

## America's Best Colleges? (forum transcript and audio)

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In October 2006, Education Sector held a forum with leading federal policymakers and higher education experts to discuss how colleges and universities should—or shouldn't—be measured, ranked, and held accountable for giving students an affordable, high-quality education.

The discussion featured:

Bill Tucker, Chief Operating Officer, Education Sector

Kevin Carey, Research and Policy Manager, Education Sector

Paul Glastris, Editor-in-Chief, The Washington Monthly, (as moderator)

David Dunn, Acting Under Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education and Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of Education

Brian Kelly, Executive Editor, US News & World Report

Patricia A. McGuire, President, Trinity University

Charles Miller, Chairman of the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education

David E. Shulenburger, Vice President for Academic Affairs, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC)

### Transcript

Bill Tucker: Good morning. Good morning and welcome on this crisp, cool Washington, D.C. morning. And, a special welcome to our viewers at C-SPAN, and also our Internet audiocast listeners via the Education Sector Web site. I'm Bill Tucker, Chief Operating Officer of Education Sector. As you may know, Education Sector is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan education policy think tank, and we're devoted to developing solutions to the nation's most pressing educational problems. On behalf of our staff and board, I'd like to again welcome you here today.

Before we get started, just a few housekeeping notes: Biographies for today's panelists and some additional background are available in your packets and are also online at the Education Sector Web site. We have some additional reports in the back of the room and out front. We'll reserve time at the end of the panel for questions from the audience. And we'll also be taking e-mail questions from our Internet audiocast listeners. And if you're on the Internet, you can e-mail those questions at any time.

And finally, I want to thank the Lumina Foundation for Education for their support of this event and for their support of Education Sector's work on higher education accountability.

Each year at about this time and a little earlier, college administrators, parents, students, and even alumni wait in anticipation and sometimes dread to find out what the latest U.S. News & World Report rankings are going to say—who's gone up, who's gone down. But this year I think the context is a little different. The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education also released their report after a series of meetings and deliberations. And their report highlighted in its preamble a lack of clear, reliable information about the cost and quality of postsecondary institutions, along with a remarkable absence of accountability mechanisms. We, at Education Sector, also published Kevin Carey's report, *College Rankings Reformed*, which details how new data and technology offer an opportunity to measure how well colleges and universities are preparing their undergraduate students.

So we're very pleased to have many of the key voices in this debate here today to join us: David Dunn is Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of Education; Brian Kelly is Executive Editor with US News & World Report; Patricia McGuire is President of Trinity University; Charles Miller is Chairman of the Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education; David Shulenberg is Vice President for Academic Affairs, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC); and Kevin Carey is the Research and Policy Manager at Education Sector. And also thank you to our moderator, Paul Glastris. Paul is Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Monthly*, and *The Washington Monthly* also publishes its own special college rankings issue.

Paul Glastris: Thank you so much, Bill. We're delighted to have you all here. Delighted to have the C-SPAN audience. We're not going to have any opening statements today. We've got a large panel—we've got a distinguished panel—and we want to really launch right into a lively discussion of an issue that, as a parent of a high school senior, is close to me. And that is whether, when parents go out and spend their tuition dollars, and students, their tuition dollars, they can know, in advance, whether those dollars are going to be well spent in terms of actual learning in the classroom. And whether, as a country—as a matter of public policy—we have to do more on that. I spent ten years working at U.S. News & World Report, occasionally on the college guide, and so I am very interested to hear a lively discussion about various ways of ranking.

But my first question that I think should open it up with is to Kevin Carey, who produced this wonderful Education Sector Report about ways of measuring learning in the classroom. My first question is, Kevin, are we capable, at this point, is there data at this point that can tell parents: "Yes, this school will produce good learning for your son or daughter," more so than that school? Is that data available for the average person today?

Kevin Carey: Thanks, Paul. It's not available in the sense that if you're a parent or a student right now trying to choose a college, you could go on a Web site or buy a rankings book and find out that information. So it's not available. But the point we [Education Sector] try to argue is that it could be available. There has actually been a lot of interesting work done in just the last few years where a number of researchers at places like the Council on Aid to Education (CAE), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), have put a lot of time and effort into really going out into the colleges, surveying students, and creating new assessment instruments that measure the growth in students' critical thinking skills, their analytic ability from their freshman year to their senior year. So there is a lot of new information that we could be using to provide that kind of information to colleges and students.

The point that we tried to make in our paper was that we have a ranking system now that's run by U.S. News & World Report. And I should say from the beginning that I have no problem with rankings. I think rankings are a good thing—they talk about quality and competition, and that's great. The downside of the U.S. News Rankings is that they're not based on those things that you talked about—they don't rate universities based on how much students learn while they're there. They basically rate them based on how much they learned before they got there, based on SAT scores and things like that. And that's not U.S. News' fault. It's not as if the data is publicly available for all institutions, and U.S. News is just choosing not to rank universities that way. So what we argue is that we need more investment in new research to refine these measures, and we need to get the data out there, so people can use it and create rankings around it, so they can use it to choose colleges. That would bring more attention to student learning and be better for everyone.

PG: Thank you. We, at The Washington Monthly, produce our own rankings based on things other than academic excellence because we feel that the data isn't out there.

Charles Miller, you ran a Commission of the U.S. Department of Education looking into more or less the same issue. Do you agree with Kevin that the data for parents is not out there? What were the findings that you came up with on what data ought to be out there and what we ought to be offering parents?

Charles Miller: Well, I agree with Kevin's comment about the parents, or the students, or the prospective students. But it's not available for the students, it's not available for the departments, it's not available for the deans, it's not available for the colleges, it's not available for the universities, it's not available for the systems. It isn't available for the public, or the policymaker, or the taxpayer. If you think of the consumer as the broad user or payer for higher education—because we all pay for it in some form—it's not available for anybody. So for all the reasons you would like to have the answers on the most fundamental mission of higher education, which is teaching and learning, nobody has it. And it's hard to imagine spending several hundred billion dollars a year for something we value so highly and think is so important when we don't really know the basic result or the basic mission in any way that I've seen measured.

PG: And let me shift over to Dave Dunn, here. Why is this information not available? Is it there in a file drawer somewhere and nobody has pulled it out? Are people not doing the

studies? Explain a little bit in detail, for a general audience, where this data is and why it's not out.

David Dunn: Well any of the colleges and universities will tell you that the U.S. Department of Education collects reams and reams of data. The IPEDS report, which I can't even remember what the acronym stands for here. We collect a lot of information from colleges and universities.

Two key problems that Charles and Kevin hit on: One, the data is not oriented at the key function of colleges and universities, and that's student academic learning. We collect a lot of information on crimes on campus, and OCEA requirements, and all sorts of things, but there's very, very little data at the national level on academic learning. So that's something that Charles and the commission focused on, others have been focusing on. [U.S. Department of Education] Secretary Spellings has come out and said that she very much wants to reorient the national data system towards academic learning.

PG: And what sorts of things would you be looking for in the data? Would you be looking at kids' grades? Would you be doing standardized tests the way we do in K-12? It seems like colleges have such a wide variety of curricula. Some students study Plato; others study nuclear physics. I mean, how do you test academic learning?

Patricia McGuire: Paul, I'm sorry, I don't want to be out of order, but there's a fundamental assumption that's floating around that I disagree with before we get into how to do that. Are we allowed to speak, or is this just a call-on session?

PG: If we're down to the level of fundamentals, I think we ought to start right now. Please.

PM: OK, thank you. I don't mean to be out of order. First of all, I disagree completely with Chairman Miller, for whom I have great respect. I disagree with him completely that there is no data available on student learning outcomes. That is just wrong. I do agree that the contemporary media-driven rankings system, most notably U.S. News & World Report, is not about student learning outcomes. And frankly, when I get my beauty contest survey every year, I rip it up and throw it away because it is just irrelevant to what goes on, certainly, on my campus. I don't believe rankings are the answer, either. I believe helping student and the parents that are involved—but remember, 72 percent of undergraduates today are nontraditional students, so we're really focused on the student consumer—helping them understand the kind of learning environment that will make them the most successful possible is what this is all about. I certainly know that on my campus all of the learning data is available, it is on our Web site, it is in our accreditation reports, and it's in the work our faculty does all the time. We are members of the Women's College Coalition. There are 60 women's colleges in this country who work collaboratively. We all participate in the NSSE survey at this point. We have a lot of outcomes-based data based on what our students learn, where they go after graduation, and employment and so on and so forth. So it is just not true to say that the data's not available. How it's made accessible to the public is an issue worth discussing.

PG: That, I think, is a very good point. I think what Patricia is saying is—and I think Kevin, in your study, I know you said this: It's not that we don't have any available data

on student learning, it's that it's not available to the public. I don't know, Patricia, maybe your school voluntarily makes that information available to the public. Is that right?

PM: Oh, we consider it a part of our ethical obligation to our students to help them understand what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how we will measure it. And it's granular—it starts with the course syllabi and how student grades are achieved. We use rubrics in our courses, then the courses link to each other and over the course of time, the student learning record tracks across the period of time the student is in school. It's not just Trinity—hundreds and thousands of colleges and universities do this, and I think all of the studies are flawed because they don't get down to the granular level of what the faculty are doing and how they construct their syllabi, and how they measure student performances in their classrooms, and I would suggest that as one of the next areas for study.

DD: And I think that's an important point because it's not just accessibility or availability of data. It's also a matter of is there clear, consistent, coherent data across the spectrum that can be helpful as parents or students or policymakers or administrators are making comparative judgments about resource allocations and any number of things? So at the institutional level, a lot of data is there. Some institutions do a good job about making it available; others do a less good job. But still there's no clear, consistent, coherent system of data.

PG: When I go to buy a product, when I go the grocery store, fortunately, I can compare ingredients and prices between products because there's a certain standardization. They give you unit prices, they give you the nutrition value, and so forth. It sounds like what we're saying is, at the higher education level, when you go to buy the product—to go to the university—you might get some nutrition data, you might not, they might measure it in ounces, they might measure it in grams. There's no way for the parent or student—the consumer—to compare and contrast.

DD: Or state policymakers, federal policymakers, as Charles said. We need to think of the consumers very broadly. But I think that's an excellent way to say it.

PG: Let me ask Dave Shulenburger, who represents Land Grant Public Universities. David, are your universities putting out the best data that is available on learning that's happening in the classrooms, and if not, why not?

DS: Well, there is a great deal of data being generated. I agree with Pat on that. And it's being used in most universities for internal improvement at this point. The NSSE data is used widely and makes a great difference.

PG: Explain very quickly to our audience: What is NSSE, and what is the data?

DS: The National Survey of Student Engagement. The survey started at the University of Indiana, is now used nationwide, and really looks at the preconditions for learning on campus—how engaged students are with the process; a great diagnostic tool. It helps you know whether your faculty are requiring as much writing or giving as many opportunities for student presentations in class as elsewhere—great piece of data.

PG: But is that data available for individuals—for Brian Kelly’s US News rankings, for Washington Monthly’s rankings—and if not, why not?

DS: It’s a choice of the university. Again, it’s a voluntary system.

CM: The answer is, “No.”

DS: Well, some universities make it available; most don’t.

PM: And first of all, it’s a very new survey. It’s five or six years old, and many institutions are just beginning to adopt it—and before we make things public, we like to understand what it is. We started doing it two years ago, and we didn’t know what it was, frankly. Not every institution sits around thinking about these particular issues until we’re into it. A dean or institutional researcher will say: “Well, here’s a new survey that maybe will help us understand more what we’re doing. So we do it, and then we get the results back and we say, “What does this tell us?” It takes a little bit of time.

We discovered, at Trinity—and by the way, we’re Trinity Washington University, to distinguish ourselves from the university in San Antonio. We discovered that our students scored well above their peers in the NSSE data, and that was good news for us. But it was also interesting for us, because it reinforced certain faculty behaviors—faculty were wondering whether, as they restructured the first year curriculum based on the result of the our middle state self-study and some of the assessments we did, whether to choose more community service, or more papers, or more standardized tests, or whatever. NSSE really helped them understand how the students processed their learning. This year, we have made our report available publicly because it helps everybody understand, but there’s a learning curve for all of us.

PG: Well let me ask Brian Kelly, because a couple shots have been taken at US News today, Brian, do your rankings reflect academic excellence in the classroom? Is there information you tried to get that you’ve not been able to get to improve the rankings, and what is the information you want?

Brian Kelly: I think it’s a great question, and I think it’s important for people to understand. We didn’t ask for this job, we kind of fell into this by default for a number of reasons. And part of it is that if you go back 20 years when we first started doing this, none of this data was available. We come at this as a journalistic institution. We are not part of the federal government; we’re not part of the academic industry. Our job as journalists is to ferret out information in a whole bunch of areas. Universities happen to be one of the most interesting ones over time. And I think we have achieved this stature where we look at ourselves sometimes and say, “You know, I don’t want to be doing this. I don’t want to be an arbiter of quality in the federal realm.” That’s not our job as journalists. But, by default, number one because our information is accurate, we have been able to get information from these colleges that, even today, they don’t really want to share. But the long, tortured history—my great colleague, Bob Morris is sitting in the front row has gotten a lot of grey hair trying to pull this data out of people. And it is now fairly standardized to the level of what we publish. So, everybody’s come on board to that extent. It’s also—when I saw by default—it’s also because of the demand for this kind of data. There is an absolute, crying demand on the part of students and parents who are our audience. I mean, I really do not care what the college administrators make

of this—that's not our job—they can do what they want with this information. But we're looking at this from a consumer-driven standpoint: How can we get some information out there that's helpful? Would we like to publish more information that's more helpful? Absolutely. We've looked very closely at NSSE. We've published more NSSE data than anybody else—when we can get it out of the schools. I think it's about 15 or 20 percent of the schools have been willing to share that data. One of the interesting ironies is that the top schools don't want to share the data. It's schools in the middle tier and schools that can make a case that maybe they look better in NSSE than elsewhere, but you can't really make that case because, as they were saying, you've got to be able to compare this across 1,500 schools, which is what we do. We're not looking at a handful of schools. So that kind of data is absolutely great.

What can we do, journalistically, to influence people to do that? That's a question we ask ourselves all the time. And we do have some capacity to influence outcomes . . . which we do. We've changed measures, we're very conscious of what are the industry standards here. And I think we will continue to do that and push some of these kinds of quality outputs. I don't want to go too long, but what we do—the one other aspect of this is that we do try to take some account of quality. We're very conscious of this. And we do have what we think of as some output measures. We look at graduation rates, and we do it, you know, based on expected rates and actual rates. That is not a perfect measure, but it does get to the question of how well freshman are being treated all the way through. We think it's somewhat of a proxy for outcomes. Alumni giving—we've studied this. And, you know, happy graduates give more money than unhappy graduates. So it is, again, a flawed proxy but certainly somewhat of a proxy for outcomes. If you ask the guys at Princeton who give tremendously, and the guys at Harvard who not only don't give so much, but in the last couple years have been particularly unhappy, is that a measure of Princeton versus Harvard at the very tiny top? I think maybe it is. So, there are certainly factors there that we try to put in there. We'd like to put in some more.

PG: Kevin Carey, how would higher education change if some of this data, in fact, were made available? How would it change for parents and students, and how would it change for universities and colleges themselves?

KC: I think it would change a lot. And just to go back a little bit to a comment that President McGuire made, she's right that there is information—there's lots of information, it's swimming all over the place. The problem is that there is not information that consumers can use to make informed choices. If someone was considering applying to Trinity University and they had a list of four or five other colleges and universities, and what they wanted to do was choose the university that was going to do the best job of teaching them and helping them earn a degree, and they wanted to base that choice on objective data they could trust that was the same for all the universities, that data does not exist. There is no information about learning to make those kinds of choices. And because there's no information about learning informing the consumer market, the market is not driven by whether or not universities do a good job of teaching undergraduates. And because the market's not driven, I think that universities don't focus their attentions on those things as much as they should, or as much as they would if that data were out there.

It's very clear that the U.S. News rankings are influential. I mean, I don't think anyone would argue with that. And so, we can see how universities change their behavior. You [Brian Kelly] talked about alumni giving. Well, the U.S. News alumni giving measure is based on the percent of alumni who donate. Not how much they donate, but percent. So I've started getting calls from—you know, it's always, like, a very nice young woman who calls me and basically says: "Give anything, a dollar or fifty cents—anything, just give something," because it's based on the percent of money that people give. If learning growth really mattered, if learning growth was driving those rankings, then I think that universities would have more of an incentive to focus on learning growth, and, quite frankly, I think that undergraduate learning is a secondary consideration for a lot of universities. It's not that they don't care about it, but it's not what drives status in the higher education market. It is not what is going to make the career of a university administrator. The things that kind of put you ahead in higher education are exactly the same things that drive the U.S. News rankings. You have to raise money, you have to attract star faculty. You need a reputation for research. You need a better applicant pool, higher SAT scores. You need to attract more consumers coming in. None of those things have anything to do with what happens to students while they're there.

PM: If I can just jump in, though, because there is a lot you have said that I could argue with, but I want to clarify some points here because they're fascinating in the discussion. First of all, Brian said that he doesn't care what college and university administrators think because you're consumer-drive. But the reality is that the people who care most about what you're doing is college and university administrators. I know in the spring I get all those letters from my peers telling me how great they are, and I throw them away along with your survey. Because I think one of the worst parts of the U.S. News & World Report business is the fraudulent survey that's put out that's called academic reputation that is simply the "American Idol" of higher education—that beauty contest survey and it's absurd. And that doesn't serve anybody well.

The second thing is, Kevin, I agree with you on many points you make, but here's the problem: You're assuming that the choice of a college is a rational choice based on rational behaviors based on information. And underneath all of this, there is a complete lack of understand that for many, many college students—and you may see this in your own children, or your nieces and nephews or whatever—the choice of college is not necessarily based on completely rational principals. Frequently, the choice of college is made on some of the most irrational principals in the world, like where my friends are going to college, and whether I like their football team—"I want to be at a school that goes to the final four!" Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Those are irrational motivations for the consumer. Now, what's happening with rankings is irrational consumer behavior students want to go to the thing that's the most prestigious, the thing that's considered the place that will give me the most status in life. And so long as we have rankings, you're going to be fueling that segment of your rational behavior in your American consumer that wants prestige, wants fame, wants glory. And doesn't still get to your issue about what's the best learning.

Final point: You are correct in raising the question, how does a student decide, "Where will I learn best, where will the faculty help me the best?" The problem is you can't answer that question by looking at paper. You can't answer that question by looking at information. You can only get to the root of that question through a dialogue in the admissions process—a live dialogue between the prospective student, and how that



student learns, and what are that student's learning modalities. And, then, how does that match up with how the institution teaches that kind of student? And one of the great glories of American higher education is the great diversity of institutional type. We call it mission. Some of us have a mission to teach women, some of us have a mission to teach historically disadvantaged minorities, some of us have a mission to teach students of a certain religious persuasion. Some have a mission to serve low-income students from underperforming urban schools—that's Trinity, among others. And we talk to our prospective students in dramatically different ways depending on who we serve, how our learning modalities match up with how the student will learn. And we try to convince them that the irrational factors, like, "where my boyfriend's going to school," should not enter into this choice process, but it frequently does.

PG: Well, then, Charles Miller, do you agree with Patricia's points? And is there not something about the kind of data that you all would like to see that would, in fact, at least give parents like me a fighting chance to convince their kids: No, don't go the school where your friends are going because that school isn't actually doing a very good job of teaching their kids, as opposed to this other school that you're also looking at, and maybe your friends aren't going there, but here's the data that says it does a better job?

CM: The better job depends on a lot of other circumstances. We have a narrow discussion about student learning, which is important, but all the students who go to college, in fact, less than half of them, are not the 18–22 year-olds who act irrationally. It's the 40-year olds, also, who act irrationally. But what's irrational to you? If we have a lot of good data on the basic mission of the university, student learning—and that's value-added, usually, what the student starts with—that adjusts for what kind of mission and what kind of school, and what they get, with whatever skill set you want to measure at the end of the day, and we have some pretty interesting ideas of what that is. You can measure value-added if you compare that with the price that you might pay or the location, or whether the boyfriend is there or not, that's added value or added information that allows people to make an informed choice.

Today, we don't have any of that kind of data to make comparative choices except the input data. We have very little otherwise. We could do a search for a school within a 500-mile radius of a community. You can get some of that, but you can't get much about what is added in value, and particularly related to price. I mean, that's one of the secrets in higher education. And there is a conjunction about quality and affordability and value and things like that. We can't make a value proposition at all. So for that kind of issue, which most families are concerned about, we can't do it with any kind of data. And as far as what's rational, 20 or 30 years ago, somebody who wanted to buy an automobile would be very uncomfortable dealing with the automobile sales people. In fact one of the worst things you could accuse somebody of was being a used car salesman because you went in without understanding what you were getting, what the price was, what the discount was, how far it would go, whether it was a real lemon, what was hidden. And today, you press a button on the computer, you get all that information first hand. Now you still make your irrational decisions about what kind of leather upholstery, and whether it's yellow or red—those emotional decisions—those are still there. And you still buy the car by kicking the tires. But the preliminary work is just the study of information that's just information.

We could do that with colleges and universities and still leave room for those emotional or other decisions, or differentiation with a mission or things like that. In actual fact, there's not much differentiation in mission when you come to general education. I don't know whether sophomore English is all that different in one place or another. Maybe it's taught a little differently in some places. But the skills that need to be measured for the future for most students in most professions aren't being well-judged and we can measure those now. Critical thinking skills, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and written communications. Those are skills that apply to almost everybody everywhere in almost every profession for the future—for what we need from higher education, beyond the subject matter. You might know a lot about Abyssinian archeology, and maybe you want that, and you can get that from the coursework, but you really want to know these other things, too. And you can measure those, and we should have some of those kinds of skill sets measured. We should have them NSSE-measured, I'm glad to hear that that's used as an answer to assessment now. Because, like Pat said, that didn't even exist a few years ago, it's spreading like wildfire because it's a good set of assessments. And almost nothing else had been there before, and the only thing that we need now is for most of the information to be made public so that we can compare and rank universities. There's a CLA that measures these skills sets, and once that becomes more common, we can have something that we can compare against all institutions. If we did that—to answer your earlier question—the institution can learn how to do their jobs better. The students and the parents can make informed decisions about what's learned, the policymakers can decide where to fund things, and the public can have an understanding that they might want to invest even more in education because they know they're getting something for their money—as opposed to being afraid to even talk to a used car salesman—which is a sense of how you negotiate with a college on pricing, and information today.

BK: If I can just reinforce Charles' point about price I think that is something that has changed the nature of this debate in the last 20 years. That Patricia's notion of universities as very individual places—that's all very nice, it great, and in a perfect world we would all just be able to do what we wanted to do. But when you're shelling out \$40,000 a year for this product that has an indefinable outcome, that's just not going to cut it for consumers. What we hear back as prices rise, and we know that we have outstripped inflation considerably over the last 20 years it is a very increasingly precious good. People are going to apply this same standard to that—the same rational buying standards as they do with cars, and particularly, in the information age, where more information is available on so many of the products. They're going to treat this like a product. I think that universities are making a mistake by not understanding how their consumers are coming to them in this regard, and how they have to be a lot more forthcoming about treating the process not as a crass, commercial transaction, but at least appreciating the two sides of this transaction. I don't think enough of this goes on.

DD: Brian makes an excellent point there, I think, but going back to your original question—how are we going to change things. Because there should be a multi-varied side to this decision. It's not just outcomes, right? But there's no clear, consistent, true cost data that's readily available to the public or to higher ed. administrators as well. And so, we think that that will also have a very real impact and change over time as institutions have better information about true cost, they can make more informed decisions about resource allocation, mission changes, that sort of thing. And so I think that's at least as important a part of this discussion as . . .

[Interrupt]

PM: I don't know why you, at the U.S. Department of Education, don't know how to ask about true costs. I know all of my true costs, and I think that most college presidents know our true costs. And we know one of the true costs is that it costs a lot more to education a student than what the tuition the student paid is. And by the way, very few students are paying \$40,000 a year. I think you need to be fair and honest that that discussion is about a very elite group for institutions where a minority of students go and a minority of parents are willing to pay the price and that's not true for the vast majority of institutions in higher education. Trinity is a private institution like many small, religiously-affiliated colleges and universities in the cities. Our tuition is \$17,200 a year. We're in the District of Columbia—we get no state support—our tuition reflects a small percentage of the real cost it takes to education every student. But let me tell you this: The average student at Trinity pays no more than \$2,000 out of pocket per year because we're subsidizing that student. We're subsidizing that student at a rate of 40 percent ourselves.

CM: I'm subsidizing them, too.

PM: Yes, you're subsidizing some of those students, and frankly, we're a public good in the District of Columbia. We graduate 65 percent of our residents in the District of Columbia. A figure that outstrips any other college or university in this nation on the graduation rate for District of Columbia students. Now, we're not alone. You're going to find a lot of colleges and universities like Trinity all over this country. And part of the problem with this discussion is you're always talking about Harvard and Yale and Princeton and Amherst and all of those institutions and they have the resources to sit up here and argue for themselves, but you're leaving out the vast majority of institutions of higher ed in this country who are doing an excellent job with scarce resources, frankly. And U.S. News & World Report sets it up so that only the wealthy institutions matter and the rest of us are tier two or tier three.

BK: That's completely untrue. We rank 15,000 colleges, and we specifically have stuck to that standard so we are treating the University of Texas at El Paso equally with the University of Texas at Austin.

PM: You glorify a very few institutions and ignore the rest.

CM: Well I'd like to have the information to look at all the rest. The problem is that today, there's no way we can do that. We would, I would expect some of the finest liberal arts colleges in America who don't charge that tuition or do—I'm not even sure if that's related, to tell you the truth, that's what we don't know. We might find that somebody charges \$5,000 and does a great job, and somebody charges \$40,000 and does a poor job. We do know that it's highly subsidized by the public, across almost all the institutions—private, public, small, large, or whatever. So the public is spending this huge amount of money on something very important, the price is going up radically faster than almost any of the measure of economic activity, and we don't know the result. We're making serious decisions about these things. Like we're sitting in a dark room blindfolded with the sound off. We're just guessing. We don't know. There's no information on the things we need to know.

PG: Dave Shulenberg, you've heard all this. Why not go with what Charles is saying? Get the data out there—let's put our cost data out there, let's all put our NSSE data out there, let's come to some agreement about what sort of assessment, or tests, if you will, need to be done. And Kevin Carey's report suggests linking up student graduation data with unemployment insurance data so that I can know that if I go to this university, my chances of making X amount of money are this, and if I go to this university, I'm going to make this much, so we can have some measure. A lot of kids go to college for the chance to earn well. That information is out there—why not connect the dots?

DS: Well, NASULGC [National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges], along with ASCU [Association of State Colleges and Universities] represents the 70 percent of students who are in 4-year universities in this country, and we have proposed a system that will largely do that. While we don't always, as individuals, use information rationally, it's hard to argue against providing information. So what we proposed is a system where universities do measure core educational outcomes—where they take a measure of student engagement, where they look at all the data that students and parents might be interested in, put it in a uniform format, and lay it out there. And we're in the stages of developing that now, and we'll be asking universities to commit to that over the next few years, so we think it's a good thing.

I do have some difficulties with the conversation. Having been a faculty member, provost, parent of students who went through higher education, my focus is on the kind of information that will help students most make decisions. And while students may go to multiple universities, they do it one after another instead of simultaneously, so it comes down to the university choosing the institution that's best for them. They're not using all the data. There probably are a few things that they want to express and work out for themselves. And while it all should be available, what's most valuable to the student are those individual data elements that help them fit the school to themselves. So I'm very much in favor of getting the data out there and very much in favor of then letting the individual use it to make decisions.

CM: So they can weigh and rank the data? That's what they would be doing: Informally or formally, "I want these five things 200 hundred miles from my farm in South Carolina. They have a liberal arts program, and it's X number of dollars," and they have this amount of time to do it—five factors and I could weight them 20 percent of one and 40 percent of the other, just like U.S. News does, and this is what I want so a student could do that. A researcher could take much more complex data—if it's available—including graduation rates, employment information, cost, and make great longitudinal resource conclusions that might help you run the institution better. So you have the whole range, from the most complex data collection and uses to the simple ones. But we need the data, the information's got to be there.

PM: But the information is there. I'm going to come back to the point I've made already. The information is there, and it resides in each one of our institutions, and there is no substitute in any consumer transaction for good consumer behaviors. A student right now can have the five or 10 factors they want to find out—"How will my prospective colleges perform on these five or 10 factors?" Whenever I talk to prospective students, I tell the prospective students, "You shouldn't just come here because I'm telling you, you need to ask the following questions: How well will you learn? Will you get a job when you finish?" All of those issues. And I don't know of any college or university that says, "Oh

just come to choose us.” Some of us are in sorrow because students will choose an institution because they just won the final four. And that’s not the right choice set at all. I don’t deny that students should be interested in this. I go back to sometimes they’re irrational. But the data is available—number one, number two . . .

[Two or three people interrupt]

DS: There’s no student learning data, the NSSE as he mentioned it, was a great example because it’s beginning to be a national standard. But as you said earlier, Pat, it didn’t exist, and it’s not public, and it’s not closely comparable and so it doesn’t really help as much. It will, ultimately, if it’s widely used and made public. We don’t have a measurement of student learning, we don’t have a measurement of prices. We can’t compare one price for the other.

PM: Sure you can.

M: But every student even pays a different price, and I think the discount mechanism . . .

[Interrupt]

PG: Let me ask Kevin Carey, who’s done this study, to arbitrate between these two. Is the data available? Is it possible to compare?

KC: The data is not available. I think there’s a little bit of a “Blame the consumer mindset.” In the sense that it’s just unreasonable to expect that the student in going to be able to pry information out of universities. They’re not easy to get information from. I mean, I do it for a living and it’s hard for me to do it. Even writing the report, for example. The NSSE data, some of which U.S. News puts up on its Web site, just sort of sits there out of context. It’s hard to figure out what it means. Even to write part of the report, it took me a couple days. And again, I do this for a living. To go through all these tables, and sort of carefully figure out which institutions really seemed noteworthy and seemed to be doing a good job. To expect that millions upon millions of high school juniors and their parents are going to be able to do that, I think is, unreasonable.

We need to look at how consumers interact with information and how they make choices, and go from there. It is very obvious what they want. What they want is rankings. That’s why U.S. News is in business. And some of these discussions, I find, happen as if they might go away someday. Or as if there might not be rankings. That’s never going to happen. You know, we have no choice between rankings and no rankings. We only have a choice between good rankings and bad rankings. And so what I’m saying is let’s have better rankings. I mean, in a lot of ways, what we’re really talking about here is higher education accountability. We have these conversations, “Should we have accountability? Should we not have it?” We have it—U.S. News is running it. Arguably, Brain Kelly has David Dunn’s job. I mean, at U.S. News, you say that you don’t want to be the arbiter of quality in higher education, but you are the arbiter of quality. You have established the quality measure that people care about, and we know that because it’s the quality measure that institutions react to. It influences decisions. And so in that sense, it’s a very effective accountability system. It just kind of happens to be based on the wrong measures. And so the only way we can really want to change behavior—the only way we can really have an impact—is both to put the information out

there, and again, I think NASULGC and ASCU should be commended for really taking a major step forward in really embracing the idea of transparency and disclosure, and really getting the data out there. But we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that just disclosing lots of data will do what we want it to do. I mean, a lot of states over the last 10 or 15 years have put information out there. In fact, if you ask someone from the states, they'll say that 47 states, for example, have an accountability system. Well, what most states have is some system where some information about something gets reported somewhere in some way. That's not an accountability system, it's not a system that takes information about quality and makes it meaningful. That when the data comes out there it matters. That's what U.S. News does. Their data matters. And so that's why we argue, in our paper, it's not enough just to get the information out there—although we haven't even done that yet—we have to make it meaningful, and that's kind of what rankings do.

DS: I spent 35 years as a faculty member at various institutions, and I have watched the difference between students who chose an institution that fit them and those who didn't. And there's all the difference in the world. Students do use the data that's available. And it makes a difference. Brian said that U.S. News fell into the ranking system. They fell into it the same way that Krispy Kreme fell into doughnuts. It's an important product and I'm very much in favor of the market. The market works, but with the NASULGC-ASCU system, we're focused on helping those students make decisions. We certainly want the universities to use the data and know what makes a difference. But we can't take our eye off the ball. How other people use the data is another question. But to suggest that students don't use the data that's available is wrong. Many of them do. Many of them use it and make the wrong decisions. But we ought to put it out there.

CM: Some of the students use some of the data. But there's just not enough data available for the informed decisions on prices and on student learning. I'm a financial expert by trade, if you could call me an expert on anything. I've probably looked at an infinite number of financial statements from all over the world in every kind of industry. I found, when I became the board member of regents, that I didn't understand the accounting. It was opaque and complex. And almost everything I dealt with in higher education was like that. I found that most of the people dealing with it—the administrators and the like—didn't really understand it, and didn't really mind the fact that not many people understood it. As a governor or as a policymaker, or as somebody explaining to a policymaker or the public, I couldn't explain how we use the money or what the outcomes were on any resource allocation decision. I sure couldn't tell them the single answer about student learning except grades and the degree of seat time. And those are things that are irrelevant today; they're no longer valid. So, there is data—people can use some of it, but it's very imperfect. It's like a medieval market by comparison to what's available in information and communications technology today. It's so far off field from what could be there—and what ultimately will be there—by either us deciding to do it, and maybe someone else deciding to do it and forcing us to do it. And we'll eventually get forced by the people who govern higher education to do something about measuring outcomes—even an accountability system, and we might not like the outcome if we don't do it ourselves, which I complement you for, for taking that proactive stance.

BK: Kevin has some really interesting data in his report on a group that's not represented at this table, which is the higher end universities—the top 200 or 300

schools—and I take Patricia’s point, they are functioning in a different way here. They are probably the single most resistant to releasing this data and have a lot of market power of their own.

KC: Because they have the most to benefit from the system we have now. Why would they? And you know they’re sitting at the top of this status hierarchy that was established centuries ago, in some cases. They have no interest whatsoever in changing things. They’re happy to compete about who’s one, and who’s two, and who’s one. I mean, that’s just great publicity, and so it’s not a coincidence that it’s the most elite universities that are less likely to participate in the NSSE data. And I don’t think it’s a coincidence that it’s the public universities that seem to be embracing a transparency agenda more so than the private universities. I mean, NASULGC and ASCU are farther out ahead than some of the private universities.

PM: I would suggest that if U.S. News & World Report would eliminate its top tier and say, “We’re not going to do it that way anymore,” you would change behavior rather quickly. And part of the problem is that your own magazine reinforces some of the worst behavior. And I think I’m going to come back to the point that 25 percent of your ranking is about that ridiculous survey—you know, “What do you think of these 150 schools in your region, one through five?” It has no integrity at all.

BK: I would contest that, Patricia. We studied it; it has lots of integrity. You may be someone who rips it up, but most of your colleagues do not, thankfully.

PM: Yeah, they’re afraid to.

BK: They do treat it quite seriously, and our surveys bear that influence. It’s a very statistically relevant survey.

KC: The only institutions that can change that are the higher education institutions themselves. The only people that have the power to do this are the institutions—if they come forward and voluntarily put out other information they can replace that data. Because they have that survey for every college.

PM: Thousands of us put that data out there, and you’re denying it. The chairman of the commission is sitting there saying there’s no data. There are thousands of institutions that put that data out there, and we educate our consumers well about how to assess the data. I come back to the point that you’re only concerned about a very small, elite group of institutions, and you’re blaming all of higher education, number one. Number two: There are millions of university administrators and faculty who’ve devoted their lives to education. Mr. Miller is a financial expert, and we’re happy to have this expertise, but he’s not an expert in university student learning and teaching. And the reality is that the bashing of college and university administrators and faculty is part of what’s wrong with this discussion. If you want us to work with you, which we’re happy to do, then don’t be bashing us and trashing our professions. That is just an abysmal part of this discussion.

CM: I unbash anybody I bashed. I don’t take it out. I don’t blame the professors and the administrators. I think the system is flawed. I think the financial system in higher education is dysfunctional. And it has to do with third-party payments. It has to do with the way policies develop. I don’t think accreditors are at fault because I think the

accreditation system has some faults. I don't think we could have technologically done things 10 years ago that we can do today. I think it's natural behavior. I don't feel anybody's at fault. I think professors work hard like every other human being. They don't get paid well in some cases, and they don't get honored as much as they should because we don't honor some of the things they claim they do, which is to teach and learn. And we don't even measure it the right way. It's not my decision—I can show you quote after quote of very important people in the academic community, in fact I've used that as much as anything, who say the same things—we don't do it. Derrick Bock wrote a book about the underachieving colleges. It's not just the top tier. It's across the board. We don't do it much for any of those missions. We don't measure research very well.

I'll just tell you an anecdote: The AAU, which represents the top tier universities, sent us a letter talking about the commission, blaming us for the tone of the commission to some extent, and that seemed to be a little bit like censorship. There's a sensitivity in the academy that I've never found anywhere else about criticism. As somebody who was a financial analyst criticizing the people who manage things, it's kind of normal. But they told us, "We get 60 percent of the federal research dollars." Bragging about the resources, implying their quality is the best in the world, unchallengeable. So they were making the point how important they were. What I thought of it is that sounds like a near monopoly. Is that money really being spent well? But there's no record of how it's being used, actually. Except inputs—number of Nobel Laureates, or something. But they also said that 17 out of the top 20 universities in the world are American. And all but one are members of the AAU. I hope my data's right, and I think it is. But do you know who they quoted for that ranking? They couldn't quote U.S. News & World Report, because they need to be sort of opposed to that idea of the ranking. And there wasn't an international ranking. So they had to go somewhere else. So they went to a university in China, Shanghai University. They picked a totalitarian, non-free statistically questionable ranking, and they had to do that because there is no other single way that they could compare how they stood relative to other universities in the world. Isn't that ironic? That our best universities had no other source but the communist-dominated system telling us that we were the best in the world? And, by the way, there was a Chinese University in that top 20.

DD: One thing I forgot to say: I'm sorry, Patricia, but you've said a couple of times that the only thing that this conversation is about is the elite institutions, which I just object to and take issue with. Clearly, the secretary [of education] had the for-profit sector appointed to the commission. She had community colleges, other representatives. And in fact, community colleges across the country have embraced the recommendations of the commission and the secretary's action plan, I think, for some of the reasons that you're saying. I think community colleges think that if we had good data that's clear and consistent across institutions—that for some students it's going to make sense to take sophomore English at a community college rather than the University of Texas at Austin. And so, I just think it's wrong to say that this conversation is focused only on the elite institutions.

PM: We're having two different conversations. I have no problem with the Spellings Commission Report. I think the report is a good report. There are a lot of good things in it. And I'm grateful to Chairman Miller for his leadership on that. There may be some tactical things that we can talk about. And I'm glad you said what you said. Rankings are a different issue. Rankings create elites where maybe we need to repress the idea of



elites and the struggle among elites to stay elite. And that's part of the problem because rankings create, in the consumer's mind, the idea that "I'm no good if I don't go to the elite institution," when, in fact, that's not necessarily the best reason to choose an institution.

PG: Patricia, let me ask you a question. Earlier in the discussion, I think it was Charles who mentioned that you measure academic excellence through a value-added method. And if I understand that correctly, what that means is you don't take all the top kids who got the best SAT scores and say, "Well, we got all those top kids, and we'll see how they do." You take all the kids, and you test them when they come in. And then, over the course of the time at the university, you measure their progress.

PM: That's what we do.

CM: Sure, Patricia took the weakest school in D.C., and at very low cost, she talked about how she ranks in the D.C. area. She ranked herself as number one, and she's right about all that. That's a wonderful way to both rank and measure. She gave us a ranking, and she told us what she did with a difficult population. Our schools in the UT [University of Texas] system—non-academic schools—have a wide range from one of the elites to open university enrollment. And they spend a lot of different sets of money. And when we did that ranking of value added using the CLA, we found that a small university in Midland, Texas—in the middle of west Texas—had done some of the best value-added from the beginning to when we measured it in the senior year. And what a star that shone on the university, to make them put their chest out and brag. It didn't make us all the same, actually, it did show a difference. And they were very excited about the fact that they were doing what they were doing with that population of students.

PG: And I guess my question to you is . . . we grade students, why not grade universities?

PM: We grade ourselves all the time, that's what the accreditation process is about as well. But it's not an A, B, C or D grade, that's simplistic.

PG: Why is it simplistic for universities and not for students?

PM: Because there are so many different factors that go into each institution, that to create this homogenization of institutions. You can't compare a Trinity to a George Washington University to a Georgetown. Our resources are different, our missions are different. We serve very different populations. It is perfectly appropriate to expect us to have and report data about how well we do with our students; I don't have a problem with that. But a grade is so simplistic. In fact, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* today, just this week, has the article about Alverno's assessment system. Alverno is one of the most well known colleges in the country for having a very different kind of assessment system with no grades, but it's widely recognized as one of the most effective institutions in the country because it does student-by-student assessment in a dialogical process. So grades, rankings—those miss the point. The question is that each person learns differently, and each person needs to be matched to an institution that will serve them very, very well. I don't disagree about the need for surfacing information, what I disagree with is the way rankings create a false impression about what's

important in the consumers' mind. What's important is not prestige, what's important is how well a student will learn in any given institution.

KC: What if we ranked that way, though? What if we ranked universities on all of those things that you said were important? Would that be okay?

PM: No, I'm still opposed to rankings, because what works for one student may not work for another student, and it again sets up a false set of indicators about how a student will perform. There are many reasons why some students will do well at MIT and some students will do very well at Montgomery College.

CM: Well in China and some other places they don't allow people to make informed decisions because they know what's best for them. So what I would suggest is that we ought to decide to let the student decide, or let the parents decide, or let the policymakers decide. Get them the information. Why should we decide what's good for them or not? We don't know that. We don't even know the student. The real issue, when we're talking about something for the consumer or the students is let them have the information, let them massage the data in a way that's more helpful for them. Let's not be opposed to having rankings as much as argue about what the rankings are. Maybe this ranking will be relevant; maybe it wouldn't be over here. Sooner or later, I'm sure we'll have an infinite possibility of rankings, and I think we're going to get there. I think that information is inevitably going to have to come out because of cost pressures and other conditions out there in the world. So when we get these permutations and combinations, we'll eventually shrink them down to some handfuls. US News & World Report will probably have ten rankings and twice as much income.

BK: We can only hope. But Charles, you made a point earlier that I think is important, which is that with more data and more transparency, there ought to be competition in rankings. I think there is validity to rankings and whether I like it or not, Patricia, you're going to have to change American consumer behavior . . . that's the only way you're going to get rid of rankings, because that's the way people think. But, if there's competition in rankings, if other people want to come in and have valid rankings, I think that's better all-around for the consumer. So let's see more of them, not less.

PG: Well, as somebody who's put out a competition to U.S. News' rankings, I couldn't agree more.

BK: How's that doing?

PG: Academic excellence, obviously, isn't the only reason kids go to school. It's not the only reason that we invest, as a country, in higher education. There are other reasons. Higher education has a mission to uplift the less fortunate, to put them on the road to advancement and economic independence. Higher education has a role in doing the research that is at the heart of economic growth and scientific advancement. I think higher education has a role of developing good citizens who know how to participate in democracy and participate in their communities. So, the U.S. News rankings, because we don't feel that there's good, reliable data on academic excellence, focuses on those three things.

We look at schools that recruit kids who are from low-income families and then do a good job of graduating those kids. We look at schools that use research dollars and crank out Ph.D.'s in science and engineering and the humanities, and we measure universities whose students go on to the Peace Corps, who participate in ROTC, and who use their work study for community service—not just checking out basketballs in the gym. And we came up with a very different set of top schools, Texas A&M is fifth on our rankings and Princeton is 22nd, whereas it's either second or first in the U.S. News rankings. So there are a lot of different ways to cut this. But the truth is, that the number one thing that universities are supposed to do is educate.

Kevin said something earlier—that what's blocking this, what needs to happen—is for the universities themselves to step up to the plate and volunteer this information. Let me slightly argue with that and say you'll never get universities to volunteer this information just as you would never get food companies to volunteer their nutrition information. If there's any role for the federal government, it is assuring information that the consumer can use, that is reliable and standard and comparable. So, what I want to ask is, what is the argument against having the federal government—sometime in the not-too-distant future—require universities to put forth information on academic excellence the same way they require corporations to put forth bottom-line information on their finances? And I'll open that to anybody here.

DS: We've got to be very careful; we talk with great precision but we can't measure the full educational product. Chairman Miller was right with CLA measures and that's part of the educational product. We've got lots of tests that measure what happens at the professional schools that accrediting requires . . . to focus on a single test and to suggest that that measures any university is incorrect. And even if you focus on that single test, the CLA, which I'm a big fan of it myself. But it hasn't been used enough to have comfort with it. You talked about the difference between public and private universities a while ago, there are public universities experimenting with these measures—the CLA measures. . . .

[Interrupt]

PG: Explain the CLA for us . . .

DS: The CLA—the Collegiate Learning Assessment—is a test that's put together by the RAND Corporation and many other foundations that funded the development of it. It looks at the measurement of the three items that the chairman talked about: the ability to do analytical problems, the ability to write, and the ability to think in a forceful way. It's new, it's been used by a few hundred schools—that set is growing. I know there are many private universities experimenting with it, as well as public. But part of the answer to your question is that we need to have great assurance about the test and we'll never have great assurance about a single test because of the great diversity within higher education. It's gotta be multiple tests that focus on the overall base for the learning, like the CLA does and focuses as well as what happens in the individual major areas.

PG: David Dunn, do you agree with that? We can't just have one standardized test for colleges to be measured?

DD: Paul, I don't think anyone has called for one standardized test among all colleges and institutions. Certainly the secretary hasn't. She's said that she wants to go out and initially work with the institutions that David's described and others that are moving into measures of learning assessment. Let's get that information out more publicly and let's encourage and provide incentives to have additional institutions provide that data. So absolutely I agree that there are a number of measures of success for colleges and institutions. There are a number of different missions. The key is, as I think we've said repeatedly here, is that consumers, policymakers, and administrators need consistent, coherent data across the spectrum so that they can make more informed and better decisions.

CM: I'd like to respond on the federal issue that you raised. At the beginning of our commission work, the first response—I started to say accusation—that I heard, was that we're going to come in and ask for a federally mandated test that all universities would use and that it would be a standardized test like other standardized tests. I was surprised because that was never on the table, but universities and colleges use standardized tests more aggressively to measure the life or death of a student; from the SAT and the AP Entrance Exam or the ACT, to LSAT, MCAT, whatever. They decide based on measuring other people on standardized tests. They practically invented them and used them more than anybody else. We will develop standardized tests, we will develop some national tests. It probably won't be one, it may not be as many as five, I think there are two promising ones with NSSE and the community college version of the CLA. Clearly neither one of them has been widely tested and I think there will be competition just like when information is available, just like the US News & World Report makes available.

I think that traditional testing services are not innovators. The technology has changed now that we can do some things and create widely used tests at a very economical level so we can measure things we couldn't measure before. Not in the multiple choice level, but on a very sophisticated level. We can do things today we couldn't do before, and we're going to. The pressures are going to come at least from the state level. I think the state higher education offices are clear about it, I think that legislatures are wrestling with it. The public is asking "what am I getting" for the \$40,000 or \$10,000 or whatever the number is. They're very uncomfortable about what they're getting for the money and whether their kids can get into schools and they want to know what they're going to get, in the ultimate, for all these things. I think it's inevitable that we're going to get national standards and certain sets of tests that are widely used, because it's easy when that happens. We do that all the time on standards, because if a provost from one university becomes president of another, that person's not likely to change the tests or standards they've used, when we begin to make inter-university or inter-institutional comparisons, why wouldn't that be fairly common? If it gets the job done and it's widely used, the price is going to go down. It's natural for us to develop a set of national, standardized tests. Not federally mandated, that would be a big mistake. The problem is that if the academy doesn't create these accountability systems and these assessment tools, it's going to be done for them. That's what the risk is. We came close when we started talking about this in the early reauthorization days, but it's got to come from the academy if it's going to be done the right way. I'm hopeful, with what ASCU and NASULGC have already done, that it will.

PM: If I could follow up, the Academy already has quite a few assessment and measurement standards and a lot of this comes through the accreditation process. In a different life, I am a chair of many accreditation teams in the Middle States Association and the reality is that I have not visited an institution for the last 10 years that has not had an elaborate outcomes assessment system with an elaborate, faculty-driven . . . in some cases too much, the reality is that these institutions are spending so much on assessment these days that sometimes they're creating a nightmare of tests and measurements and portfolios and this and that, that they're dying under the weight of the processes they're creating.

That leads to a question—and a thought I've been having—about this whole question of what the U.S. Department of Education's role is with regard to helping higher education to illuminate student learning results. I think that's the question that's being asked. There are student learning results, they are resident in all of the self studies and accreditation reports. Anybody who has done a teacher education accreditation report knows that it is down to such granular rubrics and so forth, thousands of data points about student learning. In our own case at Trinity, when we did our NCAID accreditation last year, we determined there was something like 70,000 data points that we had to illuminate, just for that one accreditation visit, I began thinking of the U.S. Department of Education collecting all of this data on student learning outcomes—I began to get very queasy. I got queasier because for the last three months, I've been going to the IPEDS Web site; it's the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System, by the way.

DD: I did remember that later.

PM: I visit the IPEDS Web site all the time, and we create benchmarks at Trinity as many institutions do, and we extract the data from IPEDS across a range of institutions for many things. I have been going to that Web site for three or four months now trying to get 2005 data, and it's still not posted—the last data set posted is for 2004. The problem right now, and I am also on the National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) which is a subset for the National Center of Education Statistics, we're having a conference next week by the way on student success, but we talk at NPEC all the time about the overload that already exists in the federal system for the amount of data that's collected and how hard it is to manage the IPEDS system right now. Now, does IPEDS need to be streamlined? Perhaps, and there may be ways to fix it. But when I think that we're suddenly going to layer over—on top of that—all of these other data points. I shudder to think how expensive it will be, how cumbersome it will be, both for the department [of education] and institutions, and how much more it will expose the opportunity for data breaches and the invasion of student privacy.

DD: I think the point about layering data is an excellent one, Pat. It's something that the secretary and within the administration, we're taking a hard look at how we can streamline some of the data reporting systems. And we think, with some of the data that's coming out of the commission on student level data systems, that we will be able to streamline a lot of that data reporting, we'll be able to reduce the number of submissions—I think universities have to submit six different survey instruments, we think we can probably get that down to one. We think we can streamline a lot of that burden. We want to take a hard look at some of the data that we have in the IPEDS system and it may be that if the data is not being used, there's no reason for us to collect it. We need to look at what data we're collecting, how it's being used, and streamline

that. I think in the end, we'll have a better functioning data system that will be more beneficial for students and administrators.

DS: You know, the great risk isn't that we won't assess ourselves, but that we'll suffocate ourselves in the assessments that we do. I think about things like teacher accreditation, it's moved to such minutia, it's extraordinarily expensive, and it probably doesn't measure learning ultimately. We'd be much, much better off to have a few outcomes tests that we really felt good about. For governing boards, for state regulatory agencies, for accreditors, to be able to draw in all the input measurement and to focus on a few tests. The great economy in being able to integrate more information.

DD: I think that's a great point David, the minutia. We look at teacher colleges. At the department we hear from superintendents in urban districts and rural districts all the time. The teachers coming out of the colleges of education don't have the skills that are needed to better prepare kids coming into the colleges and universities. We've got to do a better job about focusing on clear assessments that are going to help these kinds of conversations and help make better decisions and move down the road.

KC: I think the example of teacher accreditation is a great example but it also speaks to a larger point. There's all this time and effort and money going into gathering all this information about schools of education, but if I wanted to choose which school of education to go to, I couldn't use any of that information, it's useless to me! Either because it's too complicated or I can't find it—it's not available. The accreditation process, like many processes in higher education, is simply not transparent. You know, President McGuire said before, it's not a simplistic A, B, C, D, F system, it's actually more simplistic. It's just an A or F system. Either you're accredited or you're accredited with probation or whatever. Basically, it's just the accreditation process from a consumer standpoint, not from the university standpoint. But from the consumer standpoint, it's just a floor—either you made it or you didn't. So the challenge is, let's take the good information out of the accreditation process, figure out which parts of it consumers really want and are really interested in, and then put it out there in a way that's standardized so they can make choices. That's really the bargain that underlies all of this. U.S. News essentially pulled higher education into a very consumerist market-driven environment. I think we are past that point; we're not going to go back, we're not ever going to not have rankings anymore. So let's get the information out there that people want, that's really meaningful, that you all agree is meaningful. Actually, the universities that will benefit the most from that are the NASULGC universities, the Trinity Universities. You talked before about 65 percent graduation rate, well according to the U.S. News rankings, that would put you in the middle somewhere.

PM: This is for D.C. students. Graduates of the District of Columbia Public Schools.

KC: Exactly. But they don't care about that, right?

PM: But when you say standardization, you just put that number out there against everybody else. You don't elaborate on the fact that I serve a very different group of students than my peer institutions.

CM: But you did rank yourself as the top . . .

PM: We have the best graduation rate for that group of students . . .

KC: So let's measure it that way! In fact, U.S. News does this. U.S. News uses both the overall graduation rates, which combined with retention rates, is about 20 percent of the rankings. Five percent—not for colleges like you but for universities—is a predicted versus actual graduation rate. So they take into account, statistically, whether you're enrolling a lot of low-income students and actually give you credit for it. So let's make that the whole measure, let's make that 25 percent of the rankings and let's extend that principle, use value added measures like the CLA, use things like NSSE, which any university worth its salt should be able to get together, get it all out there in the public and rate you that way. I guarantee you would be higher ranked under that system than the current system. And that's the choice you have, the current system or that system.

PM: But the students that I serve don't care about the ranking. That's the other important piece of this. You're making an assumption that every student consumer in America, A) has the money to buy the magazine and, B) knows about the rankings or even cares about it. The truth is, when you serve a lot of the students that we serve in an urban public school system, the issue is not rankings, the issue is can they afford to come and how do we make that happen? We have to sit down with each family and spend a lot of time coaching through how we package education, and these are students, in many cases, who are going to be independent, because they only have one parent to come with them. They don't know about rankings, they want to know, "What is my experience going to be, that's going to help me be more successful than I am today?" You can't put that in standardized anything. You have to sit down, see their eyeballs and talk to the students. That's why we spend so much time on college counseling for the students we serve. This is true for many of my peer institutions, who would not be able to be put into a big mix master and have a number pop out.

CM: But the counselor and the family and you could all make that decision easier and more informed for whoever the consumer is, if they had the data there and it was easily accessible. We're going to be able to press the button and do a major search to get an infinite amount of information about higher education if we can just put the data there. The world's going to learn how to do it—we haven't even gotten close to the end of what's going to happen with search engines. The kids are going to know how to do it, probably better than administrators. We're going to have that kind of information available, it's going to happen whether we like it or not, that's the way the world's going. In fact, you're not going to be able to keep that information hidden very much. What we need is for the higher education community to design a system that's best for themselves and best for students and be involved in it proactively, aggressively, and not being uncomfortable with the transparency that's required. The only thing that will allow us to be trusting of our institutions at the time when we have serious funding problems is transparency. If we can't understand what's going on and we feel like something's being held back, then we're not going to be able to trust the institutions and some bad things are going to happen to us. We've got to be more transparent with data—on everything. And that includes student learning.

PM: I have no problem with transparency—if you go to the Trinity Web site, [trinity.dc.edu](http://trinity.dc.edu) our entire middle-state self study, all of our data sets, everything is out there for the

world to see. When I accredit institutions, I counsel them to put their self-studies out for the world to see. The best way to see how an institution is is to look at their accreditation reports. That has the rich data sets which are driven by how the institutions work and the chosen markets for the students and the methodology of the faculty in teaching those students.

DD: And I commend you for recommending that institutions make that available, but the fact of the matter is that very, very few do. And you talk about that being rich data and it is. In fact, in some purposes, it's probably too rich. But it's not transparent at all. It's a completely opaque system right now. Yes, it's useful for institutions and we want it to continue to be, but it needs to be more transparent and more focused on student learning.

PG: Let's be transparent ourselves here and open up our discussion to our audience both here and on the broadcast.

#### Audience Question & Answer

Q: Hi, I'm Greg Sheckman and I'm from the University of Central Florida and I'm also a community college board member, so I look at this from a couple of different angles. If I can summarize what I just heard; we want a product information label for colleges and universities just like how much iron and how much magnesium and how many calories and trans-fat and everything else—that students are going to need my "genius uncle" instead of my "rich uncle" to find out all the information that they need to know about us, about learning outcomes—that the U.S. News rankings are antiquated because they measure things that don't necessarily reflect what's going on in terms of student learning. I don't know if I've captured that, but those are certainly things I'm coming away with. From a community college standpoint, I appreciate David saying that the CLA is a big impact, and we do use it and do look at it as a benchmark. I serve on the board of Northern Virginia Community College, which is the second largest in the country.

The question is: In terms of modifying the rankings for state universities, for example, you have honors programs and those honors programs, in many cases, are as good as what you'd consider your elite institutions if you look just by the admissions criteria—the SAT scores, the GPA's, the giving, the success rate after graduation—how do you evaluate those particular programs which may be in the second, third, or fourth tier schools against the elite institutions. In many cases, they may be as good if not better than those in the elite schools.

KC: I'm glad to hear from someone from the University of Central Florida, I think you provide a great example of some of the stuff we can do. The State of Florida, unlike most states, actually tracks the earnings of people who graduate from public universities in the workplace. If you were to ask a random person, "What's the best public university in Florida?" they'd probably say, "the University of Florida in Gainesville." If you asked what the second best is, they'd probably say Florida State University, if you asked what the third best is, they'd probably say, "I don't know, are there any other universities in Florida?" Because those are the ones you see on T.V. University of Florida is tier one, Florida State is tier two, everyone else is three or four or on the back list. They're just ranked lower. However, if you look at the outcomes of what happens to Florida public universities—and again, college education is a means to an end and we really need to



start looking at the end. Right now, we're looking at what happens to students before they get to college, we'd like to look at what happens while they're in college, but let's look at what happens after they get out of college. What you find is that University of Central Florida students are quite successful. They seem to do a good job getting jobs in Florida. They earn a lot of money. Of course, earnings are not everything, and college is not just a vocational enterprise. It's not everything but it's something; it's an important thing. People go to college so they can get skills to earn a living. So, I would think that if the University of Central Florida, or another public university—again relatively anonymous on the national scene—has a great honors college that translates into better outcomes for their students, that's the kind of information we need to get out to the public, that's the kind of information university administrators should be thinking about, that's the kind of information we should give to consumers to make choices.

DS: The fact that a university has a wonderful debate team ought to be something that persuades a specific set of students. We don't ever want such a ranking that will hide that texture.

CM: Well, be specific. He did ask about a program, how you rank that within the context of a big university. If you were going further down the line—and you would ultimately get there—maybe it's the third rail of accountability. The ultimate test would be program accountability, because there is a variety in all universities. It sounds complex, but actually with today's technologies, we could measure each and every program. Maybe simple things like who goes into the program and who comes out and where they go into the workforce. Program-wise, there are people in Germany who are trying to do that, interestingly enough. We could measure program accountability and show that this university, even though it's got stature in one field, actually has a great program or a poor program in a certain field. There's no reason we're not able to do that. That would be a big step forward in how to measure universities. We'd get away from this argument about mission or whether this university does this or that. Governing boards would also be able to use it, if you're on a community college board, you'd probably like to know what the program results are. Not just the quality one that you talked about at Central Florida—you'd want to know if a program needs to be expanded or removed. We don't do much of that, we do it informally within the university but we don't do it publicly at all because we don't have data to decide it.

Q: Kevin Finneran from Issues and Science and Technology at the National Academy of Sciences. It seems to me that there are two very different questions here. One of them is the consumer information question. The U.S. News survey is very entertaining and useful to a point in deciding, but I hate to think that people are really making decisions about where their kid should go to school on the basis of that survey alone. If they are, we're pretty hopeless. I think, in terms of making good decisions, what I think we should be spending money on is guidance counselors in high schools. Even in the best schools, students are making stupid decisions. I would guess, when you've got 400 students per counselor, people are making horrible decisions. I think that what Charles Miller's commission was trying to do was ultimately to improve the overall quality of higher education in the United States to the extent you can have informed consumers that will help drive that. I think there's a limit to how much you can do. What I wonder is, what type of assessments and public information would be useful not just to consumers but really for the long-term public policy goal, which is to improve the quality of education? Maybe Mr. Miller could start but I'd like to hear from everyone.

CM: I think that's a valid question. In fact, all of our discussions about accountability were broader than the student learning. The student learning was the lightning rod, especially when people talk about federal mandates and things like that. I think the accountability system in the broad sense ought to measure other things. It ought to measure the mission, you ought to be able to say it publicly in a few words and actually measure how well you do for the public to understand it. We wouldn't have mission confusion with 15 different missions as many institutions and systems do, then it's hard to measure almost anything.

From a governing standpoint, that's a very critical thing. We decided to measure the research function, it was hard to find out how to measure student learning. We had a difficult time finding the assessments six or seven years ago, now they're starting to come up. We measured community involvement, which is the kind of mission for universities. Those are the three major missions. We added measurement for productivity and efficiency, meaning, how we do this for the cost or the price. I think we added a fifth one, for how we measure the system itself. Our accountability system was to measure all those all things. I can't tell you the first round of that was ideal, because we didn't have many places to go to copy it. People do some of that, but it was an initial idea to have more assessments of all these missions. I could say today that I don't really have a way to know we judged the research function very well, I feel like I don't know that. When I ask questions about that, I don't get many answers aside from how much research money they get from the federal government.

BK: If it's any reassurance to you, our studies and others show that people do use the rankings in a very responsible way. It's probably number 10 or 12 of the factors that they use to investigate college. It's a good first step. I think the bigger point is that consumers are pretty smart; if you give them information, they'll figure out how to use it. We certainly believe that's true and that's a lot of what this conversation is about. People know what to do with the information.

PM: I want to respond to your point about the high school guidance counselors. I think that's a critically important point. Especially in the catastrophic conditions in some urban public school systems. The reports that came out last week that were largely financed from the Gates Foundation—there was a report in D.C., New York, Philadelphia, California and perhaps in other places—they talked about the failure of so many urban children to complete high school, and those who make it to college, how long it takes them or if they drop out. Here in the District of Columbia, one of the programs that has helped begin to turn the tide—very small but we'll hope it will grow—is a program called the D.C. College Access Program, funded by over 20 major private corporations. It's a private program that puts guidance counselors into the high schools and it has made a significant difference in the ability of those children in the District of Columbia high schools to know how to think about coming to college. We have seen the improvement in those students' readiness for college because the College Access Program has been out there. That cannot be discounted in this conversation.

Q: Hello, Veronica Robinson with WTOP Radio here in D.C. The conversation that you're having about U.S. News & World Report . . . since that is basically the source that most news media uses when that annual report comes out; we report the top colleges and so on. I apologize, I got here late, if you all have already discussed; what, exactly, is so wrong with that particular report? If you could succinctly and concisely put together

what other venue people could use that would be as readily available and as easy for people to pick up and see and read when it comes to what college they want to choose, be it a child or teenager or their parents, what could they do? What alternative, I'm hearing a lot of different things, but what alternative do you have that would be just as easy and readily available as US News & World Report?

BK: Well first, nothing's wrong with it. We agreed on that before you came in.

KC: My take on it is that the problem with U.S. News is that 95 percent or 100 percent of the rankings are based essentially on three things: how much money you have and how much money you spend; two, your general reputation or fame, like the surveys that President McGuire was so critical of; and three, your level of exclusivity—are your admissions selective and are you attracting a "high-caliber" student? That's it, that's what they're basically ranked on. They're not ranked on how well universities teach or how much students learn while they're there. To answer your second question, what's the readily available alternative for John Q. Public? There isn't one, but there could be if either the universities put the information out there or if the government stepped in and made it mandatory.

DS: My thought on that is that there will never be an answer to that question. This is not amenable to a sound bite. Even if we get a voluntary or mandatory system, each student has to make a decision about which university fits them best. There's no way any university, that top ranked university, is going to accommodate 18 million people who don't want it to. So, good luck. I know you've got air time to fill, but a sound bite is never going to provide useful information.

Q [Veronica Robinson follow up]: When you say that they look at how much money is spent, are you talking about how much money the university is spending?

KC: Yeah, 10 percent of the rankings are based on university spending per student and another 7 percent are based on average faculty salary which is highly correlated to spending per student. They're directly, in part, based on how much the university spends.

PG: Plug privilege here, there are alternative rankings you can find. For instance, Washington Monthly, which you can find at [washingtonmonthly.com](http://washingtonmonthly.com)

Q: Ben Wildavsky with the Kauffman Foundation. I have multiple conflicts having worked with various places represented on stage. We do give some funding to the Collegiate Learning Assessment, so we're very much interested in this value-added approach. However, I am interested in pushing a little bit on the point Kevin just made in response to the previous question. If you look at Kevin's very useful chart on Page 3, it breaks down the components of the rankings; it talks about wealth making up 30 percent, with everything from faculty salaries to class size. This is something, when I worked at U.S. News, that we also would get a lot. It falls into the allegation that inputs are bad.

As I said, I also like value-added, but if we're talking about what consumers want, is it not fair to say that consumers want both? That people are interested in going to school at a place where they're surrounded by talented peers, for example—at least a certain set of students are interested in that. People are interested in things like small classes—

well, small classes are a function of money and inputs. You may say inputs and money are something to be condemned, but I wonder whether there isn't a case for that being some component. To finish the point, nobody has really made the analogy which seems to be glaring in K–12 education, where for years people would argue that people should be able to make their own decisions in their classroom and at the school level. Now there's something close to a national consensus that outside measures are helpful and outside accountability is useful. But in K–12, people are interested in value-added, as a school brings its kids from the 25th percentile to the 50th percentile, that's a great accomplishment educationally. But as a parent, there are plenty of parents who don't want their kids going to that school. They want their kids to go to the school where kids come in at the 85th percentile—they may leave at the 85th percentile—there's no value-added, but from a consumer point of view, they want their kids associated with that peer group. I apologize for the long question.

KC: That report, to plug as Paul did, can be found at [www.educationsector.org](http://www.educationsector.org). It's not that inputs are bad; it's just that they're not as good as outputs or outcomes. There's nothing wrong with spending money on students as long as you get something for it and you can demonstrate that in concrete terms. In terms of learning results and succeeding in life and things that people go to college for. The other thing you have to keep in mind is the incentive structure that is created when we focus on inputs that way. I think it was yesterday that the latest annual tuition numbers came out and they're higher, but not quite as high as the previous years—higher than inflation. No one is surprised, everyone is concerned. Why do college costs keep going up? Well, if you think about it, if your ranking is based on how much money you spend, if you could figure out a way to charge your customers 20 percent more money and not improve anything, your ranking will go up. If you as a college could figure out a way to be more efficient, cut costs, or spend less money for the same result, your rankings would go down, so nobody does that. Why would they? Why would you shoot yourself in the foot that way? The way the system is set up there are great incentives for universities to raise as much money as possible. We've seen this unfortunate occurrence that university presidents that were once nationally-recognized, intellectual leaders have to spend more and more time raising money because that's how you increase status and the public sense of your university. I don't think the U.S. News rankings are the source of that problem exclusively, but they certainly reflect it. That's the issue.

PM: I want to follow up on that with another illumination of this. Every year when my freshman students move into our residence halls at Trinity, within about half an hour I begin to get bitter complaints about the lack of cable television. Those complaints frequently come from parents. I had a father once bring me up to his daughter's room and say with rabbit ears on the television, "How do you expect her to get good reception if you don't have cable in these rooms?" Well, we are an institution well-known for our frugality. Our annual operating budget is about \$22 million per year, but that doesn't include the \$4 million we give back to the students in our institutional unsubsidized financial aid. We have a \$9 million endowment. We do everything possible to make sure that our students get the best education but we don't have a lot of bells and whistles on our campus. But spending per capita, that ranking in U.S. News & World Report, is about the cable television and the recreation centers and the "geewhiz, whizbang" this that and the other thing. In many institutions, they have extraordinarily high faculty salaries where faculty aren't teaching those students. In fact, the more senior the faculty member in many institutions, the less likely that faculty member is in classrooms, particularly in freshman classrooms, let alone others. At Trinity, the real faculty teach the

real students and our average faculty salary is about \$53,000, which my faculty posts on the wall every year when the Chronicle salary survey comes out to show how poorly they're paid in comparison to the other institutions. But they love it, they wouldn't go anywhere else, they just like to complain.

BT: We have a question from one of our listeners on the Internet—the question is about making the system open to all. Dr. Denny E. Templeton says, "to come up with a grand assessment or ranking report, the first academic institutions to be chosen to build the assessment will be top-ranked schools that already get more federal funding. Everyone needs to be included from small schools to the Ivy League, how do you make sure that happens?"

KC: Well, schools can participate in the CLA now if they want to. Anyone can come to them, and many of them are. Charles talked before about how the University of Texas system actually makes their results public. What's really interesting is that when you track the information down you find that, as he said, the highest value-added is not at the University of Texas at Austin, it's at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, which I had never heard of until I tracked this data down. But, again, it's on something like Page 85 of a very long report. It was mentioned in a major newsmagazine a few weeks ago, I actually got a call from a reporter in Midland, Texas saying that this was really interesting. She got her information via us via the report, in kind of a big circle. I actually think it's the universities that take lots of students who don't come to college with all the resources that the elite college students do and bring them a long way—it's those schools that benefit, that have the greatest incentive, to participate in this kind of assessment. I think they should jump at the opportunity to be able to demonstrate for the public the good work they do, probably with not enough money, probably with a lot of inefficiencies that you don't have at other institutions. They're the ones that benefit from this more than anyone.

DD: A further point on that—the secretary is calling for incentives for institutions to work for learning assessments and she's going to be wide open and reach out to all segments of the higher education system. She plans to have a higher-education summit in the spring to further develop these issues and recommendations that she'll be bringing to Congress and the President and taking out to the states. I assure you that a wide segment of the higher education system will be represented at that summit.

Q: Mal Kline, Accuracy in Academia. I have one question for Dr. Miller; you said that if the Academy does not come up with its system of assessment, one will be arrived at for them. By whom?

CM: Thank you for the honorary degree. I'm not a Dr. Miller. Wish I were, I think that'd be a proud label.

KC: It's a culminating moment now, I'm sure.

CM: I admire that title. I think that's happened in other places—the best example would be in health care. I've said that publicly. Twenty years ago we were experiencing similar things, similar problems; we were rationing quality, prices were escalating, and the people in the medical community were the best in the world, generally saying "we know how to do it, give us the money, leave us alone," it's a little bit of the same refrain.

People who are now practicing medicine, compared to what was done 20 years ago, would say that its nothing like what happened before. We have government intervention, the public got angry somewhere in that time period, particularly in the early 90s because they didn't like the costs going up that rapidly without better services.

Those conditions are happening in higher education today. People aren't getting in where they want to get, they come to the institutions and find out they're going to have to pay a lot more and the quality isn't as good as they'd expected. Those are the conditions that create a public reaction; sometimes it can be very strong and even punitive. I don't know that it will happen, but I see versions of it and possibilities of it at the state and local level. I think if the Academy doesn't respond and do what it needs to do on those issues that will happen. What, then will happen is that the valued autonomy and the ability to control your destiny and so on will go away, just like it went away because the hospital chains took over all the not-for-profit hospitals because the HMOs pushed for higher prices—it worked for awhile, but then the federal government stepped in and began the big brother things. We haven't solved the problem and we still have a price and access and rationing problem because we didn't step back and take a strategic view. The secretary, bless her heart and ultimate wisdom, has put the possibility into play that we could step back and take a strategic view about higher education and have the Academy decide what we need to do to resolve these things. It is a fear that we'll use this data incorrectly that's causing a certain reaction which is maybe understandable. In other words, I think I'd be a little uncomfortable about how this data might be used within the Academy. But, we can't let that stop us from doing things we need to do, because the confluence of factors, particularly in regards to price and competition and things like that, are going to force us to make radical changes. We need to figure out how to do it in the correct way.

Q: Matt Owens with the Association of American Universities. I commend Education Sector for this dialogue and this conversation. Like all the panelists, I don't think there's much disagreement that there is a strong need for better, more transparent information. My organization, AAU, supports this—we've actually been spending approximately two years studying this to look at what kind of information can be put out that can be better used by students and their families as well as decision-makers and federal policymakers. We're really trying to focus on what is most usable and most practical for them to use in their decisions. Before I ask my question, I want to respond to a mention that AAU may have a near monopoly on research money in this country—that's not true. Basic research university funding is awarded competitively. Sixty AAU member universities compete for that, no way do 60 institutions taking 6 percent of the research funding constitute a monopoly in that category.

My question for the panelists is as follows: There's a lot of talk about consumers, we're not talking about students but consumers. It seems to me that what we're seeing here in this discussion is, slowly but surely, a commodification of undergraduate education in this country. Even in the way we talk about it, comparing it to cars or any other type of purchase that an individual makes. What do you think are the long term implications for that undergraduate education?

PM: I'll take a crack at that and thank you for making that statement. I believe Chris Nelson, who is the president of St. John's College in Annapolis, has written a wonderful paper on this very topic in relation to this discussion. In fact, sometimes, as we're busy

about talking about our consumers—and we need to, I don't think it's wrong for me as a college president to be aware of the consumer interests and these issues, I think it's absolutely the responsible thing to do. But, I have to remember at the same time, and Christopher Nelson's paper reminded me, we're in the business, particularly in undergraduate liberal arts education, of forming whole people, of illuminating minds, of creating lifelong satisfaction in the life of the mind, and there's so much of what we do that A) defies measurement and B) is not about the size of the salary you earn after you graduate.

That was raised earlier on this panel and I object to that wholeheartedly. If we started to measure outcomes on the basis of the salary our graduates achieved, we would get out of the business of education immediately, we'd get out of the nursing and health professions, and we'd definitely get out of community service, which in fact is one of the things we want to be judged on rather than being measured on an outcome of salary. We certainly should be accountable for employment rates of our graduates, at least for the first couple years. I have no problem with that because all of our students need to be employable. That's a transition that we've had to make at Trinity over the course of the last 10 or 15 years as we have served an increasingly low-income population and we realize that in order for those students to consider themselves successful in this experience, they have to be able to improve their economic condition. That's not a betrayal of our fundamental liberal arts nature; in fact, they will be productive workers and productive human beings if they don't have to worry so much about money. So, we understand the link between successful liberal arts education and successful employment as an outcome.

CM: The idea that colleges are there to create other things like a good citizen or an academic community—I know Chris Nelson well, I was on the board that helped bring him on at St. John's and I respect his program very much. In order to create those kinds of conditions and transfer that to those naïve students who only represent a small and declining fraction of the total higher education community, you have to behave like good citizens. You have to be able to set examples. There are people who argue that of the philosophies being taught at colleges, 85 percent lean a certain way. We didn't get into that with the commission. There would be an interest to having some balance. You would have to be able to say you were subject to criticism and actually accept and attract it because the Academy criticizes everything else, that's one of its jobs.

The reaction to some of the commission and some of our work was criticism about the tone and was not taken very easily. Especially this thing about trust, if the Academy is not open to discussing everything about it, virtually every piece of data that could possibly be available, per student and every other way, then how can it stand on a pedestal and say that we're creating the citizens and the leaders of the future? It's got to behave like the best of the best and I don't think that always happens when you respond by saying, "let us tell you how to do it." That's when it becomes Orwellian, when the Academy becomes that father, "oh we know what's good for you, let us tell you." In the consumer orientation, which doesn't just mean the student as the consumer, but all these other consumers, the first thing you ask is, "What do you want? What do you need?" It could change over time, and I think it has changed over time—the way people get information. Certainly the 18 year olds come with different sets of information that they've never had. It's going to happen more and more. Information is available in different forms now. The Academy has to reexamine what it needs to do. It does depend

on the consumer, its not always business or jobs that they want, but almost everybody does come to college for career or job opportunities, so you can't say we don't want that either, you can't deny that. It's right to connect what you do in the university to the job outcomes, there's nothing wrong with it. It doesn't mean that everybody's got to say that is the primary verdict, but it's nice to know. Just because it isn't perfect for everybody all the time, we shouldn't release the data? That's the answer I keep hearing. It may not work here, it may be different there. Why don't we just have the information and let all the consumers decide? By the way, it took about the time that AAU has been studying this assessment—it took about that time to build an atomic bomb during WWII. I mean, could we get that in the next few months?

KC: One quick response to what you said, you talked about the commodification of higher education. That's a very important word. A commodity is an undifferentiated product, they're all the same, and that's what commodity means. Unfortunately, the way the market works right now, there's really only two kinds of bachelors degrees—there's bachelors degrees from selective universities and bachelors degrees from non-selective universities, that's really all the market can see. Was this person bright enough when they were 16 years old to get into a selective college or weren't they? The solution to that is more information about outcomes and learning. That's how we get past the commodification problem. Otherwise, we're going to continue to see this sort of creeping privatization of higher education. These degrees are going to become more and more functional, more and more vocational. I think that's why we see a rise in the for-profit sector, that's what the market sees. The only solution to that is to tell them something else.

DS: The nice thing about the market is that each of us are wearing different ties. We get whatever tie fits us. Higher education has thousands of different options available right now, more than the two you mentioned; you can go to religious school, military school... Students know about those varieties. I think it's awfully important reason for the Academy itself to be engaged in developing this accountability system or set of systems. I know many efforts are underway, like AAU's and NASULGC's, so we make sure we end up with a system that shows the richness of the offerings available so student's can choose. They certainly will have a core set of things they'll want to know about all schools, but we ought to be able to display that diversity.

CM: With all due respect to choice, if you can have a lot of different models, although there's a lot of overlap, four or five thousand different models wouldn't be hard to distinguish with the technology we have today. But, students and parents today really don't have that many choices, they go because of economic reasons or what happened within K-12 development, their choices are really limited. Most go close to home, over 90 percent or something like that. The fact that there are a lot of varieties doesn't mean there's a lot of choice. If one out of 10 students gets admitted to an Ivy League college and there aren't enough seats for all the people that qualify for that education, that's not choice, there's something that's really limited, not just because of a lot of variety. Variety doesn't mean choice and it doesn't mean access. We don't have access and choice but we need to in higher education today.

Q: I'm Karen Latch and I used to be an associate dean at a law school for eleven years and I fled the academy largely because of the issues being discussed today and I work with a non-profit called Equal Justice Works. I want to let this group know that a long



partnership with Newsweek.com launched a new alternative to rankings that speaks to student choice and decisions that users can themselves make about what's important to them in choosing a quality legal education and the best match for an individual students. It's called the E-Guide to Public Service at America's Law Schools and it is a database of information about public interest programs and curricula that is trying to provide apples-to-apples data, but in a context with narrative that helps people understand why information about clinical legal education or pro-bono programs or the cost of tuition vs. scholarships vs. loan repayment assistance programs is all relevant to making that choice. I commend Newsweek.com for being willing to experiment with an alternative to rankings. In this quest that we are all in to find better ways or additional ways to be providing information to those who are pursuing higher education. It's at [www.ejw.newsweek.com](http://www.ejw.newsweek.com)

CM: Do you show outcomes on bar exams?

Q: We don't have bar exam outcomes, but that information is available on the ABA's official guide to law schools. What we're doing is filling a void. With all due respect to Mr. Kelly, the criteria that is used in the U.S. News ranking completely ignores or undervalues, at best, information that we think is at the heart and soul of what is a quality legal education and what matters in the legal profession. Keep doing what you're doing and we need alternatives. The question, finally, is which academic association is truly working on creating those alternatives? The challenge has been made from the media, from academics, from consumers, from Mr. Miller and others to the Academy to come up with something better if you don't like what's currently available. So, AAU is studying it, but is there an association that's actually working on other means to present this data better and in a more accessible way, the kind of data that President McGuire says is available and on her website, but make it available in a way for people to use it.

PG: Other than the Washington Monthly, yes.

Q: And congratulations for producing alternatives.

CM: I'm optimistic because the associations have taken on that role in a statesmanlike fashion. NASULGC, which is represented here, ASCU, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, community colleges are on board now. Public universities are much more proactive because they're on the local level where there's a fair amount of demand and pressure and they're used to being out in the public, so it's coming. But also a lot of private universities, I think AACU, one of the liberal arts groups, has laid out a very, very strong set of ideas of what should be learned and how to measure it, not as much standardized testing in the traditional way. Then, a private university group, CIC has been very active in using the CLA and other things. I think we've hit the tipping point. There will be things that can stop you from the ultimate outcome, but I think the associations have been very fine leaders. The state higher education offices had an accountability commission two years ago that recommended some of the things we've talked about and they're very engaged. There's a fair amount of movement on this issue that we're talking about, which is a good outcome in the sense of where we are.

PM: I'd like to also mention that the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) has also collected a remarkable amount of accountability

information that is available on its Web site as well and NAICU is addressing these issues in a broad variety of ways. I also worked with the American Council on Education with AACU, which is the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the liberal arts college group, and the Women's College Coalition, which also does a vast amount of this work as well.

PG: Well, I think we've come to the end of our program. I'd like to thank everyone on the panel and the folks at Education Sector.