measurement has existed since the early 1900s with the rise of the educational testing movement, the use of test instruments has gradually changed over time toward one that presently focuses on accountability (Shavelson, 2010).

The field of educational measurement draws its logic from the broader sphere of the *profession* of education that emphasizes learning. While the silo of education measurement and the silo of assessment both draw upon the same logic, they do so with different emphases. Many of the standardized testing instruments (e.g. CLA, SAT, ACT, GRE, etc.) used in education measurement function as proxy measures

for student learning. The instruments are broad measures that many university faculty do not deem as valid measures of learning because they are unable to reflect the unique curriculum or educational experience of a specific college or university (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie; 2014).

In contrast, the rubrics and measures used in assessment are typically measures of learning developed within a given university to examine specific assignments, learning outcomes, and programs. Recent advancements through the AAC&U VALUE Initiative—specifically, the Multi-State Collaborative to Advance Quality Student Learning (MSC)—have sought to bring these two approaches together by providing faculty with rubrics that account for unique content while simultaneously incorporating test properties important to educational measurement, such as controlling for variation across assignments, faculty members, and scorers (AAC&U, 2017). Despite the different emphases in measurement, both assessment and educational measurement possess a foundational logic that focuses on learning, which is not the case for the hybrid logics in educational evaluation and higher education public policy.

### Educational Evaluation

Educational evaluation, the second of the three academic silos in Figure 1, focuses on the alignment of programming or products within an educational context. This approach addresses the extent to which “what was proposed” and “what was delivered” are in alignment. For example, were the program resources used as intended? Moreover, educational evaluation also includes a value component that seeks to “determine the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process” (Scriven, 1991).

Courses in educational evaluation are offered as part of the core curriculum in schools of education, and they focus on evaluation in both the K–12 and higher education contexts. There are three primary approaches used in educational evaluation: formative, summative, and developmental (Grayson, 2012). Formative evaluation emphasizes improvement through constructive feedback, summative evaluation emphasizes measurement to determine performance or impact, and developmental evaluation emphasizes identifying the effects of innovation and testing hypotheses.

The silo of educational evaluation possesses a hybrid logic that blends together the logics of learning (profession) and performance (market). Educational evaluation is fundamentally different from assessment because it uses information to make an informed judgment about performance and efficiency (Suskie, 2004). The emphasis on efficiency gives specific attention toward examining return on investment—or the costs and resources a program expends in relationship to its stated purpose or value (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2005). Consequently, educational evaluation has seen as an explosive influence in higher education within the past decade; private and federal grant funding agencies (e.g. NIH) now frequently require an evaluation component as part of the financial award.

### Higher Education Public Policy

Higher education public policy, the last of the three academic silos in Figure 1, examines the relationship between the educational outcomes and financial resources that are influenced by public policies pertaining to higher education. This approach is strongly supported by frameworks from economics and public policy, whereas educational measurement is supported by psychometric frameworks.

As a result, the field of higher education public policy focuses on types of data that differ from the other accountability silos. Here, researchers consider standardized data that all postsecondary organizations collect such as alumni earnings data, student financial aid, graduation rates, endowments, resource allocation, and resource acquisition, among others. A focus on this type of data enable researchers to draw inferences across multiple colleges, universities, and systems as they relate to a specific policy.

There are distinctions between the silos of higher education public policy and institutional research. It is important to note that while persons within institutional research have the same ability as policy analysts to comparatively analyze data across multiple universities, their analysis is typically not related to a specific policy. Thus, the primary analytical focus of the institutional researcher is a university or group of universities. In contrast, the primary analytical focus of the researcher in higher education public policy is the examination of data that relates to a specific policy.

With its focus on analyzing specific policies, the field of higher education public policy has advanced our understanding of accountability at much broader levels. Scholars have taken up work on performance based funding (Hillman, Tandberg, & Gross, 2014), federal financial aid (Goldrick-Rab, 2016), diffusion of specific policies over states and regions (Doyle, McLendon, & Hearn, 2010), and expanding access to underrepresented student populations (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009).

However, the strong influence of economic frameworks often puts the field of higher education public policy at odds with the field of assessment. Differences between the two silos as to what counts as valid educational outcome data are evident in the literature (Schneider, 2016). Assessment professionals have consistently developed multiple measures to capture rich data on student learning outcomes. This contrasts with approaches in the public policy silo where grade point average and college completion metrics are used as proxies for learning, or a different outcome altogether is emphasized such as post college earnings and return on investment.

Further reading and resources on the seven approaches to higher education accountability described above are provided in Figure 2.

In the face of these multiple accountability approaches postsecondary leaders have an opportunity to develop greater knowledge of the complex landscape in order to better manage their area of influence over accountability issues. Specifically, leaders in colleges, universities, accrediting agencies, and policy organizations can strategically improve

**FIGURE 2. PUBLICATIONS OF IDEAL TYPES WITHIN SPECIFIC ACCOUNTABILITY SILOS**

Accountability Silos	Further Reading
Assessment	Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education (Astin & Antonio, 2012) Demonstrating student success: A practical guide to outcomes-based assessment of learning and development in student affairs (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2010)
Accreditation	Higher education accreditation: How it's changing, why it must (Gaston, 2014) Five dimensions of quality: A common sense guide to accreditation and accountability (Suskie, 2015)
Institutional Research	The handbook of institutional research (Howard, McLaughlin, & Knight, 2012) New Directions for Institutional Research series (published by Association for Institutional Research)
Institutional Effectiveness	Planning and assessment in higher education: Demonstrating institutional effectiveness (Middaugh, 2009). Assessment reconsidered: Institutional effectiveness for student success (Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008)
Educational Measurement	Handbook of Tests and Measurement in Education and the Social Sciences (Lester, Inman, & Bishop, 2014) Measuring college learning responsibly: Accountability in a new era (Shavelson, 2010)
Educational Evaluation	Evaluation: A systematic approach (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004) Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010)
Higher Education Public Policy	The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education: Origins, Discontinuations, and Transformations (Dougherty & Natow, 2015) The States and Public Higher Education Policy: Affordability, Access, and Accountability (Heller, 2011)

the present processes and structures that exist within and across the seven higher education accountability silos.

### CONFRONTING THE COMPLEXITY

Integration and consolidation are two strategies to address the inefficiency and lack of coordination in higher education that exists within and across organizations at multiple levels.

Moreover, these two strategies enable university leaders to sensibly work toward improving the existing processes and structures rather than attempt a systemic overhaul of the accountability sector writ large.

### Integration

In some instances university leaders may not be able to change redundant accountability *structures* that are governed by broader agencies. In these instances, leaders can strategically focus on the *processes*, or the organizational response that aims to maximize efficient actions while still being embedded in a broader system lacking coordination across myriad monitoring agencies. A strategy of integration aims to address processes embedded within redundant structures,

whereas a strategy of consolidation aims to eliminate specific structures.

University leaders can begin to address inefficiencies in accountability processes within their own areas by thinking about integration. An integration mindset would seek to have a single activity strategically designed to be usable for more than one purpose. Moreover, an integration mindset encourages administrators and members of individual silos to consider how they relate to others.

Integration questions should be asked whenever a university administrator must address any accountability initiative. For example, can I use the same data for two or more purposes? Can I strategically design a survey or assessment to highlight compliance with multiple standards or policies? Can I use wording from the disciplinary accreditation report (e.g. ABA, NCAA, CAS etc.) in the regional accreditation report (e.g. SACSCOC, WASC, etc.)? Or, to what extent is our Office of Institutional Effectiveness actually improving internal processes of effectiveness beyond just highlighting that the university complies with accrediting policies on institutional effectiveness?



The same process applies to members of individual silos. For example, the assessment literature frequently suggests that a solution to improved learning is to develop a “culture of assessment” across the organization. However, if professionals in the other six silos employed the same solution, that a “culture of institutional research,” “culture of institutional effectiveness,” or “culture of accreditation” should be adopted by everyone within the university, it would further fragment rather than integrate the organization. Solutions should transcend individual silos, not further entrench them.

If professionals are to develop a specific perspective on their individual work it should be one that cuts across multiple silos (e.g. “culture of evidence”). A paradigm of integration looks beyond the mono-cultural view of a single accountability silo (e.g. “culture of assessment”). The broader system is complex in ways that will require higher education professionals to strategically integrate processes at local levels if individual organizations are to be more effective.

### Consolidation

While integration focuses attention on the *processes* within redundant structures, consolidation focuses attention on the multiple *structures* and their elimination. The complexity of higher education accountability in seven distinct silos invites the question—are there simply too many approaches?

Consolidation is an option university leaders should consider to reduce redundant structures rather than waiting for changes to structures in the broader accountability system. For example, some university leaders have attempted to consolidate accountability structures by establishing Offices of Institutional Effectiveness comprised of both assessment and institutional research functions. In doing so, university leaders face the challenge of merging two distinct accountability cultures (assessment and IR) under a third identity (institutional effectiveness). Consolidation at the local level will require university leaders who are adept at cultural navigation and possess a broader understanding of the complex structures that exist among accountability silos.

Consolidation efforts should also be considered by stakeholders at the state, regional, federal, and association levels that provide oversight of individual organizations and academic programs. Such efforts would help overcome the lack of coordination in higher education accountability that require additional human and financial resources. Given that a university is required to respond to many external accountability agencies, they must successfully navigate multiple deadlines, data types, reporting cycles, and regulations that are updated annually. Additionally, universities must balance competing definitions of important aspects of higher education such as quality and outcomes. How can individual organizations strive to achieve efficiency and effectiveness while embedded in a broader universe of monitoring agencies that lack efficiency and coordination with one another?

To address the unspoken irony of higher education accountability, that which is expected at lower levels ought to be modeled at broader levels. As university leaders work to

consolidate accountability structures at the organizational level, those providing leadership over broader systems and associations can collectively work toward consolidation to eliminate redundant structures of accountability. It is important to note that, given its focus on *structures*, consolidation can only occur within contexts (e.g. departments, divisions, organizations, or broader monitoring systems) where one has the authority to change such structures; otherwise, the leader can only focus on *processes* of integration within the persistent redundant structures.

### CONCLUSION

In providing a mapping and description of the complex context of higher education accountability, this article offered postsecondary leaders a way to quickly develop a more thorough understanding of higher education accountability in leading their own divisions and organizations more effectively. It identified the seven accountability silos, mapped the complexity of their broader context, and highlighted two strategies—integration and consolidation—that leaders might consider to more effectively navigate their own university divisions as they comply with accountability standards.

A more integrated and consolidated system would result in changes across multiple levels of higher education accountability. At the broadest level, multiple monitoring


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agencies would align or coordinate in such a way as to model the efficiency and effectiveness they expect of individual colleges and universities. They would embody what they advocate.

At the organizational level, the internal structures and processes of universities would be designed in ways that began to cut across the seven silos that have developed over time. Moreover, college and university leaders would help establish expectations of effectiveness for the many external monitoring agencies and regularly communicate those expectations “upward” (e.g. to regional accrediting bodies) and “outward” (e.g. to the broader public) on behalf of the organization.

With a focus on integration and consolidation, changes in higher education accountability would also occur at the individual or ground level. Scholars and researchers would give consideration toward different perspectives. For example, public policy researchers might work with assessment professionals to develop new ways of measuring student learning that go beyond grade point average and college completion. Moreover, assessment professionals might take

the lead in advancing beyond a mono-cultural perspective (e.g. “culture of assessment”) to develop new frameworks of culture that also consider perspectives in other silos (e.g. “culture of evidence”).

By emphasizing integration and consolidation from broadest level to the ground level, the system of higher education accountability would demonstrate increased effectiveness as a whole. Moreover, such efforts might possibility even reduce the number of silos that have developed over time. The accountability phenomenon in higher education is not likely to diminish in the near future. However, actions ought to be taken to ensure it does not remain uncoordinated at multiple levels within and across organizations. 

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