

The Public Good, Productivity and Purpose: New Economic Models for Higher Education

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About this Research

This paper is one of five in the *TIAA Institute Higher Education Series: Understanding Academic Productivity*, an initiative undertaken in support of NACUBO's Economic Models Project. That project was launched by NACUBO with the aim to provide colleges and universities with knowledge, ideas and tools to advance the difficult structural, cultural and political changes required for moving to more sustainable economic models. Given NACUBO's goal of offering thoughtful, objective and credible scholarship on the issues at hand, the TIAA Institute was a natural partner for the project.

This paper, written by Genevieve Shaker, author of a recent book on faculty and the public good, and William Plater, an emeritus provost and faculty member, explores the question of how to account for enhancement of the "public good" in the academic productivity equation. The authors address that question here from the perspective of institutional responsibility to deliver civic value; their companion paper, also a part of this series, looks at the issue from the perspective of individual faculty members. Their thoughtful work will help to enrich and elevate the complicated discussions surrounding academic productivity that senior campus leaders face.

About the TIAA Institute

The TIAA Institute helps advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in-depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies and maximize opportunities for success. To learn more, visit www.tiaainstitute.org.

About NACUBO

NACUBO, founded in 1962, is a nonprofit professional organization representing chief administrative and financial officers at more than 2,100 colleges and universities across the country. NACUBO's mission is to advance the economic viability, business practices and support for higher education institutions in fulfillment of their missions. For more information, visit www.nacubo.org.

Executive Summary

Tighter resources and greater public scrutiny of outcomes have caused institutions, elected officials and a spectrum of policy institutes to focus increasingly on doing more with less. What comprises “doing more” is part of the growing debate over priorities, and the question of where the public good fits into the use of resources both to achieve institutional mission and to ensure a civic return on the investment of public funds remains unresolved. This question about accounting for social productivity is addressed in two essays, this one focusing on the responsibility of *institutions* to deliver civic value based on the collective work of many individuals, and a second essay addressing how *faculty* in particular might be held accountable for individual contributions to the public good work of their employers.

Key Takeaways

- Serious discussion of new economic models for higher education must account for contributions to the public good.
- Contrived efforts to portray actual public good accomplishments in exclusively economic and quantitative forms hamper the development of an authentic understanding of the full range of work undertaken by educational providers.
- An integrated, methodologically diverse strategy for documentation and assessment of contributions to the public good is necessary.
- Because education is the one irreducible contribution all educational providers make to the public good, metrics to assess the public good necessarily must focus on educational outcomes, and civic learning specifically, at the institutional level.
- Civic learning is defined differently by its various proponents, but the U.S. Department of Education (2012) articulates most of the common features: “...we mean educational experiences that intentionally prepare students for informed, engaged participation in civic and democratic life by providing opportunities to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through learning and practice” (p. 1).¹
- Credible independent entity(ies) to assess and validate institutional claims for educational outcomes related to the public good need to be identified and built as necessary.

1. This “official” definition is drawn from *Advancing Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action*, which is representative of the reports cited in this essay.

Any opinions expressed herein are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of TIAA, the TIAA Institute or any other organization with which the authors are affiliated.

This paper is one in a series of five focusing on productivity and new economic models for higher education.

The series offers a deeply-informed review of the literature, a two-part examination of higher education’s contributions to the public good, an assessment of state-level efforts to measure productivity, and an in-depth description of a course-based tool to analyze costs.



How can the public good work of institutions be measured and related expenses justified?

What does productivity mean when applied to the public good?

Employability tilts the value scale toward private benefit and away from public good.

A shift too far puts the nation at risk, graduating workers and leaders who lack an adequate understanding of civic responsibility or the capacity to enact that duty effectively.

Context

As a 2016 American Council on Education (ACE)/TIAA Institute research paper succinctly summarizes, “Colleges and universities are under extraordinary pressure not only to produce more and better-trained, skilled graduates but also to do so with decreasing revenues“ (Soares, Steele and Wayt, 2016, p. 1). With pressure to reduce the costs of attendance for students combined with diminishing public support for higher education, attention among policy makers and institutional managers alike is shifting from revenue to expenses. New economic models focused on prioritizing the purposes of higher education and establishing corresponding productivity measures are necessary next steps (even if not sufficient) in preserving both viability and quality.

Amid this urgency and prioritization, how can the public good work of institutions be measured and related expenses justified? What does productivity mean when applied to the public good? And who among the stakeholders really cares about accounting for the public good in new models focused on efficiency?

First, what is the “public good”? The answer is complex and largely dependent on the perspective of those asking and answering, making it difficult either to model (and standardize) or to measure (and quantify), especially since the ordinary use of the term applied to higher education has evolved and come to be a proxy for contributing positively to societal well-being in many different ways. That said, most observers would accede at least to including these four elements in some combination:

- Educating for citizenship
- Educating for employment
- Creating knowledge that benefits all (without precluding commodification)
- Engaging with communities to improve the general quality of life for those in the community

However the public good is defined, “it” is presumed to be an important, perhaps necessary, purpose of higher education.

Why “It” Matters

The full complement of public good works of institutions matters, and nothing less than the preservation and advancement of an equitable, fair, just and prosperous American democratic society depends on the role of higher education in providing for the whole common good or—as the U.S. Constitution says, in promoting the *general* welfare. Even as the heavy finger of employability currently tilts the value scale toward private benefit and away from public good, a shift too far puts the nation at risk by graduating workers and leaders that lack an adequate understanding of civic responsibly or the capacity to enact that duty effectively in a globally interdependent world. Further, the commodification of knowledge may

produce economic benefits for some, yet do little for or even harm other members and aspects of the community—raising questions about equity.

As recently as 2011, a national task force called on “the higher education community—and all its stakeholders—to embrace civic learning and democratic engagement as an undisputed educational priority for all of higher education, public and private, two-year and four-year” (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, p. 6). If almost every college or university mission statement already contains some such “public good” language about graduating citizens and contributing to society, what would it mean if institutions were held accountable for producing evidence that they do, in fact, contribute to the public good? What among the four components of the public good outlined above are undisputed priorities?

The Case for Public Investments in the Public Good

All institutions, including those in the for-profit sector, share \$158 billion annually in the form of direct federal, state and local financial support (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015)—a contribution equal to nearly \$500 by every person in the United States. In addition, the federal government (as well as state governments) provides government-subsidized loans, another very large public investment; it is estimated that the federal government holds over two trillion dollars in student debt for some 22 million Americans, 43% of whom have not made a payment on their debt since January 2016 (Mitchell, J. 2016). The government’s stake in federally subsidized loans presents another compelling reason for accountability, transparency and productivity in higher education as a return on the public’s investment in all aspects of the public good.

Further, public and private nonprofit institutions enjoy tax benefits beyond receiving direct public funds because the educational purposes of colleges and universities “have been recognized in federal law as critical to the well-being of our democratic society...to maximize the benefits that they provide society, including: an educated citizenry which is essential to our democracy; a highly-educated, skilled, and productive workforce which is critical to our nation’s competitiveness; and new innovations and technologies that improve our quality of life, strengthen our security, and fuel economic growth” (American Association of Universities, 2013).

As the opening sentences of a 2015 American Council on Education (ACE) special report on the regulation of colleges and universities states: “The federal government’s substantial fiscal investment in higher education recognizes that postsecondary education is a linchpin in the nation’s social and economic strength. Through that support, the government helps ensure that colleges and universities continue to contribute broadly to the fabric of American society” (p. 1).

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For these and other reasons usually related to expected learning outcomes for graduates, many institutional and program accreditors ask institutions, even for-profit providers, to document a public good purpose: The Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), for example, requires each applicant to define “ways in which it contributes to the public good” (2016, p. 12). The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Commission asks each institution to have a mission that “addresses the needs of society” and a concrete purpose “to enhance the communities it serves” (2016), and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) requires as a core commitment that the institution’s mission “demonstrates commitment to the public good” (2016).

Not all program accreditors require such declarations, but many do and more are beginning to address institutions’ contribution to the public good as a serious matter beyond platitudes. The new Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) vision statement, for example, specifically “speaks to the need for the benefits of business to be experienced by the entire population, not a segment of the population at the expense of others” (2016, p. 12).

It is the rare higher education provider that does not avow as a central purpose a commitment to serving the public good. But it is an even more rare institution that explains how it determines if it is fulfilling this commitment. And rarer still if the institution relies on a standardized, quantitative method of measuring productivity with regard to its public good-related purposes.

Measuring the Public Good: Who, How, Why?

Many entities hold institutions accountable for serving the public good—largely driven by the aim to justify the public’s direct and indirect financial investments:

- Accreditors are beginning to pay attention to documentation of a public purpose.
- State commissions, governors and legislatures review the productivity of publicly-supported institutions, usually giving priority to economic returns such as employability, technology transfer or faculty time on task.
- Congress occasionally holds hearings on the public purposes of institutions, including how the tax-exempt status of their foundations and endowments serves a public good.
- The Department of Education audits the uses of federal funds and raises questions about the return on federal investments, now including evidence of gainful employment of graduates from for-profit providers.
- Policy institutes and employer organizations investigate and focus on learning outcomes and workplace readiness.
- Higher education associations publicize institutions’ community engagement and service.

- Media and select rating agencies occasionally consider the role of institutions in service to communities in their rankings.
- Trustees and institutional officials are concerned about all of the above in response to external expectations.
- Faculty increasingly use their annual reports to document personal contributions to the public.
- Students, in response to surveys, reflect their own experiences and expectations regarding community involvement, political participation and other forms of thinking about and acting for the public good.
- Alumni surveys ask graduates if their educations prepared them adequately for work, citizenship and achieving an adequate quality of life.

With so many curious and interested parties, why does there appear to be an element missing in *economic models* assessing the institutions' with regard to the public good? The answer, in large part, depends on the stipulation of what the public good outcomes of institutions should be and, of course, who is doing the stipulating.

Individual contributions are critical in accounting for the public good work of institutions that are expected to flow from public investments of resources, but it is the *collective* work of faculty, staff, students and others that provides the civic return on investment. And it is thus institutions that are accountable to the public, even as individuals may be accountable to their employers. Our companion essay addresses the role of individual faculty members in contributing to their institutions' public good work.

NACUBO initiatives on messaging and modeling have been sparked by the growing funding crisis for higher education (i.e., having to do more with less) and a desire to respond to a profoundly important issue: How higher education can “deliver on the wide-ranging societal expectations that we produce not only capable engineers, scientists, doctors, and social workers ready to move into the workforce, but also educated citizens ready to take on the significant economic, cultural, and societal issues we face as a nation” (Shea and Askin, 2015, p. 1). The widespread focus on educating citizens is both remarkable and critical.

As suggested by the preceding list of entities that might raise productivity issues related to the public good, there may well be some measures that transcend institutional purpose and type. The U.S. Department of Education, for example, requires annual financial aid and compliance audits to be conducted by independent auditors of *all* institutions receiving federal funds—which is almost every college and university in the United States.

Other measures are self-referential, elective or limited to a specific subset of institutions. Most institutions publish annual reports to their stakeholders identifying the ways in which they have contributed to their constituencies—local, regional, national and global—such

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as the University of North Carolina’s system-wide engagement report. One of the leading examples of elective measures is the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, which permits institutions to decide whether to submit their documentation—both quantitative and qualitative—to peer review in order to be formally “recognized.” Other measures that are mandatory but not universal include those that state agencies, such as the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (see Lumina’s policy series for information on Tennessee’s efforts), may impose on public institutions within their jurisdiction, requiring, for example, that they meet defined performance metrics related to completion.

The latest effort to justify and explain the value of higher education’s public good is the extensive project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences called the “Lincoln Project: Excellence and Access in Public Higher Education.” The fourth of five completed reports, subtitled *Serving the Public Good*, examines “the many ways in which public research universities contribute to their communities, states, regions, and the nation, and provides empirical evidence of their service to the public good” (2016a, p. 1). Ironically, the project is intended to make the case for funding public universities instead of articulating the public good the universities are intended to serve. As the project website states, “Ultimately, the project will encourage the development of new federal, corporate, and philanthropic sources of support to sustain public higher education in every state.” To be convincing to the public, however, new economic models might best begin by considering what it is that the public needs universities to do for the common good and general welfare. When the “public good” is cited principally as a reason for more funding, a skeptical public may reasonably ask how past investments have benefitted the public and not merely the interests and compensation of the beneficiaries of the public largess.

A similar effort to measure and account for higher education’s productivity is a series of ten essays in a recent Russell Sage Foundation report titled *Higher Education’s Effectiveness*, which looks at “how to make [colleges and universities] work better” (Brint and Clotfelter, 2016, p. 2), while acknowledging that “ideally, one might suppose that cost-benefit analysis could be employed to make decisions about how to invest resources to improve effectiveness, but that approach would require that outcomes be valued in dollars, surely a difficult trick to pull off for example in considerations of equity and public service” (p. 4).

Serious efforts have been undertaken to consider how to measure, assess and value the public good work of institutions and their faculty, staff, students and volunteers, but the means of doing so remain elusive. Indeed, a danger is that the contribution of higher education to the public good can be distorted by inadequate or contrived efforts to portray real accomplishments in exclusively economic and quantitative forms. Economic models for higher education need to be complemented with concepts of civic value, civic return on investment and civic productivity—all of which rest on a foundation of shared values that are widely accepted, yet are defined in the separate, nebulous imaginations of stakeholders.

Key Issues for Creating Economic Modeling of Public Good Productivity

If new economic models are to account for the value of institutions' contributions to the public good, the most likely candidates for addressing the broadest range of stakeholder interests center on documented competencies of graduates with regard to (1) workplace readiness; (2) citizenship preparedness; (3) contributions to economic development beyond workforce preparation; and (4) contributions to the general welfare of the communities (local to global) served by the institution through what has come to be labeled "engagement." Indeed, public funding and tax- exempt status most often are justified by these very outcomes.

Each of these domains of institutional public good work has leading models for reporting, assessing and even benchmarking public good productivity. The looming question is whether these approaches can be integrated into largely quantitative economic models that value and measure productivity: i.e., return on investment, or the rate at which desired outcomes are produced.

Measuring Education for Work

Stakeholders dedicate a great deal of thought and care to assessing student learning related to workforce readiness (especially among accredited and licensed professions such as engineering, medicine, law or accounting). Clearly both sustainable employability as well as effective citizenship are necessary for promoting the general social welfare. However, given the implications of student debt for both individuals, whose quality of life may be compromised by unwise borrowing, and an enabling public that funds students and the institutions that enroll them, work readiness, employment adaptability and adequate return on investment have become the focus of policy and legislation.

Although the public policy issue regarding work readiness remains highly contested, measures such as the College Scorecard, gainful employment regulations, licensure rates, completion indices and loan repayment are taking their place in economic models as proxies for workforce readiness and are complementary to program-specific accreditations, which always address employment skills and knowledge. Clear metrics available for measuring gainful employment include, for example: "(1) a debt-to-earnings metric, and (2) a program cohort default rate metric" (ACE, 2014, p. 1). Whether these or similar metrics might eventually be used more extensively to apply to all nonprofit and public degree programs (as well as those of the currently affected for-profit institutions) remains to be seen, but the public interest might best be served by requiring that all institutions, regardless of their status as profit, nonprofit, or public be subject to the same rules and expectations.

Accounting for contributions to the public good includes measuring...

Graduates' workplace readiness

Citizenship preparedness

Institutions' contributions to economic development

Contributions to the general welfare of local and global communities

Employers themselves are beginning to claim a role in assessing workplace readiness of graduates: a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report argues for a direct employer role in credentialing, noting that “employers could identify their preferred [educational] providers for use in public and private career guidance and information systems used by students and job seekers” (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016, p. 21).

Regardless of these clear metrics, the AACSB vision statement, for example, notes that “a wider range of accepted metrics of success should give schools more freedom to pursue strategies that support achievement of their core missions and purpose” (p. 17), and the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is “a tool for public institutions to demonstrate accountability and transparency, particularly in the areas of access, cost, student progress, and student outcomes” (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2016). Comparable reporting structures exist for nonprofit universities and community colleges. And new entities such as College Measures are being sponsored by foundations and states to provide detailed information to perspective students about how particular degree programs offered by specific institutions might play out in terms of earnings: “Our goal is to move the information out of these data warehouses and into ‘data storefronts’ in which performance metrics will be placed into the public square, allowing students, their families, and policy makers to get much better measures of the rate of return on their investment in higher education programs and institutions” (College Measures, 2016).

Do college graduates...

Vote?

Volunteer?

Serve on community boards?

Write opinion pieces for newspapers or social media?

Communicate with elected officials on matters of public importance?

Measuring Education for Citizenship

Although measures of citizenship evidenced by college graduates are largely absent from public and media consideration, they do exist. In 2015, Judith Torney-Purta and colleagues released a report through the Educational Testing Service that “presents a comprehensive review of existing frameworks, definitions, and assessments of civic-related constructs from approximately 30 projects relevant to higher education, and includes a discussion of the challenges related to assessment design and implementation” (p. 1).

Most rubrics for assessing civic learning make a distinction among civic knowledge, civic skills, civic values and civic engagement while viewing all four components as necessary for effective civic learning and for preparation of graduates to assume their responsibilities as citizens and workers. Acceptable evidence of students’ having acquired the knowledge, skills, values and experiences to be effective citizens will vary considerably among institutions, but common elements might include such direct evidence as voting, volunteering, serving on community boards, writing opinion pieces for newspapers or social media, or communicating with elected officials on matters of public importance; indirect evidence might be found in student work that analyzes different positions on conflicted public issues and takes a stand based on knowledge, values and experience, or a capstone project in the major that articulates why and how a profession can be self-regulating because of a duty to the public good.

Among the most relevant means of assessing and documenting citizenship readiness are:

The American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) VALUE Rubrics (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) serves this purpose broadly. In particular, the rubric for assessing civic engagement is designed to assess how well institutions prepare “graduates for their public lives as citizens, members of communities, and professionals in society” (2016b, p. 1).

Recently the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has augmented the AAC&U rubric with a second, parallel and related rubric focused on civic knowledge. Importantly, the state’s Board of Higher Education acted in May 2014 to require “campuses to incorporate civic learning as defined in this policy as an expected outcome for undergraduate students” (p. 4).

The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) sponsored by the Lumina Foundation includes a rubric for civic and global learning that sets forth expectations for student attainment at the associate, baccalaureate and master’s degree levels. It describes “in concrete terms how students demonstrate expected proficiencies across different degree levels and across the different elements of any degree” (2016, p. 6).

The “Civic-Minded Graduate” construct, developed at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, provides another tool for assessment of a students’ desire and capacity to work for the public good based on a tripartite assessment of identity, educational experiences and civic experiences (Steinberg, Hatcher and Bringle, 2008).

Although not as thorough as either the civic learning rubrics or the DQP, and less credible, there are several efforts to measure student learning related to the public good through proxy measures. *US News and World Report* provides a reputational ranking of service learning, for example, and *The Washington Monthly* “rates schools based on their contribution to the public good in three broad categories: Social Mobility (recruiting and graduating low-income students), Research (producing cutting-edge scholarship and PhDs), and Service (encouraging students to give something back to their country).” Notably, these media initiatives are intended to appeal to the general public and to influence families’ and prospective students’ decisions about college selection.

Still, colleges and universities that claim “credit” for educating effective citizens typically do so by making their case based on what Harvard (2016) and most others call the “transformative power” of the liberal arts and sciences—presuming at face value that the case has been made. Without evidence, the refrain has lost its power among a skeptical public that has long been inured to slogans. Further evidence is required.



Do U.S. college graduates think their education was worth the cost?

Do students graduate well-equipped to find good jobs and prosper financially?

Measuring Work and Citizenship

Workforce and citizenship readiness are connected. AAC&U, among others, leads the higher education community in expressing the linkage between a liberal arts education and the dual goals of citizenship and economic development, including workforce readiness. Through an umbrella project known as Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP), AAC&U provides a large array of tools to explain, measure and promote the role of liberal arts learning as the foundation for the public good, including by making an economic case (2016a).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) asks currently enrolled students to reflect on their education while they are experiencing it; results are meant to be used by institutions to better prepare students for work and citizenship. Nascent efforts are beginning to assess the impact of learning over time by asking alumni about the value of their education. The Gallup-Purdue Index (2016), for example, “examines the link between key college experiences and positive outcomes for alumni long after graduation” and “examines important questions such as: Do U.S. college graduates think their education was worth the cost? Do students graduate well-equipped to find good jobs and prosper financially? Do graduates leave school prepared to pursue their passions and lead healthy, fulfilling lives?”

Measuring Economic Development

Of the four distinct areas of higher education's public good work, its role—and success—in economic development is the most highly documented with regard to economic returns on investments. Indeed, many governors have explicitly called upon their colleges and universities to be the engines of economic development for their respective states, tying financial incentives to measurable economic gains, including direct advocacy for STEM fields and other more vocationally-related disciplines without regard for civic learning.

Because this domain is so widely acknowledged, it may be sufficient to cite the work of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) as representative of the large number of associations, think tanks, legislative offices and policy institutes that have sought to measure, assess and publicize the contribution of universities and colleges to economic success as a public good. APLU's Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness and Economic Prosperity created an economic engagement framework and developed specific tools to assist institutions in advancing their economic role. They offer four publications as institutional resources, including a *New Metrics Field Guide: Measuring University Contributions to the Economy*, the purpose of which is to help “leaders identify the right measures and indicators to use in evaluating the success of their economic engagement” and to “shape messages about the university's contributions to the economy, and to deliver those messages to key audiences” (2016, p. viii).

Elsewhere in the world, accountability standards are taking new forms in considering the public good contributions of colleges and universities. The U-Multirank (the European Union’s project to supplant the role of rankings and league tables), for example, includes a metric assessing engagement “by a university’s research publications having at least one co-author within 50 kilometres” of other authors as a way to link knowledge co-creation with the economic potential of the places where the university is located (Mitchell, 2016). Other regions are similarly developing their own indicators of how colleges are contributing to the public good. In a report titled *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good*, UNESCO has called for “going beyond narrow utilitarianism and economism to integrate the multiple dimensions of human existence” (2015, p. 10) in assessing and evaluating higher education’s role in a transnational public good.²

As it becomes more widely asserted, however, economic development, and more specifically the creation and use of knowledge for economic gain, is disputed as a moral issue with regard to the public good. Often termed “academic capitalism,” the tendency to emphasize the commercialization of knowledge detracts from the presumed public benefit of making knowledge available for the benefit of all. In a 2009 study titled *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades document the tendency of colleges and universities to shift “from a public knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime. The public good knowledge regime was characterized by valuing public knowledge as a public good to which citizenry has claims” (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2009, p. 28).

Most commentators have been content to let knowledge creation for both public and personal gain co-exist. With a growing emphasis on the commercial potential of knowledge and the profit-making role of educational institutions in the wake of the 1980 Bayh-Dole act of Congress, however, there comes a sharper critique of the purposes of higher education and the publics actually being served. Further, the Internet has ushered in an era of policy debate on open access with regard to publication and the sharing of knowledge, as well as the means of dissemination. Most public and nonprofit institutions are seeking a balance between the claims of public good and private benefit.

Ironically, for-profit institutions that are commercial by design may be offering a new pathway to reconciling money-making and the public good. A small but growing number of for-profit institutions are declaring a public good purpose and are taking advantage of a new “public benefit corporation” status now available in more than 30 states. B Lab, which certifies that such for-profit entities meet certain public good or public benefit standards, provides a set of supplemental policies designed specifically for higher education. Their assessment protocol has 46 “transparency” questions and focuses on four domains, of which learning outcomes are the most important: “Student outcomes comprise the most material portion of the [higher education] addendum, highlighting the significance of whether the institution produces positive results for its students” (2016, p. 3).

UNESCO suggests a broader approach to assess contributions to the public good, **integrating the multiple dimensions of human existence.**

Seeking balance



Public
Good

Private
Benefit

2. It should be noted that the UNESCO report makes a substantive distinction between the “public” good and the “common” good but for purposes of this report the terms correspond.

Measuring Community and Civic Engagement

Measurement of the fourth area of public good work—that is, institutional community and civic engagement—is as well developed and as prominent as is economic development. For many years, most institutions have produced reports or documents that detail their involvement in their communities, whether these be local, regional, national or international. Most often they appear as listings, much as the North Carolina report cited earlier. Michigan State University has developed a widely used tool “to assist the university community in planning, monitoring, and evaluating its outreach efforts [i.e., public good works through community engagement]” precisely because there is “a lack of adaptable models” for such assessments (2009, p. 3).

The most prominent and comprehensive assessment of community engagement is the self-study protocol developed for the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. The Classification’s documentation framework is globally one of the most robust sets of measurements, and other nations are experimenting with importing the framework into their own educational environments. While being classified, or recognized, is itself the overarching and summative productivity measure, the process of assembling both the qualitative and quantitative information required for the self-study involves multiple measures, including hours of community service, listings of faculty publications and other evidence that can be assessed based on specific criteria. B Lab certification is a similar standards-based third-party evaluation of productivity, albeit elective and currently used just by for-profits.

Most of the national higher education associations have some program for recognizing and celebrating community engagement. Among the more prominent are the Civic Engagement in Action series and the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the similar Democracy Commitment Project for community colleges. Campus Compact is a voluntary association of over 1,100 colleges that share a commitment to “develop students’ citizenship skills” and “forge effective community partnerships;” the organization offers a number of resources for documenting and assessing community engagement. The President’s National Service Honor Roll is a national recognition in four categories: education, economic opportunity, general community service and interfaith community service. Imagining America is another consortium dedicated to promoting the public good work of institutions with tools to “demonstrate, document, and assess the impact of democratic scholarship and cross-sector collaboration integrating humanities, arts and design.” And the list goes on. The number of well-researched, carefully-designed tools or protocols for assessing and valuing community engagement is staggering in both sheer quantity and variety or approach.

New Challenges

Amid the new challenges facing both policy makers and institutional leaders who would highlight the value of the public good work of institutions, four stand out:

- *The changing academic workforce*: The principal resource supporting all of the public good work is staff—mostly faculty—time. As the academic workforce shifts to a largely contingent and even part-time majority, one of the most important elements of institutional public good work is at risk because of the reduced capacity of faculty to allocate their time and effort to activities that enhance the public good. This concern has been thoroughly reviewed and assessed in *Faculty Work and the Public Good: Philanthropy, Engagement and Academic Professionalism* (Shaker, 2015) and documented through the Delphi Project at the University of Southern California.
- *Nontraditional providers of sub-degree education that may soon be eligible for federal funding for students*: Recognizing the inevitability of an expanded role for new providers, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) “will accelerate and evaluate innovation through partnerships between colleges and universities and non-traditional providers of education, such as intensive ‘boot camps’ building skills in particular fields, specific programs awarding certificates aligned to employer needs, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs);” the program will “waive certain provisions regarding federal financial aid in order to improve the results achieved with federal student aid dollars.”
- *The changing demographics of American society*: Equity, fairness and inclusiveness are all essential to attaining the public good, and yet higher education’s contribution to the public good—employability, civic leadership, commodification of knowledge and community engagement—can be (and often is) the basis for difference, segregation and disparity. Arguably, undereducated citizens and nonworkers cost the state more in terms of public services, lost wages and lost revenue—in other words, “lost economic productivity” (Bell, n.d., p. 2)—than it would to educate them. The public good is intended to consider what is good for the greatest number of people; likewise, one of the most important challenges now facing our society is consideration of the costs of *not* educating as many citizens as possible at the postsecondary level.
- *Development of clear, accepted measures independent of institutional mission and discretion (or type of governance) that “prove” the value of the investment in public good work*: Of all the challenges outlined here, none may be more difficult than creating productivity measures that could apply to all types of institutions (including new providers) across their diverse purposes, sizes and governance models, and yet respect the contributions of a rapidly evolving academic workforce that is no longer full time or traditionally credentialed, and may report to multiple employers.

In short, how can the complex public good work of higher education be made comprehensible to a distracted and impatient public, including those historically disenfranchised from and by higher education? Technology in general, and social media in particular, presents new forms of connectivity and engagement that may help to address these challenges, as they reshape our understanding of both “place” and community. Further, “big data” allows for using ever-increasing amounts of information in new ways to draw conclusions and model behavior, and as such has enormous potential for assessing the contribution of higher education to the public good.

New Economic Models and the Path Forward

Thus far, the most widely used aggregate measures of student success are retention and completion rates. But although these proxy measures still depend on institutional context, mission and reputation for meaning and value, they currently are considered sufficient for most accreditations and for federal financial audits when combined with data on student defaults on loans. However, graduation may say little about preparedness for work or citizenship unless the institution bases graduation (or progress toward completion) on assessment of each individual’s performance on established learning outcomes, such as those envisioned by the VALUE rubrics, the Degree Qualifications Profile or the Massachusetts civic knowledge rubric.

Civic learning must be measured and assessed.

Colleges and universities must be held uniquely accountable for their contribution to the public good, grounded in student learning and education.

As NACUBO, the TIAA Institute, Congress and others concerned with “the general welfare” of the nation help develop economic models to address the need to do more with less, the compelling conclusion of this study is that all viable models must include measures that address whether graduates (or completers of sub-degree programs) are attaining levels of learning necessary to be successful as productive citizens, and “to ensure that all citizens receive an education and gain the skills necessary to be employed and contributing members of society” (Bell, n.d., p. 4). The one irreducible public good purpose (and product) that all colleges and universities share is education. Many other actors can and do generate knowledge for the public good or contribute to a community’s quality of life without claiming an educational role. Colleges and universities, on the other hand, must be held uniquely accountable for their contribution to the public good, grounded in student learning and education.

Reflecting a growing consensus around this conclusion, the 2014 White House Summit on Civic Learning and National Service clearly stated:

Civic learning must be measured and assessed. Unless colleges and universities collect data and use it to improve programs and hold themselves accountable for results, civic learning will not be pervasively effective. Better measurement systems would also *demonstrate the value of civic learning for employment and thus mitigate the tradeoff between education for democracy and education for work* [emphasis added].
(Tisch College, 2014, p. 2)

Of the hundreds of reports on the public good produced in the last decade, nearly every one focuses on the nation's need to pay increased attention to the *outcomes* related to education for citizenship. These reports may not be prescriptive, but they are nearly uniform in calling for more information and better outcomes for preservation of the nation's democratic society, a fact of which NACUBO's project leaders have taken note in designing the Economic Modeling Project:

The project will neither attempt to resolve the public-good versus private-good debate about higher education, nor focus on institutions' revenues and who should contribute what shares. Rather, the project examines the effect of the current economic, political and social environment on colleges and universities, and examines the internal structural, operational and cultural variables critical to their success. (Askin and Shea, 2016, p. 21)

In essence, the models are intended to address how resources are *used*. One traditional and prevailing measure of success is how institutions define their own purpose and mission—and hence their own success. This appealing but limited definition begs the question of the public purposes of *all* institutions and whether or not they can be successful if they are not attending adequately and transparently to the civic learning, civic knowledge and civic participation of graduates—as assessed by an external evaluator.

The one measure to be asked of every institution that receives any form of public support—direct or indirect—is: *What evidence does your institution provide to ensure that graduates (completers) have the capacity to be competent local, national and global citizens in an interdependent world?* A follow-up question might be, what resources are devoted to achieving this goal?

Employers can ask for evidence of readiness for work. Stakeholder communities can ask for evidence of engagement and economic productivity. Students can ask for evidence that they are ready for work and citizenship. Trustees and fiduciaries of colleges can ask for evidence of their institution's providing civic value and a civic return on investments as forms of social productivity.

The looming policy question is who can hold institutions responsible for civic learning—and how. Who legitimately can ask for the evidence of graduates' readiness for citizenship, and who has the public's trust in their capacity to fairly evaluate the evidence free from ideology, politics and partisan beliefs?



What evidence does your institution provide to ensure that graduates have the capacity to be competent local, national and global citizens in an interdependent world?

By creating explicit measures of accountability for institutions under their jurisdiction, accreditors can externally validate institutions' contributions to the public good.

The next months or perhaps years will offer several important and wide-ranging venues for addressing these questions, including: a new Congress considering reauthorizing the Higher Education Act; a new President and administration charging the departments of the federal government with policy development and enforcement; new providers challenging traditional concepts of the forms of learning; states wrestling with where to invest their public funds; other nations competing economically with the United States to establish comparative metrics for student attainment; media and educational institutions gaining access to vast new “big data” sources of information; policy institutes floating de novo plans for the public funding of higher education (and students); and questioning of the role of self-regulating accreditation and quality assurance bodies.

As serious and responsible as institutions and providers may be in attending to policy issues surrounding their contributions to the public good—and in providing relevant evidence of institutional success—they too need an independent third party for validation. Who or what might that party be, and how might the public good be fairly and equitably measured?

The answers to these questions are best addressed in public debate with the airing of multiple perspectives and views. Third-party, independent validation already has begun to emerge in some states, which are creating explicit measures of accountability for institutions under their jurisdiction. As noted, accreditors may hold the key to verification if all seven institutional accreditors make explicit a requirement to document how the institution contributes to the public good and how it ensures that its graduates are ready for their public lives as citizens. Most, if not all, of the program accreditors that define expectations for independent, self-regulating professions might also explicitly state their expectations for civic-minded professionals. As the next Congress takes up reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, there could be room for adding a requirement for external validation that institutions that receive public funds serve a public purpose in verifiable ways.

The forms of evidence and the means of measuring and assessing the public good ultimately may be left to those institutions being held accountable—if all institutions are required to define the evidence by which they are willing to be judged within some broad, uniformly-applicable framework, such as the Degree Qualifications Profile, an enhanced Voluntary System of Accountability and/or a combination of the other tools described in this essay. The general public can then evaluate the public good of institutions both by their claims for their public purposes and by the evidence they purport to offer.

Individual Effort and Social Value

The individual contributions of faculty to the public good are inextricably intertwined with the institutions that employ them. Although there is general agreement that the cumulative and collective work of faculty and staff is the best means by which to consider the public good in economic models, institutions themselves rely on the activities and products of specific individuals. Moreover, growing skepticism about how much time faculty actually devote to education has led to calls for greater accountability at the more granular, individual level. As the need to do more with less transforms the professoriate into a largely part time and contingent workforce, individual faculty are losing much of the discretion that has allowed them to devote attention and effort to the public good. How these contributions might be measured and accounted for is the topic of the second of our two essays on the public good and productivity.



How much time and attention can a largely part-time and contingent workforce devote to the public good?

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