

**APPENDIX E – MEETING TRANSCRIPT OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE  
BENEFICIARIES OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION PANEL**

MS. KELLER: Thank you. I am Christine Keller. I am the Director of Research and Policy Analysis at the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities, and I am also the executive director of the Voluntary System of Accountability, which we've heard a little bit about already this morning.

The VSA is a joint project between APLU and AASCU, and I want to emphasize that between our two associations, we represent nearly all of the public four-year universities. So it is in my role as the VSA executive director that I'm going to make my remarks.

The VSA is an initiative by public four-year institutions to provide clear, accessible and comparable information on the undergraduate student experience through a common web report, the College Portrait. The VSA College Portrait has two primary purposes: to serve as a college search tool for prospective students, and also to provide a mechanism for public institutions to demonstrate accountability

and transparency, particularly in the areas of access, cost of attendance, student progress and success and student learning outcomes, and I'm going to touch on a little bit more how we do that later in my remarks.

We currently have 326 institutions participating in the VSA that represent 60 percent of the public colleges and universities, and we enroll, those institutions enroll two-thirds of the undergraduate students attending public institutions, which is about four million students.

The VSA was created in 2006 and 2007 with some help from the Lumina Foundation. It was a collective response by public universities to calls by some for the federal government and/or accrediting bodies to mandate specific data and specific measurements that must be used to demonstrate institutional affordability, quality and accountability.

Our associations and member institutions believe strongly that such decisions should be left in the hands of academic leadership, and to ensure

the continued diversity, independence and flexibility of U.S. public education. As we've already heard this morning, the context in which institutions operate in their individual missions are very important.

The VSA includes a variety of standard description measures to assist students and families. They were designed to be meaningful to consumers, but we also include four more innovative measures that I'd like to describe briefly.

The first is a net price calculator that is used to assist students and families in estimating their out-of-pocket costs to attend a particular institution, and I would like to point out this was part of the College Portrait before it was mandated by ATOA.

The second measure that is more innovative is something that John Pryor talked about earlier in his remarks, the importance of student engagement on campus. Within the College Portrait, we provide a snapshot of opportunities for student engagement, so that students can get some idea of campus life on a

particular, at a particular institution, and this also serves as an indirect measure of student learning and student development.

The third is the student success and progress rate. We use National Student Clearinghouse data to show student enrollment and completion data across all the institutions that a student will attend. Again, as was pointed out earlier, more than 60 percent of students attend more than one institution before they graduate.

It was developed as an alternative to the IPED's graduation rate, and on the College Portrait we report the success and progress rate for both first-time full time students and as well as full-time transfer students.

The fourth and the area of the College Portrait VSA that we've probably gotten the most attention is our reporting of student learning outcomes. On the College Portrait, we measure and report student learning gains between entering students and exiting students, using a common methodology and one of three standard measures, the

CAAP, the CLA and the ETS proficiency profile.

This was designed as a four-year pilot project, because many of our institutions express concern that they hadn't used this type of measurement before. They wanted time to try this out and see how it could be useful on their campuses.

We are beginning the fourth year of that pilot project. At most institutions, the deadline to report this information is 2012, and I am pleased to note that 35 percent of our institutions have already posted learning outcomes gains over the past two years before the deadline.

As a coordinated response to legitimate needs for better and more transparent information on the undergraduate student experience, the VSA is flexible enough to adapt to the dynamic circumstances and environments in which higher education operates, as well as respond to the variety and changing needs of stakeholders, consumers, legislators, states, state boards and systems, all needing different types of information.

From our perspective, one of the positive

aspects of the current accreditation structure is the ability for institutions to set their own goals for institutional improvement and student learning, as well as choose the appropriate accountability metrics and reporting based on the mission and environment in which they operate.

Such a stance allows initiatives such as the VSA to flourish and to respond to the needs of higher education consumers, as well as the needs of institutions themselves. The VSA and its sponsoring associations support efforts by accreditors and regulators to include a range of different measures of student success outcomes, including a greater emphasis on student learning and development, based again on an institution's mission and student population, rather than a more singular focus on inputs or resources.

We also advocate more widespread recognition by regional accrediting associates of legitimate accountability efforts like the VSA, as noteworthy and significant contributors to learning outcomes assessment that can drive institutional

improvement.

Such recognition would acknowledge the tremendous effort that our institutions and our associations have put forth in the VSA's development and maintenance. This widespread recognition would also work towards establishing some of those common definitions and standards that we've talked about earlier, while helping to minimize the burden and cost to institutions from different stakeholders running different types of institutional data. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: I thank you very much.  
Lindsay McCluskey.

MS. McCLUSKEY: Hi and good afternoon. My name is Lindsay McCluskey and I am a recent college graduate myself and also currently serve as the president of the United States Student Association. USSA is the nation's oldest, largest and most inclusive national student-led organization. We represent over four million students on over 400 campuses across the country, and all of our current members are public campuses.

We're a membership organization of both student government associations as well as statewide student associations, which are permanent state-based coalitions of student governments, typically of public systems of higher education.

So I would like to first of all thank the Department for inviting me to speak on this panel. We're always thrilled to be able to represent the student perspective, and feel that it's very important to have that representation in conversations like these.

I myself am not an expert on accreditation. I'm an expert on students, so that is the perspective that I'm going to provide, and I apologize if there's not more technical questions that I can answer, but I hope I can be of assistance in the role of representing students.

At a time when, you know, many higher education institutions, particularly those in which my membership attends, are in fiscal crisis, we believe it's critical to constantly be assessing both the quality of our institutions as well as the access

and affordability of -- particularly of public higher education.

We believe that, you know, this current crisis at many of our institutions poses of course many challenges, but also opportunities for change, and particularly at a time when our economy and our country seeks new innovation and new technology.

The only way that our country's going to be the world leader in college graduates and innovate our economy is by investing in a system of higher ed that's high quality, that is affordable, and that is accessible to all those who seek to learn.

In considering the system of recognition, accreditation and institutional aid eligibility, and the ways that these systems impact students, I'd like to focus my comments in a couple of areas that are particularly of importance to my student membership today.

These areas are the impact on quality that cuts in higher ed budgets, particularly at the state level have had, and the way that that impact on quality is represented through the accreditation

process, as well as student concerns about trends in institutional aid.

In terms of the quality aspect, I myself, like I said, am a recent college graduate, so I'm not far from the experience of being a student on a college campus and experiencing the impact of cuts and the impact on the quality of my learning.

I was also in a unique position my senior year at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. I was the student representative on our board of trustees or statewide board of trustees, and had to make the difficult, or had to be a part of a difficult decision-making process to raise costs for students by \$1,500 the year that I represented the students at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

During that same year, we saw the quality of our education suffer as we were paying more. So students were sort of in this predicament where we felt like we were paying more, and we were getting significantly less quality in our education.

Quality is impacted, of course, by less class availability, less individual attention, pay

freezes, hiring freezes, positions that students needed going unfilled. Not only instruction positions but also positions in critical student support services.

I think a critical aspect to analyze, amidst cuts and in looking at quality is where resources are going, and this was discussed earlier by Gary Rhoades in his comments. But being a student at a large four-year public university, you know, we were paying more, like I said. It felt as though our academic experience and our support by the institution were suffering because of these cuts.

However, like Gary referred to before, we saw these kinds of the Super Bowl of Higher Education being built all around us. New fitness centers going up on campus, you know; investments in new signage for our buildings that cost upwards of \$1 million, while again we were being asked to pay \$1,500 more out of pocket unexpected for our own education.

So I think it's critical in the process of reviewing quality and accreditation, to look at where resources are going, how quality is being impacted by

cuts, and then how available resources are being used by institutions to actually support learning and personnel as opposed to the beautification of our campuses, because frankly students don't care if the flowers or the signs are quite as attractive. We care about being able to get the classes that we need to be able to graduate on time.

Many students in my membership this year are not graduating on time simply because the classes that they wanted to take were not available for them. So this is a serious concern to my membership, to really look at the impacts on quality, and like I said again, tracing where the resources are going.

You know, as 43 states plan on cutting their higher ed budgets this spring, we really need to analyze the impact that these cuts will have, like I said, on quality. I agree with Gary Rhoades on placing meaningful measurements on quality that are accessible to consumers, that are accessible to students and families.

I also believe that we need to take a very serious look on what kind of federal incentives there

are for states to fund their higher ed systems, and to not pose as serious cuts, because my student membership, that's their first and foremost concern this year is what is the state cut going to be, and how much is my tuition going to go up for next year.

I realize I'm probably coming close to my time, but I did want to touch on one more issue that is of concern as it relates to institutional aid. Am I getting close to the time?

MS. LEWIS: Yes.

MS. McCLUSKEY: Okay. I will make sure to submit my written comments as well, so I can touch on institutional aid, because again, it's another issue that's of high importance to students right now. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: I thank you very much. You may, during the questions and answers, get to expand upon that. Our next speaker, Susan Traiman.

MS. TRAIMAN: Good afternoon. I'm Susan Traiman, Director of Public Policy at Business Roundtable, which is an association in Washington, D.C. of chief executive officers of leading U.S.

companies, with more than 13 million employees. I'm delighted to be here today representing America's major employers.

Like Lindsay, I'm not an expert on accreditation, but I hope to bring you that perspective of employers. America's businesses and their employees are the direct beneficiaries of the U.S. postsecondary education system. For U.S. companies, I hear this all the time from CEOs, talent is often the key determinant of success.

From the CEO to the line employee, skills and knowledge of the workforce are the most valuable asset of any U.S. business, and this is becoming more true over time as the economy grows more sophisticated and knowledge-based.

For workers, you know the data. Knowledge and skills are often the key determinant in an individual's success, and the recent great recession cast this into sharp relief. The December 2010 unemployment numbers among Americans with only a high school education, was five percent higher than the unemployment rate for college graduates.

So college graduates, many of us know or have children who are having trouble finding jobs even with degrees, but 4.8 percent unemployment among college graduates is much lower than the national average. What's remarkable today is how quickly the U.S. economy is changing.

The explosive growth of the knowledge economy and the premium paid to knowledge and skills is growing. So we're seeing the economic value of postsecondary education increasing at an accelerated pace. Yet even during the depth of the recession, there were unfilled job openings and skill shortages at many major U.S. companies.

Last year, Business Roundtable released recommendations from something called the Springboard Project, which was an independent commission we convened. I left you the summary at your places, and that group, which included college presidents, community college presidents, as well as academics from institutions around the country and others outside of education, was looking at what do Americans need to have in terms of knowledge and

skills, to thrive after the economy rebounds.

One of the things they found is that the gap between worker skills and the needs of employers is widening, exactly the opposite of what we should be seeing. Now in addition, millions of Americans are pursuing certifications, apprenticeships and postsecondary training credentials, in addition to or as an alternative to a traditional college degree.

Workers who complete such programs can earn twice as much as those who complete only high school. But the members of the Springboard Project were very concerned that for these credentials to be worth students' investment, the certificate or credential needs to reflect national industry standards, so that employers can determine its value when making decisions about hiring and promotions.

Likewise for four-year institutions to grant academic credit for these credentials, your institutions need to be able to assess the quality of the program.

One of the things that I have found in talking to not just CEOs but the people who hire at

the companies, is that I have never once heard them mention accreditation of an institution as something that factors into who they hire.

There are a whole variety of ways that people get hired or come to the attention of an employer, but many employers rely on their prior experience with previous graduates of that individual institution. It's clear that accreditation may not play any role in the employers' view of individual institutions and the quality of their graduates.

So we have a situation where American institutions of higher education or postsecondary education, whatever's the politically correct term these days, enjoy a worldwide reputation for excellence. But U.S. employers remain concerned about escalating costs and a nagging perception of inflexibility in higher education.

So because these institutions play such a central role in our society and economy, we need to ask ourselves are U.S. two-year and four-year institutions as good as they can be? How well are they doing with the fastest-growing groups in our

population, and are they keeping pace with social and economic change, and with growing competition around the world?

The Springboard group felt very strongly that there was a need to change the incentives in federal and state policy, that currently reward access and participation, which we don't want to walk away from. But we need to increasingly look at completion, because the piece of paper matters, and when job descriptions are posted, employers are very careful about stating what level of education is required for that particular job, and that piece of paper, that credential or degree has to be respected.

There are examples in the full Springboard report about how incentives are being used, particularly at the state level to change funding formulas to reward not just somebody filled the seat, but they actually completed. There's a very interesting pilot that's been done by MDRC that uses student financial aid as an incentive for Pell grant recipients to complete course work.

So there's a way to totally rethink these incentives. CEOs are really shocked when we tell them only 19 percent of American high schoolers graduate from high school and go on to enter and graduate from college on time by the very generous way that you all define on time.

So I'm going to wrap up and hopefully in questions I can raise some of the other things that I've heard from employers, and if there's time, a few things from my perspective as a parent.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Thank you very much. Questions from members of the Committee? Yes Bill.

COMMITTEE MEMBER PEPICELLO: You've got a variety of perspectives here, institutions, students and employers, but I noticed a theme in terms that kept coming up when you said, you used the term "meaningful measurements of quality." We use the terms talents and skills, and I'd like to get a little bit of perspective on what those things mean, because completion or graduation is clearly not an end in itself, if in fact we're being judged on quality based on our outcome, which is the student.

So I'm just wondering if you're going to talk about quality means, or what quality means from each of your perspectives, what would that be?

MS. KELLER: I think we would go back to two different aspects. I think we would talk, go back to the student learning outcomes theme that keeps coming up.

I think we would talk about both content knowledge and then the broader skills that we're trying to assess within the VSA, the critical thinking, analytic reasoning, written communications, which are not only taught in the classroom but learned throughout the University experience, and feedback from employers is one of the reasons that we chose those particular areas to focus on within the College Portrait and the VSA.

I think that if we're talking about meaningful measures, I think those are two keys for those.

MS. McCLUSKEY: In terms of meaningful measures for students, in terms of quality and looking at the experience that students have while on

campus, I think there are a few things. Like I mentioned in my comments, class availability is incredibly important for quality and timely graduation. Class size obviously is a pretty consistent measurement but I think is also important.

One of the things that's oftentimes first on the chopping block when institutions are squeezed are support services, particularly for under-represented students or first generation students. Identity-specific support services for students, I think, is an incredibly important part of quality and experience for a lot of people, helps to foster community for students and I think is another important area to look at.

I would also say academic and financial advising on campus is a really important part in terms of quality. I know that a lot of students that I interact with have problems where they have very little advising, especially students who are at very large institutions and feel a little bit lost, don't have sound or consistent advising, either in the area of academics or finances.

Oftentimes students who -- I can't tell you how many students I know who thought that they were going to graduate after four years and after they walked at graduation got a letter saying oh you didn't actually graduate. So just, you know, people falling through the cracks is a really big problem, and I think that that's an area that needs to seriously be addressed as well.

MS. TRAIMAN: Because there are multiple audiences for education, I think there have to be multiple measures of quality. From the employers' perspective, they are looking for graduates who have the capacity to continue learning, because no degree, no course, no training is going to be sufficient.

So they're looking for the analytic skills, the problem-solving skills, and depending on the field, the content knowledge may be absolutely critical.

So I think there's a variety of ways of looking at quality, but outcomes are very important. So knowing the completion rates and disaggregating them by race and ethnicity, knowing the kinds of

employment or pursuit of graduate school, what percentage of the students go on.

Having some transparency, especially on the employment side, because what I keep hearing anecdotally is that institutions report high rates of placement, for example, of their law school graduates, but they're in minimum wage jobs. So as long as they're employed, it counts that this program resulted in getting the graduate employed.

There has to be some transparency about what kinds of jobs are the graduates getting. So some of this is longitudinal data.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Art.

COMMITTEE MEMBER KEISER: Ms. Keller, I find it interesting that your organization represents 60 percent of the students in public education I think you said today, and you're doing tremendous work on establishing accountability, standards and procedures.

How does that jibe with Professor Arum's statistics, which were mind-boggling to me, that only 30 percent improved their critical thinking skills,

and how can -- what is the loop that's being closed by these universities, that would ensure that a student going to a state university would have, you would think, developed the critical thinking skills by the time they graduate?

MS. KELLER: If I could answer that question sufficiently, I would be a consultant making lots of money. But let me give you our perspective and some of the work that we're really trying to do, because very seriously Dr. Arum was at one of the workshops that we held this summer, so I knew what was coming out before it came out.

I go back to what I said about the four year pilot project. I think that this type of measurement is very new, particularly to large public universities, and we're still very much learning how to take those measurements and use them for institutional improvement.

John Pryor touched on this earlier, and I'm going to put a more positive spin on it than what he said. You know, the CLA provides a very aggregate institutional benchmark of whether your institution

is learning, or your students in your institution are learning what would be expected of a student with similar, of an institution with students of similar abilities.

But the work that needs to be done to unpack that number and combine it with the more local measures, so that you can really use that data for institutional improvement, that's the really difficult part. That's what we're doing with the VSA in trying to help institutions actually do that, because we have lots of data sources out there, but I think we're still learning how to use the data, combine it together in a meaningful way to allow institutions to improve.

That's what we were doing at one of our summer workshops this summer, is gathering institutions together, having researchers and experts come together to try to start those conversations.

COMMITTEE MEMBER KEISER: Would that beg the question that though there is a disconnect, my institution does a significant amount of institutional research. It does a significant amount

of benchmarking ourselves using the, in a different measurement, to see that our students are comparable to other institutions.

But if Mr. Arum's study is correct, there's a disconnect, and all the work that we've done over the last few years isn't working. The benchmarking, the measurements that we're using, which says, you know, my students are learning at the baccalaureate level the same as the University of Massachusetts or whatever, but they're not really learning.

Did we lower the measures to a point where the students aren't getting what they should be getting?

MS. KELLER: Well, I think that I'm going to go back to something that Richard said in his presentation, and I think that's part of what we discovered as well, is that you know, when you say 35 percent aren't learning, there is also the other 65 percent that are.

So there are pockets within our institutions. He also said there's a lot of

variation within institutions. So I think there are pockets of excellence out there within institutions, where students are learning.

When you go in and you unpack some of the data that he presented, there are differences between groups, and there are differences between groups that should cause all of us a great deal of concern.

I think that what we need to do is to continue to share those ideas of what sorts of excellence is going on, because obviously we've done some good jobs with some students. But now we need to focus on those students where we haven't done such a good job, and get those up to par with the students who are.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Arthur?

COMMITTEE MEMBER ROTHKOPF: Yes.

Christine, let me commend you and your organization for taking on this project. I think it's a real service, and I know you're still in pilot phases and trying to work out all the bugs in it, as evidenced by the comments that Art Keiser made.

I guess my question is your study involves

or your work involves about 350 institutions who are members of your organization, but we have, you know, several thousand other institutions who have not in the same way undertaken such a robust program.

What's your sense of the ability of some of the other sectors to do the kinds of things that you're doing, whether they be community colleges, independent colleges, the for-profit sector, technical institutions and so on? Is what you're doing transferable to others and are they -- do you have any sense that they're interested in doing the kinds of things that you're doing?

MS. KELLER: My perspective is that there are institutions who are interested in this sort of activity across the different sectors. I say that because we have had institutions, private institutions; we've had community colleges that want to join the VSA.

You know, they -- in fact, a lot of community colleges have wanted to join the VSA, and in fact now the AACCC is developing the voluntary framework of accountability in response, I believe,

to some of those institutions wanting to actually come up with common measurements that are appropriate to the two-year sector.

Because what we told those institutions that asked us is that well, some of the measures are appropriate within the VSA, but not all of them are. So I think it's very important that each of the different sectors come up with different measures within their sector.

The private independent schools, they do have UCAN. It does not have the learning outcomes in the student engagement piece within it. I think that's -- I should just speak for public institutions. I believe we have a concern about transparency and stewardship to the public that runs through all of our missions.

So I think it's easier for us to do that than perhaps a private or independent school. Then there's also the transparency by design work. I know that is primarily aimed at adult students, online students. But they're doing some very interesting work with assessing learning outcomes at the program

level, and I think all of us would do well to pay attention to the work they're doing, and seeing what we can do for them.

COMMITTEE MEMBER ROTHKOPF: Thank you.

That's very helpful.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Jamiene.

COMMITTEE MEMBER STUDLEY: Yes. I'd like to ask, give Ms. McCluskey an opportunity to tell us about the institutional aid points that you wanted to make earlier.

MS. McCLUSKEY: Thank you. I appreciate that. I will keep it very brief, but I do appreciate the opportunity. So in terms of institutional aid, what I really did want to just touch on is a grave concern that students have, that is again a product of the lack of funds coming into our institutions, our public institutions.

What we see is under, you know, under these intense financial constraints, and I'm sure many of you know this, many higher ed institutions have begun to move to a model of a high cost and high aid for students, and you know, the theory being that

by raising cost significantly for all students, those who can afford to pay more will, and those who cannot afford to will receive larger financial aid packages from the institution that would be afforded by the increasing cost.

We have serious concerns about it for a number of reasons, one being just the squeeze on middle class students. You know, this high cost high aid model of course benefits low income students, and we believe, we truly believe in high aid for low income students. However, those students who fall just above the, you know, eligibility for the institutional aid are tremendously hit hard by these significant hikes in institutional costs.

There's also other concerns, other factors of concern, such as enrollment of low income students and students of color declining, because of the sticker shock of a high rise in costs. But also enrollment of high performing students declining, because of the competition with private institutions, and several other things.

I think overall a real concern that this

sort of move, this move to this sort of framework really creates an institution that's dependent upon recruiting and accepting and admitting a higher income student, and really creates a dependence upon that, for which my membership believes and we feel that, you know, our system of public education should not be recruiting and depending upon high income, oftentimes out of state students, to subsidize the education of lower income students.

And you know, as difficult as it is, we believe that the goal should be lowering costs for all students at a public institution, and are really seeking to do advocacy on the state and national level around that, around coming up with other strategies for lowering costs and also innovating, you know, state and national need-based financial aid programs.

So I did want to make that comment and wanted to just stress the concern about that shift. It does relate to quality as well, and it just relates to a sort of a shift in the system upon which quality is dependent upon again, a wealthier student

coming into the institution. So I again appreciate the opportunity to be able to make my comments.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Thank you, and thank you very much for your presentations today. Very enlightening, and we appreciate the time and energy put into them. We're now going to take a break, and we'll be back at 2:45.

(Whereupon, a short recess was taken.)

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: Thank you. We're going to reconvene. Before the panelists begin, I'd like to ask, recognize Melissa for a few comments.

MS. LEWIS: Thank you, Cam. I'd like to note for the record that at the beginning of the day, we had nine members present at the meeting, and a tenth, Bruce Cole, joined us just before lunch.

Those who were unable to join include, and this is in no particular order, Aron Shimeles, Earl Lewis, Frank Wu, Federico Zaragoza, Daniel Klaich, William "Brit" Kirwan, Benjamin Allen and Carolyn Williams. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STAPLES: I'd just like to make a quick comment too, because I was asked by a few

people. This is the full NACIQI Committee that is conducting these meetings, as well as the meetings in June. Although we're not at full complement, it is the NACIQI, not a subcommittee thereof.

All members have been invited and will be invited to each meeting, just some were not able to attend for various, you know, personal or business reasons.