

Educational Improvement and Accountability in American Universities

1. Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to undertake an overview of the recent trends in educational improvement and accountability in American universities since 2006 and to explore the implications of these trends for higher education in Asia.

2. Spellings Report

In September 2006, a report by the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings was published. According to the Spellings Report improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the other reforms that the commission proposes. The report states that “Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a value-added basis that takes into account students’ academic baseline when assessing their results.”

3. “Our Underachieving Colleges” by Derek Bok

In 2006, Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, published a book titled “Our Underachieving Colleges” .

He examined the following 8 purposes of undergraduate education and pointed out the necessity of further improvement:

(1)Critical Thinking, (2)Learning to Think, (3)Building Character, (4)Preparation for Citizenship, (5)Living with Diversity, (6)Preparing for Global Society, (7)Acquiring Broader Interests, (8)Preparing for a Career.

4. Recent national studies on the assessment of student achievement

When we talk about building accountability in higher education,

we need to consider two levels. One is the classroom and department-program level, and the other is the institutional level.¹

The Association of American Colleges and Universities 「2008 VALUE Rubrics」 has been newly introduced at the classroom and department-program level. At the institutional level, the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) and Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education have gathered a considerable amount of student outcome data linking with teachers' practices and institutional environment.

5. Implications of educational improvement and accountability in Asian countries.

Rubrics: 「The VALUE rubrics」 were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from the faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptions demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. This can be one of the effective tools for the improvement of the student outcome.

Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education: This is a large-scale, longitudinal study to investigate critical factors that affect the outcomes of liberal arts education. The research is designed to help colleges and universities improve student learning and enhance the educational impact of their programs. This methods and results can be useful for liberal arts education in Asia.

Accountability: For example, in Japan, accountability to stake holders has been improved in terms of financial reports:, however there is a lack of sufficient accountability to taxpayers and local communities in terms of learning outcomes.

¹ Paris David (2009) 「Building Accountability in Higher Education」 pp.29