

**Virtual HETS Best Practices Showcase 2017
Celebrating Innovation in Retention,
Assessment, Internationalization and
Placement to Promote Hispanic Student
Success in Higher Education**

**Retention, Graduation and Career Placement:
New Expectations from the US Government and
Accrediting Agencies**

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Until last year, most regional accreditors established accreditation standards and criteria that recognized mission as the fundamental element from which compliance was judged and used both qualitative and quantitative measures to identify levels of educational success.

But, in April 22, 2016, Ted Mitchell, then Undersecretary of Education, sent a “*Dear Colleague*” letter to all accrediting agencies that was meant to elaborate on a previous one on the topic of flexibility.

New norms in Ted Mitchell's letter

April 22, 2016 letter by Ted Mitchell available at;
<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/04222016-application-flexibility.doc>

USDE establishes the following positions to “orient” or guide accreditors both regional and national

Summary: This letter provides clarification for federally recognized accrediting agencies on the flexibility that they have in differentiating their reviews of institutions and programs, and encourages use of that flexibility to focus monitoring and resources on student achievement and problematic institutions or programs

Accrediting agencies may adopt this flexible review process on their own initiative, and subject to 34 CFR 602.27(a)(4), do not need prior approval by the Department. However, the agency's review process, **including the specific criteria** and risk factors an agency uses to differentiate its processes and requirements, **will be analyzed for its effectiveness when accrediting agencies' recognition is before the Department.**



- Section 496 of the HEA and 34 CFR Part 602 provide certain requirements that an agency's accrediting process must consider for each institution or program, including that the agency establishes appropriate **measures for student achievement**.
- Measures widely accepted by accreditors provide one factor in **determining agency effectiveness** in meeting this requirement.
- For example, **most** of the national accreditors have **benchmarks** for the **proportion of students** who are expected to be **retained** from year to year, and for the proportion of students who are **placed in employment after leaving** postsecondary education.

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- The statute and the regulations reflect that different circumstances may warrant differing degrees of scrutiny and subsequent monitoring. For example, the HEA says that the agency is to consider **licensing exam results**, course completion, and **job placement rates** “as appropriate” (HEA §496(a)(5)(A)).
 - For example, an accrediting agency might look at the **rates of student retention** from one academic period to the next, **graduation rates**, some measure of **student learning**, some measure of **post graduation outcomes**, and **student loan cohort default rates**

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- Example: Accreditors **of a certain type of institution** or program generally look at **four** outcome measures: **retention** rates, **graduation** rates, **licensure** rates, and **job placement** rates. Accreditor X does not have a metric for retention. Accreditor X may be asked to explain how it can be effective, given that it does not consider retention rates when its peers believe that retention is an important factor in gauging institutional or programmatic quality.
 - Example: The institutions accredited by agency Y, in the aggregate, show lower levels of student achievement on generally accepted measures of student success, such as completion and cohort default rates, than the schools, in the aggregate, accredited by similar agencies. **Accreditor Y may be asked to explain how its standards are effective in terms of the results its schools achieve in the aggregate.**

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- ▶ Many recognized accreditors, especially national accreditors, have set numerical metrics. We encourage those agencies that currently have that type of metrics to consider whether **additional metrics** of student achievement that are accurate and effective can contribute to their standards. For example, many accreditors look at completion rates; **we encourage those currently without this metric to consider adding it.** Similarly, job placement rates have been adopted by many accreditors as a standard of student achievement; **success in obtaining employment** cannot be ignored in accrediting institutions that offer occupational programs.

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- ▶ **Regional accreditors tend to use qualitative measures of student achievement, and tend not to have numerical metrics.** We encourage them to consider adding objective, transparent, comparable, and actionable quantitative measures. Important measures, such as retention, graduation, and cohort default rates may be utilized if they are not already. In addition, because **applied, professional, and occupational programs focus on employment** as a primary goal, a regional accrediting agency that does not consider licensing and placement rates in its initial or continuing accreditation of institutions that offer such programs may be **failing to ensure** that the education or training offered by those institutions is of sufficient **quality** to achieve the institution's stated objective, as required by law.

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- ▶ Example: School X describes for incoming students the objectives of its **liberal arts programs**. The accreditor must assure that the amount, nature, and content of the work involved conforms both to the institution's stated mission and to the commonly accepted standards for the respective fields. In addition, the accreditor must ascertain that the institution is successful; this entails assuring that student work conforms to the standards and that students achieve the outcomes that the institution intends for students in the program. That success may be demonstrated by such factors as retention, graduation, and employment, **pursuit of graduate studies**, and measures of progress in internalizing concepts within the field. There are, of course, other measures that may meet this requirement.
 - ▶ Example: Program Y describes for incoming students the objectives of its **technical or vocational program**, both substantively and in the nature of employment that may follow. For instance, the program may describe what coursework or field work is involved, and what proportion of students get jobs and with what types of employers, for a credential in medical technology or computer science, or a credential in retail marketing or civil engineering. In addition to the considerations common with a liberal arts program, the accreditor might also look at factors such as **employment rates in the field of study, increase in earnings between pre- and post-educational employment, and third-party (e.g., employer or workforce board) recognition of the qualifications of graduates** to gauge whether the program has been successful in achieving its employment-related objectives.



So...

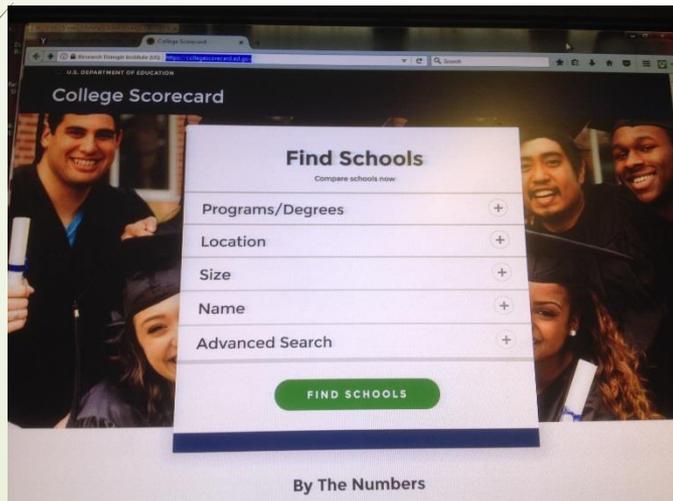


What's
the
problem?



Here are the problems

Scorecard Project



Required criteria

➔ Retention, Graduation and placement analysis

Here is the problem with the bright lines approach. . . [1]

Table 1

Retention Trends 1983–2016: Freshman to Sophomore Year

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
Two-Year Public	56.4 ('16)	51.3 ('04)	56.4
Two-Year Private	72.6 ('92)	55.5 ('08, '12)	63.3
BA/BS Public	70.0 ('04)	64.2 ('14, '15)	64.9
BA/BS Private	74.0 ('89)	67.3 ('10, '12, '13)	70.8
MA/MS Public	71.6 ('06)	68.1 ('89)	70.4
MA/MS Private	78.0 ('85)	69.5 ('13)	73.5
PhD Public	79.0 ('16)	72.9 ('08)	79.0
PhD Private	85.0 ('85)	80.2 ('12)	81.5
All			68.5

Here is the problem with the bright lines approach. . .[2]

Table 2

Completion Trends 1983–2016: Two-Year Colleges—Graduation in Three Years or Less

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
Public	38.8 ('89)	21.9 ('14, '15)	22.1
Private	66.4 ('90)	40.2 ('15)	52.6
All	44.0 ('89)	22.7 ('15)	23.6

Table 3

Completion Trends 1983–2016: Four-Year Public Colleges—Graduation in Five Years or Less

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
BA/BS Public	52.8 ('86)	36.0 ('13)	36.6
BA/BS Private	58.5 ('13)	53.3 ('01)	57.6
MA/MS Public	46.7 ('86)	37.0 ('00)	39.5
MA/MS Private	58.4 ('88)	53.5 ('01)	54.5
PhD Public	51.2 ('16)	45.0 ('01)	51.2
PhD Private	68.8 ('86)	62.4 ('14)	62.7



Work for the use of contextual variables

- ▶ Contextual variables are conditions or characteristics of our students, communities and institutions that should be used to assess the outcomes we attain, NOT as EXCUSES, but as exogenous or non-controllable factors that correlate with our outcomes.
 - ▶ Socioeconomic background of our students
 - ▶ Academic performance and other profile elements of the high schools from where your students come
 - ▶ Socioeconomic conditions of their community in terms of employment and unemployment rates; job market conditions; family incomes; percent of families living at and under the poverty level;
 - ▶ Admission policies: Open vs. selective [level of selectivity]
 - ▶ Other

CONCLUSION

- ▶ You must be congratulated for your efforts to innovate in search for educational programs, teaching processes and institutional environments that result in higher levels of success in retention, graduation, internationalization, job placement, socioeconomic mobility and the formation of graduates who are good citizens and have a social conscience!
- ▶ But we live in new, conflictive, divisive, ethnocentric and authoritarian environments resulting from the dysfunctions of a neo-liberal globalization process that is polarizing society.
- ▶ If we do not become active in the defense of the university as a unique institution, recognize that universities need to be transformed, sometimes dramatically, listen to our critics and address their concerns even if these transformations are not comfortable for us, we may lose this unique and valuable pillar of our society.

Beware the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that must be addressed soon! Become engaged!!