

University to be early adopter of VSA College Portrait

by News Bureau - Friday, November 02, 2007

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/79/uw-oshkosh-to-be-early-adopter-of-vsa-college-portrait/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh will become an early adopter of a national tool known as the Voluntary System of Accountability's College Portrait, which is designed to assist prospective students in selecting a college or university.

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is a program developed to provide greater accountability by public institutions through accessible, transparent, and comparable information and is jointly sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and supported by a \$314,800 grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education. The College Portrait is a Web-based reporting system that provides a template for the communication of VSA accountability data to prospective students and their families.

"The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is pleased to be a leader in this endeavor," said Chancellor Richard H. Wells. "Defining 'quality education' is critical for the University of Wisconsin System to benchmark educational quality for the future. While we have some reservations about the need to improve the quality of the outcomes assessment tools, we believe the VSA College Portrait is an important step toward improving the transparency of data among public colleges and universities. Given the legitimate concerns with regard to the learning outcome assessment tools, we are very pleased with the recently announced news that Federal Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education has awarded a \$2.4 million grant for the improvement of learning outcomes/'gains' assessment tools."

The VSA College Portrait for each university participating in the program will include descriptive data about the university, its programs and the characteristics of its students; a mechanism for the students to calculate their estimated cost of attendance; various success measures such as graduation rates and continued enrollment of students who transfer into other universities; a measure of post graduation plans; direct learning outcome measurement of the value added by the university to undergraduates in the areas of critical thinking, analytic reasoning and written communication ability; indicators of the engagement exhibited by the campus's students in several strategic areas.

More than 80 higher education leaders from 70 public colleges and universities contributed to the development of the VSA program and data reporting template. Chancellor Wells chaired one of the three task forces that created the College Portrait template. Following the development of the template, Chancellor Wells met with University governance groups including the Faculty Senate, the Senate of Academic Staff, the Oshkosh Student Association and the Classified Staff Advisory Council, which have signaled their support for the University's decision to become an early adopter of the College Portrait.

According to AASCU, the VSA College Portrait arose following state fiscal crises in the 1990s that raised consumer concerns about the cost of higher education and education loan debt burdens for those who do not graduate. As a result, most institutions of higher education now provide information about

costs and are required by federal law to report six-year graduation rates for students.

That reporting has led to awareness that many students admitted to higher education institutions do not graduate. Combined with national concerns about U.S. competitiveness in an increasingly globalized economy, this has raised new questions about what value students receive from higher education. In addition there is frustration that while many institutions are providing information about costs and graduation rates, consumer comparisons are difficult at best.

As a result, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings convened a Commission on the Future of Higher Education. In August of 2006 this commission explicitly called for providing information that “allows comparison among institutions regarding learning outcomes and other performance measures.”

Responding to those facts, AASCU and NASULGC engaged in a joint effort to develop a Voluntary System of Accountability that addresses the new concerns about learning outcomes and comparability of information.

For more information about the VSA College Portrait, visit <http://www.uwosh.edu/chancellor/systemofaccountability/>