

**Digest of
A REVIEW A TWO HIGHER EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY ISSUES:
STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND FACULTY WORKLOAD**

Interest in higher education accountability is reflected in the requests for this report. Representatives Moody and Bradford requested a review of techniques being used nationally to improve higher education accountability. We found states are increasingly using student assessment data to improve higher education. A separate request from Senator C. E. Peterson asked for an audit of faculty workload and productivity with emphasis on classroom hours and actual research activities. We found little reliable data exists about faculty workload in Utah or other states.

Student assessment has been praised nationally as a new higher education accountability tool. The fundamental concept of assessment is that the measure of an institution's quality is what its students learn; funding levels, faculty characteristics, and library quality are important only insofar as they contribute to student learning. Many states now have student assessment initiatives in place. In some instances, assessment has been a powerful inducement to institutional change by focusing attention on undergraduate achievement.

Faculty workload measurement embodies a more traditional concept of accountability by focusing on resource use rather than student outcomes. Faculty workload has long been a controversial and sensitive topic; those within the higher education system feel that outsiders have little understanding or appreciation for what and how much faculty do. Unfortunately, satisfactory methods to measure faculty workloads and communicate them to outsiders have not been developed. While the teaching load may be quantified, the non-teaching workload remains very difficult to measure.

Throughout the nation, bringing more public accountability to higher education institutions has been difficult. Traditional accountability processes in higher education rely on peer review. Educators emphasize that the diversity and complexity of higher education makes it very difficult for non-educators to understand or evaluate colleges and universities. Furthermore, the higher education system may not be well suited for detailed control mechanisms. Colleges and universities are centers of creativity that are best fostered in unstructured environments. A decentralized governance structure has developed in higher education to help provide faculty and students the independence and freedom important to create and disseminate knowledge.

New accountability measures should not be required of Utah's colleges and universities without an appreciation of their current situations. For example, existing mechanisms such as legislative budget hearings, accreditation requirements, and academic program reviews may provide an adequate level of accountability. Requiring additional accountability mechanisms could divert resources and attention from other critical issues such as coping with growing student enrollment.

The following summaries describe the two main issues addressed in the report.

Student Assessment Can Contribute to Higher Education Accountability. Student assessment provides a direct method of evaluating higher education effectiveness. Assessment programs measure the benefits students and the community receive from colleges and universities, and indicate how they can be increased. Some states require the reporting of assessment information as part of higher education accountability programs; however, the range of programs is broad. Utah's institutions are now developing student assessment programs to meet Board of Regents' and accreditation requirements. While it is early to judge, institutional commitment and progress appears to vary considerably. The Utah Legislature may act if it wants to be involved in how assessment progresses. In many states, legislative action has been a key factor in spurring reluctant institutions to develop assessment procedures. The Utah Legislature should act if it wants to provide direction or stimulate progress. However, if legislators are satisfied with ongoing assessment plans and efforts they should continue to rely on the Board of Regents to guide statewide assessment efforts.

More Faculty Workload Data Could Be Provided. While legislators could direct the Board of Regents to report annually on faculty workload, the need for and purpose of workload reporting should first be clarified. Obtaining better faculty workload information will require considerable political and administrative effort to overcome the barriers which now limit its availability. The Board of Regents' staff recently compiled a special report on faculty workload (see Appendix III), which includes data on teaching loads, total faculty workload, and institutional productivity. The workload report shows many differences in teaching loads among USHE institutions that may be important to legislators or the public. If that type of information is useful, the January 1991 workload report should be considered only as a starting point because its data is incomplete and may not be accurate. However, the Legislature may decide that additional workload data is not required.