

## Partners for Transformation: Subcommittee on Student-Focused Accrediting Agencies

May 3, 2018 – Conference Call

### Welcome and Background

After participants were welcomed, Karen Solomon referred to the Defining Student Success Initiative that has three subcommittees discussing 1) a glossary of terms (retention, completion, etc.), 2) differentiation for disaggregation of over-arching accreditation models, and 3) changing the conversation from defining student success as bright lines to meeting students' goals. President Gellman-Danley pointed to the upcoming June Partners for Transformation meeting which will ask this subcommittee to meet face to face and then report to the Partners on what the subcommittee feels accreditation would look like if it were student-focused instead of institution-focused.

### Defining Student-Focused Quality Assurance

One approach to defining student success is have HLC or some other external agency do it. Another approach is asking institutions to define student success and then hold institutions accountable for whether they are helping students achieve success or not. The argument for the later approach is exemplified by Wheaton and Knox Colleges which on the surface look similar but would define student success quite differently.

The consensus was for institutions to define student success for their institutions rather than having an accreditation agency define student success for them. Institutions could be held accountable for 1) defining student success, 2) setting goals for student success, 3) demonstrating support systems for student success, 4) measuring student success, and 5) publicizing their student success results. The burden of defining student success would be on the institution and would be based on the institution's mission. HLC could develop a template for this that includes required Federal compliance issues such as completion, loan default rates, etc. A model of an institution using the template would further develop this approach. Could we accomplish this in three years?

Thoughts regarding such a template are to think about the long view of student success since students will need to be prepared for jobs that are not yet even created and to think about co-curriculars since student engagement is correlated with student satisfaction. And, maybe we should ask students what they want, what they define as their success.

### Other Topics

*Use of Data.* HLC could synthesize and aggregate the comments on the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), which is distributed prior to every comprehensive evaluation. In the age of big data, institutions also have survey data such as NSSE and FSSE and have detailed data regarding student and faculty interactions. HLC could draw attention to the critical issues that student most often cite in the SOS survey and identify key themes that the membership should address.

*Government Advocacy.* Federal lawmakers and the U.S. Department of Education expect accreditors to ensure the financial stability of institutions to ensure improved student success outcomes. Student success and financial stability are the two key issues the government focuses on, so we need to keep these in the forefront. Community colleges are a prime example of institutions enrolling students who have no intention of graduating with a major, yet for federal aid reasons are required to declare one. Instead, holding colleges accountable for ensuring that students receive what they define as their personal success.

This would require changes to federal regulation. There is a growing recognition that students will need to keep coming back for education as careers evolve.

*Transparency of HLC Information.* Public institutions under FOIA report more information about accreditation than most other institutions. Should HLC require more transparency? Beyond the action letter, what are we comfortable publishing? Another thought is for HLC to certify the level and quality of instruction at an institution and ensure that what an institution says it will provide, it does. In other words, HLC would be a guarantor giving a Good Housekeeping-type of seal of approval. Finally, there may be some HLC policies and procedures that hurt students. For example, if a sanction or withdrawal is imposed and it is done during a term of study, what is the long and short-term effect on students?

*Alternative Providers.* These providers will continue and will increase. There should be some way to recognize them and give them HLC's seal of approval. Should that approval be done through institutions or directly with these providers? Included in this discussion should be dual enrollment programs often managed by post-secondary institutions. In Oklahoma there is a growing movement to look at the last two years of high school as an opportunity to acquire college credit, including an associate degree, enabling high school graduates to enter the University with a college degree.

## Framework

Based on the discussions thus far, here is a framework for drafting the thought paper:

Post-secondary education is moving beyond institutions. Consistent quality evaluation for any educational offering, not limited to degree granting institutions, needs to be explored. Can accreditors offer different levels of recognition to help this concept? How do institutions articulate learning outcomes and the recognize learning when it comes from multiple sources (even within their own degree such as when a contractual arrangement is in place)? This could improve transparency with regard to what will be accepted as transfer credit (aka academic pathways), but it also may force a focus on clear, high quality outcomes that can be recognized by other institutions and the workforce.

## Questions?

Please contact [luminaproject@hlcommission.org](mailto:luminaproject@hlcommission.org).

## Participants

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