CONSUMERISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2010-2020 Public Attitudes Towards Higher Education

From “Squeeze Play 2010: Continued Public Anxiety on Cost, Harsher Judgments on How Colleges Are Run.”

- Six out of ten Americans now say that colleges today operate more like a business, focused more on the bottom line than on the educational experience of students.

- Two Colliding Trends:
  - A growing conviction about the necessity of a higher education for success in contemporary America.
  - The belief that just as college has become more and more necessary, it is becoming less and less available to many qualified people.
The vocation-focus of higher education has only increased, as have the levels of consumerism and social demand for education at the will and fingertips of the people.

“Students have become customers, and colleges have become vendors” (O’Meara, 2001). Students arrive on our campuses as consumers first and students second.

Student-customers rarely drive educational improvements because many are satisfied with the least demanding curriculum available for their dollar.
As public demand for access to higher education increases in response to increasing global competition, it is predicted that demands for public, data-driven forms of accountability will also increase.

The final report of the 2006 Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education recently echoed this trend by criticizing U.S. colleges for “a remarkable lack of accountability” and recommending the implementation of additional accountability reporting measures.
Excerpts from the National Education Technology Plan (2010):

- Technology-based learning and assessment systems will be pivotal in improving student learning and generating data that can be used to continuously improve the education system at all levels.

- The model of 21st century learning requires new and better ways to measure what matters, diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the course of learning...

- With assessments in place that assess the full range of expertise and competencies reflected in standards, student learning data can be collected and used to continually improve learning outcomes and productivity.
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Public anxiety has created two opposing concerns:

1. From the public:
   - Access
   - Value in terms of better life chances
   - Less demanding curricula

2. From the Government:
   - Accountability—evidence that colleges are about learning, not money
   - Value
   - More demanding curricula