

THE CSU ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS BACKGROUND

As the need for publicly supported services grows, all states face hard choices about how to distribute their limited revenues. Increasingly and particularly for those service areas that are not subject to legally binding funding requirements, states are giving greater scrutiny to how effectively resources are used and, in many cases, linking performance to funding. Public higher education, along with all other services, is being asked to clarify the value it adds to society both in terms of intentions and results.

Public institutions of higher education have a long history of successfully justifying their value, quality, and continuing improvement to their various external constituencies: students, parents, the general public, makers of public policy priorities, accrediting agencies, the providers of financial and other resources, and their various supporters. Institutions do this by paying attention to the goals of their work, by testing results against these intentions, and by their willingness to change when confronted with the imperatives that flow from better ways of measuring their effectiveness. In broad terms, this process is called accountability.

Although the CSU and other educational segments necessarily are part of an increased government-wide emphasis on accountability, the CSU enters this period with a heightened sense of responsiveness and with significant advantages. First, evidence shows that the public continues to have faith in the value of higher education generally and the CSU, in particular. Second, the CSU and its campuses over the past several years have shown a willingness to define and redefine, to respond to new or restated needs and forces, and to involve their constituents in significant discourse over what ought to change and what ought not to change to meet internal and external pressures. Third, more than most systems, the CSU already has in place a substantial system of evaluation and ongoing improvement procedures. Campuses review academic programs on a regular basis, typically every five years, and are expected to meet the goals of the Board of Trustees in academic, financial, and administrative areas. Campuses also respond substantively to regional and professional accrediting agencies, and professional discipline advisory boards. Students and alumni/ae are regularly polled concerning their experiences at the CSU. Other appropriate constituents are also consulted concerning the quality of CSU graduates and programs.

The CSU is and has been involved in these discussions of accountability and responsiveness and, in many ways, is covering ground not yet covered by many institutions and systems of higher education. Given the quality of the CSU and its established commitment to self-appraisal and consequent action, the increased demands for public accountability make a strong case for the CSU's need for even more support from the state. It is an opportunity to tell more clearly a positive account of the value and performance of the CSU. The source of this information must flow from a partnership which constitutes the CSU system: campus, faculty, students, administration, alumni/ae, Trustees, and the chancellor's office. Each component has an important role in achieving the kind of public responsiveness which will help assure strong public support for CSU.

The proposed accountability process consists of the underlying principles, descriptions of the performance areas and indicators for which the chancellor's office will be responsible, and descriptions of the institutional performance areas and indicators for which the campuses will be responsible.