

Assessing the Impact of the Spellings Commission

*The Message, the Messenger, and the
Dynamics of Change in Higher Education*

SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

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Perceptions of the Spellings Commission Report and Recommendations Questionnaire¹

1. The date that this interview is taking place:

2. How familiar are you with the Spellings Commission, its Report and its recommendations?

- Not at all familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Very familiar

3. In your view, how significant is the Spellings Commission, the Report, and the recommendations to the future of higher education?

Not significant					Very significant
1	2	3	4		5

4. Overall, how has the Commission's work been perceived within the higher education community?

Very unfavorably					Very favorably
1	2	3	4		5

5. Based on your knowledge, how would you characterize the reaction of the following stakeholder groups to the Spellings initiative:

Very Negative reaction					Very Positive reaction	No reaction/ Don't Know
a. Faculty	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Administrators	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Boards	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Alumni	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹ Responses to the ratings scales were used to focus and guide the interviews, and as a guide in developing the summaries provided for each question. They were not used as a focus for analysis or statistical evaluation in their own right. For further information on the methodology used for conducting, analyzing or summarizing interview responses, contact: Dr. Brent D. Ruben, Rutgers University.

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e. Students	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Parents of students	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Public at large	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Congress	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. State governments	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Business community	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Media	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. How would you rate the overall impact of the Spellings Report and follow up activities by the Department of Education to date?

No impact					Substantial impact
1	2	3	4	5	

7. To what extent do you think each of the following factors has been significant in accounting for this impact?

	Not significant at all		Some significance		Very significant
a. Intensity of criticism and language used in the report	1	2	3	4	5
b. The approach, style, and/or critical comments of Secretary Spellings	1	2	3	4	5
c. The approach, style, and/or critical comments of Committee Chair Miller	1	2	3	4	5
d. Political pressure, including concerns about the party in power	1	2	3	4	5
e. Perceptions of the Bush administration	1	2	3	4	5
f. Perceptions of the "No Child Left Behind" program	1	2	3	4	5

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- g. The composition of the Commission

1	2	3	4	5
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- h. The facts and data considered by the Commission in making its recommendation

1	2	3	4	5
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- i. The way the Report was disseminated and publicized by the Commission/USDE

1	2	3	4	5
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- j. The approach, style, and/or critical comments from higher education national and regional associations and spokespersons

1	2	3	4	5
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- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Not significant at all | Some significance | Very significant |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------|

- k. Concerns about a potential loss of autonomy for higher education

1	2	3	4	5
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- l. Concerns that what was being proposed was a standardized “one size fits all” approach to assessing performance

1	2	3	4	5
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- m. Withheld signature by Commission member David Ward

1	2	3	4	5
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- n. The approach, style, and/or critical comments from higher education leaders at the institutional or campus level

1	2	3	4	5
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- o. Concerns about increased government intervention

1	2	3	4	5
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- p. Belief that the issues were already being adequately addressed by the higher education community

1	2	3	4	5
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- q. Publicity given to the Commission and related activities by the internet and electronic and print media (e.g., *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Chronicle*)

1	2	3	4	5
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8. Are there other factors that you feel were significant? If so, please name them.
-
9. The Report of the Spellings Commission put forth 6 recommendations. How important do you consider each recommendation to be for the future of higher education?

Not very important	Important	Very important
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- a. Improve preparation, address non-academic barriers, and provide significant increases in aid to low-income students

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1 2 3 4 5

b. Restructure the student financial aid system, and improve the measurement and management of costs and institutional productivity

1 2 3 4 5

c. Create a robust culture of measurement, accountability and transparency throughout higher education

1 2 3 4 5

d. Promote a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement in pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve learning

1 2 3 4 5

e. Develop a national strategy for lifelong learning to help citizens understand the importance of preparing for and participating in higher education throughout their lives

1 2 3 4 5

f. Increase federal investment in and efforts to attract the best minds to strategic areas that are critical to our nation's global leadership and competitiveness, such as science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions

1 2 3 4 5

10. A number of *specific changes* were proposed in, or inferred from, the Spellings Commission Report, among them, the following. For each, please indicate how important you believe it is for advancing excellence in higher education.

Not
important

Important

Very
important

a. Giving more attention to assessing learning outcomes

1 2 3 4 5

b. Changing the system of financial aid

1 2 3 4 5

c. Developing external measures and/or peer comparisons to assess learning outcomes effectiveness

1 2 3 4 5

d. Developing external measures and/or peer comparisons to institutional effectiveness

1 2 3 4 5

e. Clarifying institutional, general education, and major/programs teaching/learning goals

1 2 3 4 5

f. Enlarging the scope of accrediting agencies and the accrediting process to include more attention to institutional and learning assessment and outcomes

1 2 3 4 5

g. More clearly communicating indicators of institutional and learning outcome performance to present and prospective students, parents, and the public

1 2 3 4 5

h. Developing more standardized approaches to data reporting for colleges and universities

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1 2 3 4 5

i. Standardizing approaches used by colleges and universities relative to the transfer of credit

1 2 3 4 5

j. Devoting additional attention to assessing and improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of college and university operations

1 2 3 4 5

11. *Thinking particularly about your institution (agency, association) what has been the reaction to the recommendations of the Spellings Commission?*

Very unfavorable reaction	1	2	3	4	5	Very favorable reaction
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12. Can you describe your institution’s (agency’s, association’s) reaction more specifically?

13. Has your institution (agency, association) responded through a formal statement or response? If yes, what positions/points did the statement make/take? Please provide a brief summary of the major points. Can you provide a copy?

14. Has your institution (agency, association) undertaken or accelerated any initiatives (e.g., task forces, committees, or improvement initiatives) to address any issues raised or reinforced by the Spellings Commission Report? Select all that apply. Have you:

- Reviewed/refined approaches to assessment of student learning
- Undertaken or refined approaches to benchmarking or peer comparisons
- Developed or modified approaches to data collection and dissemination
- Reviewed/refined approaches to transfer or credit
- Other (please specify)

15. Did your institution (agency, association) initiate or actively participate in efforts to support, challenge or refute the directions, specific proposals, or initiatives advocated by the Spellings Commission or related follow-up activities by the Department of Education?

Yes No

16. If your institution, association or agency initiated or actively participated in such activities, what was your rationale for this decision?

17. How would you rate the impact and/or effectiveness of your efforts?

Very little impact	1	2	3	4	5	Very strong impact
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18. Please explain why you rated the impact and/or effectiveness of your efforts as you did.

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19. People have pointed out that many of the issues raised by the Spellings Commission are not new. Other commissions, the Kellogg Commission, for instance, and various authors within and outside higher education have pointed to many of these same issues in recent years. Why do you think *this* initiative and Report have garnered the visibility and vigorous response that they have?
20. In your opinion, to what degree did the work of the Commission, and the reactions and responses to it, lead to lasting change within higher education?
- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| No or very
little change | | | | Significant
lasting change |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
21. If you believe the work of the Commission will lead to lasting change, to what extent will the change be favorable or unfavorable for higher education?
- | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| Very
unfavorable | | | | Very
favorable |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
22. What lessons about the dynamics of change within higher education can be derived from this case?
23. Looking back, what thoughts do you have about other ways the higher education community (associations, agencies, institutions) might have responded to the changes being recommended by the Commission or follow-up efforts by the Department of Education?
24. Looking back, what thoughts do you have about other ways the Spellings Commission and/or the Department of Education could have promoted the changes being proposed?
25. How would you describe your role?
- Administrator/staff at a college or university
 - Administrator/staff at an accrediting organization or agency
 - Administrator/staff at a higher education association
 - Administrator/staff at a governmental agency or organization
 - Faculty member
 - Other, please specify
26. What is the length of your career to date in higher education?
- Less than 1 year
 - 6-10 years
 - More than 15 years
 - 1-5 years
 - 11-15 years
27. Please indicate the geographic region associated with your association, agency, or institution.
- West
 - South
 - Nationwide
 - Midwest
 - New England
 - Southwest
 - Mid-Atlantic

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28. For colleges and universities, please indicate the size of your institution.
- Less than 2,000 students
 - 2,000-5,000 students
 - 5,001-10,000 students
 - 10,001-15,000 students
 - 15,001-25,000 students
 - More than 25,000 students
29. For colleges and universities, please select the term which describes your institution.
- Public
 - Private
 - For-profit
30. For colleges and universities, please indicate whether yours is a 2 year or 4 year institution.
- 2 year
 - 4 year

Summary of Interview Responses

PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

Thirty-six individuals were interviewed for this study.² This includes 4 members of the Spellings Commission; 2 Department of Education representatives; 4 higher education association presidents; leaders of three accrediting associations; presidents or chancellors of two public university systems, three liberal arts colleges, and one community college; 3 chief academic officers; 14 chief business and administrative officers; and editors of two higher education publications. The majority of those interviewed have worked in higher education for more than 15 years. Presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers, and chief business and administrative officers work in diverse types of colleges and universities: public and private, with student bodies ranging in size from less than 2,000 to more than 25,000, and in every region of the U.S.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

1. The date that this interview is taking place.

Interviews were conducted from July 2007 through December 2007.

2. How familiar are you with the Spellings Commission, its Report, and its recommendations?

Overall there were 36 participants in the study. Out of that number 24 indicated that they were very familiar with the Spellings Commission, its Report, and its recommendations. Twelve respondents said they were somewhat familiar. This signifies that the respondents were indeed knowledgeable about the Spellings Commission, its Report, and recommendations.

²Two members of the Spellings Commission also had responsibilities in public agencies; their interview comments were organized and presented in this study in a manner that reflects these two roles. For the purpose of summarizing the characteristics of the interviewees, they are counted in both categories.

3. In your view, how significant is the Spellings Commission, the Report, and the recommendations to the future of higher education?

The general sense among all of those interviewed was that “the Commission, the Report, and the recommendations are, indeed, quite significant to the future of higher education. There are, however, a variety of perspectives and points of view on the topic.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of those interviewed who represent the perspective of the Commission and the Department are very positive in their assessment of the significance of the initiative. One Commission member who rated the initiative as very significant explained it this way, “I’d say on a relative basis [of] what a commission like this can do, [and given the goals of the Secretary] I’d have to give it a high score.” Said another Commissioner, “I think it’s extremely important [because it prompted] a conversation that this country really needs—not just for the citizenry, but for our economy.” Offering a qualified endorsement, another Commissioner said, “It’s been very influential, but in a rhetorical way [rather] than a pragmatic way. One Commissioner expressed a very different view, “I don’t think the Report itself is significant at all. I don’t think people are reading it. We might have been very close to producing a really... interesting, important result, [but that didn’t happen].”

Those who look at the work of the Commission from the perspective of higher education associations and agencies had quite similar views. One person asserted that “this is the single most significant look at higher education... in 20 something years.... I think it’s been very significant... but you know I don’t think it’s changed the enterprise overnight. I do think that it’s had, at least to date, [a] major impact on the conversation and what people are doing...” Said another, “I [consider the initiative to be] very significant, but not everyone agrees with me.” While many others who were interviewed do agree with these sentiments, there were also several individuals in this group who consider it to be only moderately significant—and one who considers it to be minimally significant.

Among institutional leaders, the perceptions are quite similar. One system-level administrator put it this way, “I think [the Report] provokes—and ‘provokes’ may be the right word—important conversation about how we should improve higher education. And I like the fact that it deals with accountability and transparency and also outcomes and the improvement of data. It’s caused all of the national groups to give some thought to this and I think it reflects the great concerns that we have in the country about higher education, about access, [and] affordability, and I think all of us need to find ways to address some of these issues.”

Commented one chief academic officer, “I think this has the potential for really changing the landscape of higher education in this country.... We don’t know where it is going, but it reflects an attitude that is very pervasive and is not going away about the perceived lack of accountability for higher education, and ... we’re going to have to deal with this.... I see this in Washington and also in [the state capitol].”

A chief business officer, who sees the Report as very significant, explained that “... [it is an example] ... a symptom. It doesn’t stand alone. It follows a series of examples of the uneasy partnership between the federal government ... [of] society and higher education, which is troubling What it reflects is a less-than-complete level of confidence in what we do and how we do it, and we should figure out how to respond.... The [commission] used the terms ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ almost interchangeably. At least on the transparency side of it ... we do a lousy job. That’s hurting us because we think we have a good story to tell.” Said another, “I would [consider it to be] very significant if the community is able to implement some of [the recommendations].”

Several senior institutional leaders said they consider the Report and recommendations to be only moderately significant. One business officer who has this view said, “I don’t know how important the Report will be actually in terms of public policy It seemed like there was tremendous flurry initially... [but then activity seems to have dissipated] a little bit... and... we are towards the end of the Bush administration, so I don’t know whether it is going to be transformational in terms higher education.” Several others expressed the view that the issue of significance comes down to how it [will be] embraced by the higher education community and the government.

Interviewees from higher education media who have been close to the work of the Commission were mixed in their assessment of the significance of the initiative, noting also that it may be five years before it is possible to address this issue meaningfully.

4. Overall, how has the Commission’s work been perceived within the higher education community?

These observations were borne out in responses from interviewees, who believe that overall, the Commission’s work was perceived unfavorably—with cynicism and annoyance—by many, but not all, within the higher education community. It appears that the harshest reaction came from the Washington-based higher education organizations, where the responses from the six associations of university presidents and many other

associations and agencies were described as being “considerably more negative than in other parts of the higher education community”—ranging from “skeptical” to “openly hostile.” Reactions were perceived to be less extreme, wider ranging, and more balanced among system and institutional leaders—depending to some extent on institution type. Unique personal perspectives of the individuals involved also accounted for some differences. While both campus academic and business leaders had a similar range of views, perceptions were seen as being generally more negative on the academic side. Some of those interviewed acknowledged that embedded amidst some of the negative reactions there is also the awareness that elements of the Report address what are believed to be important themes.

Most members of the Commission perceive that their Report was received in a fairly negative way by the higher education community. One Commission member offered the following comments: “I think it was received with a certain amount of skepticism and cynicism—some of it justified.... There’s a high level of defensiveness in the academy, and a certain amount of ‘leave us alone we know what we’re doing... the best in the world, just send us the money.’” This Commissioner went on to elaborate the view that the Washington-based higher education associations were considerably more negative than other parts of the higher education community: “... [We have heard] much more encouraging responses... in more private conversations. I think some of the ... associations were either skeptical or even openly hostile. I don’t think the people in Washington necessarily represent the views of many of [their] members.... I think they’re there to create the level of anxiety that they create in order to justify their own existence or to show what they’re doing. I think that’s true of most interest groups in Washington or state capitols.... I think they... strongly overreacted... [even] before anything was even talked about or done.... [The associations] represented the [formation of the Commission as implying the] federalization of higher education.... [and also described what was being proposed using] the code phrase ‘ministry of education,’ [which] is one of the most incriminating terms you can imagine. I think it’s a signal. I think it’s hostility. I think it’s uncalled for. I think the fact that the people in the academy ran to Congress to solve something, looking for a federal solution for something that they’re supposed to be responsible for indicates what that means... propaganda.... I’m not interested in federal imposition of those things.”

Echoing one element of this sentiment, another Commissioner said the Report is fairly well received in the higher education community at large, but much less so within higher education associations.

Another Commissioner offered the following observations: “First it was perceived with dread, then with caution. And now most people know... it’s sort of like a kidney stone: it too has passed.... The question that comes up on various

campuses is, ‘What are you doing about the Spellings Commission?’” According to this interviewee, the typical answer is very interesting, “The cabinet talked about it for ten minutes and decided it didn’t matter and we went on to the business at hand.... I think it’s a lost opportunity. I think the Commission and the fact that it existed and the kind of people who signed up to be on it is very important and very revealing.... [It] does say there is out there this sort of mood that we need to pay more attention to higher education.... I think... the real contribution of the Spellings Commission [is that it] got people talking inside higher education about higher education. The irony of it is, it didn’t get people outside higher education talking about it.... I didn’t see any press except the *Chronicle* and *Inside Higher Education*.”

Leaders with the Department of Education offered the observation that there are individuals and groups who have been supportive, more often in private conversation than in public. “If you look at the dissemination of the Report... over 12,250 copies have been disseminated [as of August 2007]. And so [while some] people are publicly decrying some of what we’re after, it is being widely read.”

Another person sharing a similar perspective offered the following comments, “It’s interesting that what you hear most is the people that have concerns about it... and say the tone was not right. [Then there are the] people that say that we’re mandating a federal approach to higher education and the secret to our success has been the absence of federal intrusion and the freedom that they’ve had. [However, people] wouldn’t be [able to do] a lot of what’s happening [if] the federal government... wasn’t interested in higher education, and on occasion we do hear from the people that let us know... that what we have said was right on... and we’re glad that they do. We hear it privately a lot.”

One association leader characterizes the distribution of reactions as “bipolar.” “There is a group of people who viewed it favorably to very favorably, and probably an equal number who put it unfavorably to very unfavorably. I would say to you that people involved in the coordination of higher education and system heads, viewed it as very favorably.... most public university presidents viewed it favorably and most private institutions, well heads, viewed it very unfavorably. It was the privates in my judgment that probably had the most disfavor with the Report altogether.” Noted one individual, while in general, the higher education community has reacted very unfavorably, “there’s a recognition that there’s some value there.”

Another association leader offered the following observations, “I’d say for the most part, [the Commission is viewed] pretty negatively. I think that the community, in general, believes that the Commission was not able to offer recommendations that reflected the point of view of the community.... This isn’t me speaking, [but] what members of the community think. [It’s not] realistic about what higher

education and what accreditation, for example, can do in the near term. I think that folks in the community perceived the Commission as pretty much having its mind made up about the problems of higher education even though the Commission ... acknowledged in ... many instances the importance and value of higher education. There was very strong reaction to a number of the Commission papers. I think folks think the Commission was created with a bias, was carried out with a bias, and thus the recommendations of the Commission are not on sound footing. And then there are lots of other comments about whether or not they're realistic, could be implemented, make sense, 'what's the cost/benefit?', and 'what's the price for these recommendations?' [Personally], I think that the Commission was a political creation, and I think that's fine. I think that's what politicians do. I think that a number of the issues that the Commission pushed, were issues that we all know we need to address... It's easy if we're an expert at it in the higher education community to attack any argument or any set of conclusions that point to limitations. So ... maybe my expectations were different from some other folks, but I thought they were doing what they were created to do. I didn't always like it, without question, I disagreed, but I didn't generally react the way most of the other folks did."

Commented another higher education association/agency leader, "I think it's very mixed.... It seems to have had a very polarizing effect, and I think some people view it very favorably and other people view it very unfavorably." Another interviewee said simply, "I think relatively unfavorably."

Interestingly, one Washington-based leader offered this observation, "If you're talking about the higher education community [as a whole, I think they were received quite positively]." He/she noted, however, that viewed from the perspective of the kind of reactions that he/she has seen in his/her association ... the response was very unfavorable: "My community... [and] all my board... would be on the unfavorable side."

Most of the presidents and chancellors interviewed felt that, in general, the Commission and its work had been received quite negatively. In several cases, they personally had a different view. Commented one interviewee, "... [While I believe that a number of the national organizations and private institutions had negative views, as a system head, I looked upon it favorably because it was [asking the] right questions ... and I think some other system heads ... members of the State Higher Education Executive Officers did too."

Echoing a similar view, one president commented, "[I] personally... thought the Report... brought forth [some] major elements... and gave them a level of urgency, and pointed out that unless we really do something that basically the future of the nation is at risk. So, I think the Report did an excellent job."

The variability across institutional types was emphasized by a chief academic officer who said, "... [The response] varies from one extreme to the other.... Some elements in higher education... like it very much, and I would say that most [in research universities] don't care much for it at all." Another chief academic officer described the reaction of the higher education community as ranging "from apathy to annoyance. As an administrator I've feared it and I rarely get comments. I mentioned it at the... when it first came out last September. A year ago I shared it with the president's cabinet and they were not academics and they sort of looked at it, shrugged their shoulders, and shared it with the faculty and got basically no reaction.... People are just kind of [saying], 'Okay let's wait and see what happens next.'"

Reflecting a somewhat similar point of view, a chief business officer said, "My sense is that it wasn't taken very seriously by anybody... although there's a lot of variation there in terms of what individual people think and what they think about particular parts of it." Another business officer said, "At my university I think it's been viewed skeptically."

A president remarked, "Well I just think higher education has an almost instinctive negative reaction to any governmental whiff of change or regulation. And I think you're seeing that in a lot of the commentary. I think that there's some good stuff in the Report, but that's being kind of glossed over. People are really concerned with which direction the federal government is going.... The accrediting agencies have certainly had a very swift instinctive negative reaction as well."

Another president commented that "Clearly there's a negative reaction from traditional academe saying that these people are out to regulate us and impose NCLB [No Child Left Behind] on colleges and we don't like it because we think we're smart enough to do it ourselves."

Several other interviewees commented on the "mixed reviews" that the Report has received. "At my university I think it's been viewed skeptically, although I think many of the recommendations in there are being embraced by our governor and the direction she is steering higher education in the state."

Others who have been close to the unfolding events of the Commission reflect a similar perception. Both believe that the initiative was received unfavorably by the higher education community in general, though one person notes that "I guess it also depends how you define 'the higher education community.' I actually think there are parties within what I would define broadly as the higher education community that are on board. You talk to [the leadership from organizations concerned about higher education costs, some of whom were former leaders in higher education associations], and some are quite critical of their former colleagues at One DuPont Circle. I would consider [such individuals to be part of] the com-

munity. It is indisputable that the loudest opposition has come from the private colleges, defined broadly, although even there I think there are voices within the private college community that aren't quite as shrill as some others. I think that [I and others] may listen... too much to a small number of loud voices. I guess when I've been out in the field... there's more of a recognition that the [issues the Commission] raised are real. I'm not always sure that [this fact] is well represented with the associations and agencies, nor fully reflected in my own coverage."

5. Based on your knowledge, how would you characterize the reaction of the following stakeholder groups to the Spellings initiative?

The perception of the overwhelming majority of study participants is that faculty members may be largely unaware of the Report, but those who have become familiar with it have a particularly negative reaction. To some extent this is seen as the result of faculty not having been more directly involved in the deliberations of the Commission.

In characterizing the reactions of higher education administrators, interviewees offered varied assessments, but generally believe that this group has reacted much more positively than faculty.

Study participants were mixed in their views about how boards reacted to the Report. Many believe that boards are generally positive; some feel boards may be disinterested; some indicate they have no clear sense one way or another.

Many of those interviewed expressed the view that alumni are largely unaware of the Commission. While most students, parents, and members of the general public are perceived to have little knowledge of the Commission or its Report, the issues addressed are seen by study participants as clearly resonating with the concerns of each of these groups.

There is a consensus among those interviewed that members of Congress are well aware of the Report. Characterizing their response is a bit more problematic, but there is a general sense among study participants that, public political posturing notwithstanding, there is a level bipartisan support for many of the issues addressed by the Commission. State governments, similarly, are seen as being positively disposed toward the issues addressed by the Commission.

The business community is viewed as perhaps the constituency that is most positive in its response. The media are generally viewed as neutral, but because they tend to focus on controversy, give visibility to particular issues that encourage (according to some interviewees) or undermine (according to others) support for the directions being advocated by the Commission.

Faculty

The perceptions of the Commissioners are that faculty members, in general, have been quite negative in their reaction to the Report. One Commissioner explained that, in part, this may be the result of not having more faculty members directly involved in the work of the Commission. He/she believes that as faculty members are learning more about the concerns being voiced by various constituencies, they have become increasingly attentive to the issues raised by the Report. Another Commissioner echoed this same sentiment, “The issue with the faculty probably more than anything else is that they were not engaged on the front end. We had a really tough time reaching out to faculty; they are so spread out.... Their concerns about their lack of involvement were justified.” A third Commissioner expressed the view that faculty members generally “don’t know about it.... It’s not on their radar screen other than programs in education. You talk to a physicist or a sociologist—they don’t know who Spellings is.... They might know she’s the Secretary of Education, but they wouldn’t know very much about the Commission. And actually [the Report] had very little to say about either knowledge or the disciplines....” Reflecting a similar view was a Commissioner who said, “The faculty are completely clueless,” and another who believes that faculty had no reaction.

Interviewees from the Department of Education perceived the initial faculty reaction to be quite negative, and they shared the view that this may be partially due to the fact that they weren’t involved directly in the work of the Commission. “We tried to work through other groups and it wasn’t until we hit on the academic disciplines and... personally made some contacts that we were able to actually reach faculty. And once we were able to include them, it really [improved] their response and buy in. It started out horribly and once we got in touch with them it [improved].” There is also a feeling that “the spin that’s been put on [the initiative, that it’s about] ‘what we’re trying to do to them’ [added to the negative reaction by faculty].... If they’re negative, that just tells me we’ve got some work to do [to explain why the issues being raised by the Commission and Department are important ones].”

The overwhelming majority of leaders from higher education associations shared the view that the faculty reaction has been negative. One interviewee said simply, “[My perception is that faculty are] very, very negative.” A number of others, however, said faculty don’t know much, if anything, about the initiative: “I think most faculty don’t know what in the world was going on. And that’s not a criticism of them, but as I travel and I make speeches and all this... not very many faculty [are] clued into this. They... [see] it as something that was going on in Washington, and ‘a lot of things go on in Washington, and so what?’”

A similar view is expressed by college and university leaders, who see faculty as either uninformed or negative. One chief academic officer expressed it this way, “I think the faculty are not sufficiently... aware of Spellings. They have a kind of superficial awareness of what’s going on and maybe a few of them have read one thing or another, whether it’s in the newspapers or the *Chronicle*, but they’re not well educated and they don’t have a sense of how potentially intrusive [it might be] ...” A chief academic officer who participated in the study sees their perception of the Report as quite negative... “because it’s obviously seen as government intrusion into education.” Reflecting a similar perception was an academic officer who noted that faculty members he/she had talked with were quite negative in their reaction. By way of contrast, one institutional leader observed, “I think faculty members that really understand the issues probably would support it.”

One chief business officer offered the following observation: “I think faculty are... are a little more cynical about this than other groups are... I’m not sure that accountability and change are always things that a lot of faculty have comfort with, at least in my perspective. Obviously that’s a generalization, but I would say that there’s probably more cynicism among the faculty than... among the administrative groups.... The group on our campus that has probably been the least receptive or the least interested has been the faculty.” Another campus leader put it this way, “I would say... faculty who know anything [are quite negative]. But of course for the vast majority they don’t actually know what it’s about... I think a majority have heard the words [Spellings Commission], but [little more].”

Several campus leaders—particularly chief business officers—said they do not know how faculty have reacted. “I don’t think I can give you a judgment regarding faculty—I don’t know.” Another chief business officer commented, “I might have conjecture, but no data to support it. I would imagine the faculty don’t like it... because I think they [would conclude from the Report and communication about it that the Commission didn’t] seem to respect the role of faculty, and... I don’t think a lot of faculty perspectives were brought to the table. So if I were on the faculty, I’d probably be more critical of it for that factor myself.”

Another interviewee said he/she thought faculty was the group that was most negative. But “that is... in part, for some legitimate reasons. I think the Commission largely ignored the role of faculty. To the extent it addressed the role of faculty at all it was often from a critical perspective—not teaching enough. And I can’t remember how much of that is reflected in the final Report, but in a lot of the conversations and some of the issue papers the faculty took some pretty good hits. So I think the faculty may have responded most negatively, in part, because I think it was treated pretty negatively by the Commission.”

Administrators

In characterizing the reactions of higher education administrators, Commissioners offered varied assessments, but generally believe this group has reacted much more positively than the faculty. One said, “There are pockets [of administrators] where we have tremendous advocates... [because] many, I think are... trying to do innovative things within their own systems—whether it’s the chancellor with several institutions or the president.” Another said, “That’s the group that I characterized as being first in dread, then cautious, and then realizing it didn’t matter.” A third commented this way, “I think... most administrators... felt it was a threat to the historic relationship between government and higher education.”

Department of Education interviewees perceive administrator reactions are more supportive of the directions of the Report than are faculty reactions. One observation was “I’m finding ... that a lot of people quietly call us and say ‘stay on it,’ but then publicly, for whatever reason, just ride the wave.... If I just look at the bloggers on the two higher education publications, there are a lot of people who [report that they are] doing things that we’ve suggested... and [in their comments they] hold others accountable when they try to obfuscate.”

Leaders from higher education associations and accrediting agencies see a similar range of reactions among campus administrators. One person expressed the view that “administrators have more positive reactions than faculty because I think administrators see more of the problems [with higher education].” Commented a chief academic officer, I think administrators... in public higher education would be positive about it. Another responded this way, “Administrators were more clued in, but for the most part have it compartmentalized as a Washington issue” that might or might not affect them. “You know, ‘there’s always a lot of hot air that comes out of Washington. Here’s another Commission. Big deal. Is anything really going to happen here?’” Reflecting a similar view was the observation by another association leader: “I think most of the administrators are close enough to see some of the flaws that [The Commission] point[s] out. But at the same time [the Commission] just didn’t deal with the response of the academy or with the richness of it, the research that we generate, etc. And I think that limited the positive view of administrators.”

One association leader perceives the reaction among campus administrators to be very negative. “I think there’s a strong feeling that... the Secretary viewed [the recommendations put forth by the Commission] as her agenda and she was prepared to [try to implement] this agenda. I think... most administrators... felt [this would be] a threat to the historic relationship between government and higher

education.” Pointing to the differences in perspective that result from the “sector” of higher education from which one comes, one interviewee said, “I come at this from the for-profit center, and I would say that for-profit administrators probably think it’s a good report, but administrators in other centers of higher education probably don’t view it very favorably.”

Not surprisingly, college and university leaders see their colleague academic and business administrators as having a range of responses to the Report. Commented one senior academic administrator, “Most administrators that I know on the academic side are pretty well aware and have a great deal of concern. Certainly in the groups where I see E-mail traffic—the academic leaders [of peer institutions] and what I hear from [our representatives in Washington]—there is a high level of awareness and concern. One business officer commented on the differences between the response of an academic leader and the business leadership on his/her campus, “Well, I’ve had discussions about this with our Provost. We are at very different ends of the scale [in our reactions]. So I would think that from an administrator standpoint the more academic [one’s role] is, the less positive [the Report is perceived to be]. But then on the side of those that aren’t academic, I would think [reactions are] very positive.” And indeed, many business officers were somewhat positive. “Again from the institutions I know... there’s been much more of a willingness to think and listen and agree in many respects.” Another study participant responded: “... [The Commission] hit the nail on the head on some things, but were overly critical on some.... I read the first draft and I didn’t read the last draft. And I thought it was a bit overly critical [but probably] just what we needed—a kick in the butt....”

But not all business officers share this view. One said, “My experience with administrators, broadly defined, is people don’t like the tone, they don’t like the ‘federalization thing,’ efforts to provide assurances [by the Department] notwithstanding. If you start unilaterally declaring stuff, that is federalization, no matter what words you want to use... how we use the vocabulary has a huge affect on how... [messages] affect us.” Another chief business officer sees the initial response as being quite negative among his/her administrative colleagues: “Those that have noticed it... with a knee-jerk reaction... [have reacted] unfavorably.”

Both of the senior journalists who were interviewed perceived there are a broad range of reactions among campus administrators, with views on either side balancing one another. Both perceive the reactions of administrators, overall, to be somewhat negative.

Boards

The Commissioners in the study were mixed in their views about how boards reacted to the Report. Some believe that boards are generally positive; some feel boards may be disinterested; some indicate they have no clear sense one way or another. One Commissioner noted that it depends greatly on whether the boards are of public or private institutions, with boards of public institutions being more positive in their reaction than those of privates. “[Boards of public institutions] are not selected to necessarily represent the institution,” where boards of privates may see the Report as having the potential to undermine their own authority.

Study participants from the Department of Education describe a similar range of perceptions, although, in general, seeing board and trustee responses as being favorable to many of the issues and recommendations of the Commission.

Leaders from higher education associations and agencies also have a similar range of perceptions regarding board responses and a similar sense that awareness of the Report among boards may be limited. Among those who have a knowledge, there was a sense that reactions were mixed, making the point that responses would differ from board-to-board in general, and also public to private institution more specifically. Notes one individual, “[Some boards are] struggling with ways to improve the reaction of the academy, and I think they’ve found some things [in the Report] to be positive about.” Another person commented that “I think Board members who were interested in participating at a national level... were familiar with it. I’d say they started being very negative, progressed to having a more neutral view, and ultimately have ended up with a favorable perception.”

College and university leaders differ in the perceptions of board levels of knowledge, interest, and reaction to the Report. Some see boards as more positive than some other constituencies. “[Boards are] probably going to be a little more sympathetic, because they have other people whispering in their ears..., so it’s an interesting dilemma for them.” A president described board reactions in this way, “My board is very involved because I got them involved. I was surprised... that the association of governing boards (and for that matter there’s also the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the Association of Governing Boards)... weren’t involved in more of these things... [because] I think they have a major role [to play].... It’s the boards primarily that will lead the accountability.”

A chief business officer noted, “They like to talk about accountability.” Commented another interviewee, “They’re more positive because I think they’re looking at ways to measure [performance]... of universities and also the presidents of the respective universities.” A chief business officer commented, “We talked about this with our [community college] board a bit... [and] I think that it reso-

nated very well [with them]. [The Report] emphasized their growing [concerns about] accountability... the price of education and access and all those issues. So... at least from my limited perspective it received a very positive reaction. Thinking in terms of public institutions, I am thinking... our state Board of Trustees, who are political appointees, [will be very positive in their reactions].”

Several administrators described using the Report to engage their boards. One chief academic officer explained, “We used [topics from the Report] in our board meeting... because we are preparing our accreditation review... and so we wanted to have a way to get the board members and trustees more engaged in that process... and... wanted to [give them a] broader higher education knowledge. [The] Spellings Commission gave us the chance to both talk about national higher education issues and also... about assessment and student learning, and what it means in accreditation.... So it actually fit very nicely under a couple of things we were trying to accomplish.” A chief business officer explained, “We spend a lot of time thinking about ourselves relative to ourselves, and not a lot of time thinking about ourselves looking outward. So [we have used the workings of the Spellings Commission] very explicitly with the board [to foster these kinds of broader conversations]. One of the things [our new president] wants to change is getting the board to be looking outward—to see our institution in a national higher education context not just as a single [unique] institution. We [invited a Commission member to campus to] open the session with our board by talking about the commission and the Report. [At the end of the process, we have a board that is] pretty negative about the [tone of the] Report, but more ‘nuancedly’ positive about the content.”

A chief academic officer described the process of board engagement with the Report this way, “We have been trying to educate our boards... about this. And because business people are often on boards, they have a different kind of view of this. It’s sort of the attitude of why can’t nonprofits and higher education institutions abide by Sarbanes Oxley the way my company does? But when they’re educated and you tell them some of the details [about the issues raised in the Spellings Report] just like you do about Sarbanes Oxley they say, ‘Oh well some of these things should apply, but obviously this [or that aspect] doesn’t work.’ But [without this kind of dialogue] all they hear about is this is about more accountability, transparency, [and] access—all of those sorts of things—and they typically say what’s wrong with this? Many board members... tend to be more conservative, more republican... and they like the idea of oversight and especially of public institutions in that sense of accountability. When they’re educated, when you tell them here’s... what this means... applying the elements of NCLB to higher education institutions, they say ‘that doesn’t make sense.’ [Without a more thorough understanding of the issues involved] on a superficial level [... their response may

be] ‘why not?’” On the other hand, observes one administrator, “I don’t know of any boards that have taken it very seriously. They may be out there but I just don’t know. I think people have been dismissive of it, which is partly because they think it’s not important and partly because they think it’s not very good.”

Alumni

Nearly all of those interviewed from the Commission, Department, and higher education associations and agencies said they had no sense of how alumni might be reacting to the Report. Said one association leader, “To the extent that alumni were aware of it, it is largely because they were made aware of it by their presidents talking at commencement, or they were themselves because in some ideological camp that caused them to take special note of it... largely a conservative camp.”

Much the same perspective was voiced by campus leaders and others who were closest to the effort. One chief academic officer said, “... It hasn’t filtered down to them. Again for faculty and the boards, we’ve made a concerted effort to educate them. So we’ve talked about Spellings particularly in relation to what we’re doing [for accreditation] to our boards, but we haven’t really done that for alumni. One business officer commented, “I don’t think many alumni of institutions even knew what was happening... had no reaction.”

Students

Commissioners, members of the Department, higher education association and agency leaders as well as campus leaders had a variety of views as to the level of student interest and the nature of their reaction. Most indicated that they were not aware of how students were responding, but there were exceptions. One Commissioner said, “[The Commission] met with parents and students the day before [each Commission meeting. They were so relieved to know someone was working their agenda for them. But I don’t think we’ve made our recommendations matter to the American public. I don’t think the outrage is there yet in the families and students on what needs to happen around the higher education system, [but] I think that they feel the crisis.” A Commissioner commented that “the students’ [news]paper [at my institution] discovered I was on the Commission... and wanted to do an interview... I did finally do the interview and I was just sort of startled about what he did with the interview. He cherry picked [the article he wrote] to include all the nasty points that he wanted to make, [but there seemed to be no reaction among students on campus]—not one single student said, ‘Gee,

I saw that interview with you. Did you really say all of that?’ I had no indication that students were interested in the least.” An interviewee from a higher education association noted, “I think that the student groups that are here in Washington were aware of it.” Another higher education leader said, “[We] heard a lot [from students and it’s] weird because all they cared about initially was increasing the loan limit for student aid. They’ve gotten more engaged and are looking at the issue more broadly.”

Campus leaders had the following observations: “I don’t know that very many students, at least on our campus, would have read it. However, I think the issues that it raised, particularly those dealing with financial aid and price, ... were very important [to them] and to the extent that they were aware of the Report, I think [they would have] a very positive reaction. I think it sounds right from the student perspective That’s my *perception* of how they react and not my *understanding* of how they react.” A number of interviewees questioned whether students were even aware of the Report. “I interact with students quite a bit and I have not engaged any of my students in discussion about it, but I have also never heard them talk about it. Again I wouldn’t say that [their response] is negative; I would say there is a level of indifference.”

Reflecting this same perspective, was a comment from a journalist participating in the study: “I think the knowledge about the Spellings Commission in the public—and among students—is minimal still.”

Parents of Students

Many of those interviewed for the study were unsure how parents were responding to the Report and generally doubted that most would have much, if any, knowledge of it. One interviewee, speaking from the perspectives of the Commission and Department, noted that, ironically, “We may well have done a much better job engaging parents than we did faculty.” Many leaders from higher education associations and agencies were of the view that most parents were probably not very aware of the Commission or the Report, but as one said, “My guess is that the issue of educational cost is certainly one that they sympathize with or are concerned about to the extent that it was called to their attention by the local press.”

Campus leaders expressed a similar view—that they weren’t aware of much parental interest or knowledge of the initiative, but that “some of the topics [the Commission] picked... are legitimately reflective of parental concern... [though it] might not in be the language [parents would] use.” A chief executive expressed this in somewhat stronger terms: “I think members of the public are the ones

that really feel these issues. I think there's great concern about the issues that the Spellings Commission [related] on the part of parents and students and the public. I think it's real and I feel it in [our state].... The Spellings Commission issues are the same issues that sophisticated parents and public officials are [concerned about]."

The journalists in the study also thought that most parents had little or no awareness of the Commission or Report, but to the extent that they are knowledgeable, they would be positive in the response.

Public at Large

Most interviewees perceive there to be little awareness of, or reaction to, the Commission or the Report among members of the public at large. As one member of the Commission commented, "I would say that we haven't made our case yet to the American public." Another commented, "These are the issues that the public at large is talking about—maybe not so much the Spellings Commission, but these are the things that are really bubbling up." Several association and agency leaders believe there to be some awareness in the general public "... if you include in that public policy officials...or maybe that's other stakeholders." Said another, "I guess there's a little bit of a buzz in certain subsets of the public, so I hate to say, 'no the public isn't interested.'" Most university leaders shared the view that there was little public awareness, but to the extent that there is some response, several business officers speculated that the response is positive... "because those that are familiar with the Commission want to see the accountability and all the measures." Another business officer commented, "I think they've embraced it positively."

Congress

There is little disagreement among those interviewed that members of Congress are well aware of the Report. Characterizing their response is a bit more problematic.

Some Commissioners and members of the Department of Education have very positive views of the Congressional response: "Behind the scenes Congress is really behind us and wanting us to continue.... Congress has been watching this whole effort unfold very, very closely. Many members have been very supportive. These are their issues. They've gotten the heck beat out of them in the past over raising these issues.... If you look historically at what Congress has tried to do in... the past [their efforts have had] common themes—increased transparency, increased accountability, increasing the amount of funds for the needy students—

which were very common themes for the Secretary and the Commission. These are issues that are important to them, [though] I actually think that ... publicly it might not look that way.”

A similar view was provided by a Commissioner who noted, “I think that many applaud that we are looking at [these issues]. I know I’m going to sound awfully cynical when I make this next statement..., but I think there are a lot of people in... [Washington] who love to talk about what’s wrong but would just as soon have nobody, other than themselves, advance an agenda for remedying [the problems]. I think that there are people who get it and [understand] that there is a problem, and ... they’re appreciative that the Secretary challenges the bipartisan group to look at it systemically. There isn’t a lot of in-depth knowledge on the Hill about higher education. There isn’t. When [any of us] stop and think about [our alma maters] ... we just assume it’s a great institution. It isn’t until you look at the whole system ... and you see that it’s doing a marvelous job for some, but that it can’t close the gaps, [that you see the real need for improvement]. That’s where you sit back and say... ‘What are the trigger points [for making change]? Is it a market system? Is it not a market system? What are the barriers to entry? What is innovation? How are we meeting the new student where he or she is ...?’ It isn’t until you have that knowledge that you begin to understand where to start looking for key leverage points. And I don’t think there’s enough awareness about how the system works. And candidly, I think there’s a lot of responsiveness to those that make their case the loudest.... [change is difficult] but it’s possible ... and I’m optimistic.”

Another Commissioner expressed a different view: “I think [Congress] ... was very angry about [how the] secretary [tried] to greatly enhance the government’s role in the relationship [between higher education and the federal government]. I think they, too, were worried about the [way the Secretary was trying to change the] relationship.”

Leaders from higher education associations and agencies see mixed reactions. First, it’s important to note that “it is hard to say if you look at Congress as a whole. If you look at [certain individuals the response is] probably... favorable.” Commented another interviewee, “I think that Congress has been really positive to the Report. They haven’t adopted all of its recommendations, but the folks that we work with think they’re seeing the right direction.” Others see a Congressional response suggesting that [the Secretary] “is trouncing on territory they thought was theirs. Part of it is turf and part is perspective.”

Not surprisingly, there was also a range of perceptions of the Congressional response among college and university leaders. Most agreed, however, that while there are political dimensions to the public reactions, most members of Congress shared a concern with the general directions of the Commission. One senior

leader put it this way, “I think my view, from people I talk to, is Congress agrees with these important issues.” Another study participant commented, “I think ... all of us in higher education have heard a lot about ... [legislators who] feel we’re not sufficiently accountable. You hear it from general assemblies; you hear it from Congress. It’s on both expenditures and on the quality of what we actually do. We don’t measure it. We don’t report it. So I think all of that was in the air and was building, and so the Commission got formed.... At least some people... realized that we’ve reached the point now where we’ve got to do something. And I think [the Secretary’s] most telling and effective commentary during the whole Spellings Commission was her experience with her daughter. She couldn’t get... information about universities, and this was going to be the second most expensive purchase that she and her husband were going to make.... She couldn’t find out anything in a comparative kind of way. She could do better buying a car. I think that comment really hit home. In fact, I personally think that the most useful part of the VSA is the first section because it does provide in a very user-friendly way this sort of consumer-user comparison. Of course, the third section is still somewhat controversial and hasn’t been completely operationalized yet. The VSA [Voluntary System of Accountability] was generated by the universities. It wasn’t generated by the federal government, but the VSA would not have happened if it hadn’t been for the Spellings Commission. There’s no way it would have happened. I know that for a fact.”

A chief academic officer sees it this way, “[From my discussions with our representatives in Washington, it seems]... there are some who are aware of it and have taken an interest in it.... The lobbyists for the Washington presidential associations and people representing universities have done some work in getting particularly our more enlightened men and women of Congress to understand [what’s at stake]. But again a lot of [what goes on] in Congress is... influenced by politics and by people who take stands out of expediency or because of their support structure.”

A senior business officer said, “You know it’s... interesting.... You would think from the behaviors that they are actually... [annoyed], questioning whether the Secretary has the right to push the agenda. [They seemed annoyed at the] ‘how and the who.’ [On the other hand].... I think there’s certainly a lot of Congressional enthusiasm for the [directions being advocated].” Echoing some of the same sentiment is a business officer who said, “I think they do look at it positively as getting better accountability, and also I guess one [piece of evidence is] that... the Senate... included some things in their version of the higher ed reauthorization... simplifying the financial aid application process and things like that, which could really help access. So I think they did listen.”

A similar set of themes was expressed by other interviewees who have followed the Congressional response to the Report. “I think Congress is probably fairly favorable—even the democrats.... I think there’s a decent amount of continuity of thought between what the Commission talked about doing and what Congress’s inclinations are. One might not have thought so given the turnover in Congress. I think the colleges were counting on Congress stepping in and defending them against the... Education Department, and I’m not sure they’re seeing that in the way they would have thought.”

State Governments

Many of the study participants believe there is considerable interest within state government. Explained one individual Commissioner, “State governments at a much smaller level have to deal with the same issues we’re dealing with [nationally]. They’re having to establish accountability measures linked to their public priorities. They’re concerned about taxpayer dollars and they’re concerned about quality and educating their citizenry. It is on a smaller scale the same set of issues. So they’ve been very supportive.” This view that state governments have been interested and generally supportive of the themes of the Report was supported by several Commissioners and interviewees from the Department of Education.

Expressing an alternative view were two Commissioners who saw little interest by state governments. One put it this way, “I don’t think they’re [taking much note of the Report] because... the document had nothing to say about state government relationships. I think we’ve had very little evidence of interest in state governments....”

Leaders of higher education associations and agencies are evenly split in their views of state governments’ response. Several said they believed state governments were very aware of the Report and were quite supportive of its directions in their response, as suggested by the comment, “[They are] very much aware of [the Commission], following it very closely (maybe not as closely as Congress), [and quite positive in their reaction to it]. Others said they believed state governments have no real interest. “We haven’t heard anything from state governments. When we met with the National Association of Governors, they didn’t talk about this.” And another said, “They barely know what was going on there.”

One other association leader noted that state governments are very interested in the themes and directions of the Commission’s work, but because they provide a much greater portion of the support for higher education than the federal government, “they’re a little concerned about the control issue..., so the issue of control is largely one of the factors that’s influencing the impact of the Report with this group.”

While several college and university administrators were uncertain about the level of attention and nature of response of state governments to the Commission and the Report themselves, most believe a good deal of attention has been devoted to the *issues* addressed by the Commission and Report. The extent to which this is a consequence of the work of the Commission or a coincidence is difficult to assess. "... In our state... [the Report] was very consistent [with the issues of concern, and]... there's been a lot of parallel conversation at our state on some of these issues. And I know that many of the policy makers that I know in [our state] at least would agree fairly strongly with this." Another person explained the response this way, "In our state, state offices... know what's going on in Washington, [and in] my discussions with them [there is a] kind of parallelism [in their interest in] accountability, access, and control, and all of those things—oversight.... They almost never refer to it through the Spellings. I think it's just they're trying to put their own stamp on it..., [but clearly]... the themes very clearly resonate with them. But they're not attributing it to Spellings. Partly that may also be a democrat-republican [partisanship]. Even if [state policy makers]... agreed with everything that Spellings originally proposed they might not have wanted to associate it with Spellings.... So [it may appear that... it's not about Spellings, but the end result is the same." Commented one other association leader, I don't know if the Report itself has had a positive response... but "our state government and our board have both been addressing some of the issues in the Spellings Report and so is our state government. I don't know that they give much credence to much that goes on in Washington D.C. but they have been addressing some of the same issues with very specific steps and actions. Certainly I would say [that relative to] the issues [addressed in the Report] our state government is... very positive."

Both journalists interviewed perceive that state governments would be supportive of the Report. "I think the state governments are getting on board.... They're pretty positive..., [but I think they] are worried about the equivalent of unfunded mandates. To some extent the Commission wants states to do a lot. Probably some legislators are thinking 'we don't have the money for it....' In general, the commission [recommendations] put a lot of responsibility in the states' hands."

Business Community

While interviewees differ in the extent to which they have broad and direct personal evidence, there is a shared sense that the business community supports many of the issues addressed by the Spellings Commission. Whether that community's response is to the Commission and its Report or more a matter of parallel concern

with particular issues is unclear. Among those representatives from the business community who served on the Commission, the response to the directions of the Report was very positive. “Those that [were] at the table [were] highly supportive. And actually it was the business community more than anybody that pushed for the very strong tone that the Commission used. Many of those business leaders had been involved in other reports such as *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* and others and felt the only way to send a ‘wake-up’ call was through a very strong ‘in-your-face’ message.”

Another interviewee related an interesting exchange from a Commission meeting that bears on this issue: “Clearly my fellow commissioners on the Spellings Commission [from the business community] came on it because they understood [what is at stake]. They’ve seen their companies take their dollars [invested in education] elsewhere because they couldn’t [find ways to] work with the [higher education] system [in the U.S.]. In fact, at one of our Commission meetings [there was] a rather testy exchange... around the purpose of higher education. [What is the appropriate balance between the goal of preparing men and women for the workforce versus preparing broadly educated global citizens?] And then in a governance argument right after that a suggestion was made that corporate America had to invest a lot more in U.S. higher education.... The answer that came back from corporate America to the academics on the Commission was ‘We would be willing to give you all the money we spend on training your graduates to be good workers at our corporation,’ which I thought was just an interesting exchange.... [My conclusion is that] the Department could be more effective in making the case for the business community to get involved in asking the tougher questions of the colleges and the universities they support.”

Leaders from higher education associations and agencies see the business community’s reaction to the Spellings initiative as being favorable. Speaking of the Washington community, one interviewee commented, “There are groups in town who are in the business community. They think that this is good stuff.” Said another, “I suspect... I’m sure the accountability and cost issues would resonate there. I don’t know that I have a first-hand feel for that.” One association leader attributed the positive response, in part, to the fact that [the Commission and Department] “pitched the Report to essentially the business community...”

Most campus leaders who have an opinion believe the business community’s response is favorable—and for that reason, some concerns were raised from the perspective of higher education, “Well... our worry with our board members who are all in the business community was that they were going to [have a] sort of knee-jerk [reaction] and think [the Report] was all right [and]... all true.” As one chief academic officer commented, “I only get that through board members who come

from a business side, and they ... [often have only a] superficial understanding of [the issues, and so the Report resonates with them] until you explain to them the kind of nuances and particular risks that it represents.” A number of other study participants said they really didn’t have any perception of how the business community might be reacting to the Spellings initiative.

From the perspective of both journalists, the business community response was positive. Noted one, “Certainly the Commission, I think, saw itself as representing the views of the business community to a large extent—too much of an extent—from the view of a lot of the people in higher education. And it’s certainly consistent with other statements that have come out more directly out of the business community through the Business Higher Education Forum.”

Media

How did the media respond to the Commission and Report? Study participants had a wide range of opinions. One Commissioner said, “I think [the media have] been, on the whole, supportive. I think the Commission chair and [the media] have had a wonderful love fest because he’s controversial, not [so much] because of what he says, but because he makes statements about higher education that are inflammatory. I think they love it for headlines.”

Another interviewee voiced a similar observation about how the media focused on controversy, though viewing media as undermining, rather than contributing to, the Commission’s purposes, “You know maybe the answer is the media [like to] point up the controversy.... And I don’t get why this is so controversial. I really don’t. While the Department is certainly interested in accountability, [we have] no interest in federalizing K-12 and going for national standards. [We have] even less desire to do that for higher ed. So [I don’t understand why the Secretary’s] efforts on the Commission, her action plan, and ... even negotiated rule making [were] viewed [with such] suspicion.... It bothers me. [To the extent that media talked about suspicion more than it talked about the need, I guess that, de facto, they picked a side. Maybe [the conclusion is that we have got to] do a better job helping them understand.” This interviewee pointed out a number of facts that he/she feels are very important but yet are seldom presented by the media because of a preference for focusing on controversy. “[For example,] ... over the same time period ... in which family income has risen 55-56% ... the cost of a 4-year public education has increased 120%. We’re pricing more American families out. Everybody’s chipping in more money... but the percentage of Americans enrolled has stayed relatively flat.... We’re putting up all this money and yet there are more kids today,

who, when you take all aid that's available, can't pay tuition.... I [wonder] why aren't people enraged when they see that kind of stuff?... [The media could play a far more central role in providing a reasoned view of these issues]."

Others from the Commission and Department indicated that they had not thought much about the issue, but noted one, "I don't know that the media has ever been really supportive, but.... I think they have provided this effort a great deal of coverage...." Said another, "Other than the higher educational media I'd say there's no reaction."

One higher education association leader made the same point, "... *Inside Higher Ed* and the *Chronicle* [have covered the initiative extensively and] they have given a balanced view of it. Other than [these publications,] I don't know that the topic has received much visibility." Said another, "I think they've done a good job." Several others agreed. Yet another association leader noted, "The *New York Times* ran articles on it, and the *Washington Post*.... [These were] pretty balanced...." Another view expressed was "well, the education press followed it very, very closely.... The general press, toward the end was more engaged, but they didn't track it...." Another study participant commented, "I think the media certainly paid a fair amount of attention to it while it was underway, but they really dropped it." And another, "It's got no legs, no follow up afterwards."

The general sense among campus administrators is that the media coverage has been quite balanced. Commented one chief academic officer, "... From what I see... it has been very good... and fair." Another said, "I haven't seen any editorials [where] the media... [have] taken a side, but they've tried to report it. Higher education policy doesn't seem to attract much [general] media interest. Every once in a while you get something in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, but it's not on the hit parade. It's not resonating with the presidential candidates either." One interviewee had a rather different view: "I think they're enjoying reporting it.... I don't know if they're quoting the anti-higher education people, or if that feeling represents their own views."

Comments by media leaders to this question were interesting. "To the extent you talk about media's opinion... I think the reporting was what you'd expect... It focused on some of the more exaggerated and extreme recommendations. [Media tended to] respond to Charles Miller's every word... but... if you talk about the media's view of the Commission, I'm guessing the editorials have run pretty positively towards acknowledging there are problems.... [One problem is that while journalists] don't always look for the loudest voices, that's certainly the default. And so, too often [the media] ended up [concentrating on] the chatter [between two members of the Commission who voiced very different viewpoints, in this case, Charles Miller and David Ward].... And the media are drawn to the conflict...."

6. How would you rate the overall impact of the Spellings Report and follow-up activities by the Department of Education to date?

Participants in the study used several different definitions of “impact” in responding to this question. Taking a broad view of the concept of impact—as referring to either positive or negative reactions, responses, or consequences—there was a general agreement that the Spellings Commission, Report, and follow-up activities by the Department had a substantial impact. Interviewees commented on how the Report became highly visible within higher education, how it stimulated dialogue and discussion, how it reinforced or helped to give greater urgency to ongoing and new initiatives, and how it addressed themes that were included in the Report. Some also see the Spellings initiative as leading to various tangible results and actions. This view was not universally shared. A smaller number of study participants described the impact as negligible and negative, either because there were few tangible results or because reactions to the initiative were negative.

Commission members who were interviewed were split in their opinion about the overall impact of the Report and follow-up activities. Several who believe the initiative has had substantial impact refer to the extensive number of published articles and web sites dealing with the Report and related topics, the large number of “hits” to the Commission web site, the intensity of responses from those supporting and trying to minimize the influence of the Commission, and personal invitations to Commission members to speak to various groups all over the country. Commented one Commission member, “I knew there was some [interest in higher education] on the local level and some within the administration..., but I was surprised there was such a broad interest in the subject. I think it was bubbling under the surface. If we don’t change things and ... things continue to go the direction they are, I think it’s going to be explosive. And I don’t know when that will happen. I saw... [this same pattern in] in health care...”

Said another, “I actually [think it has had] substantial impact. I think there’s a lot of evidence to support [that contention]. Congress really had no intention of taking up higher education reauthorization. We had heard all along that if anything happened at the earliest it would be January. As a result of the Commission Report... [and] as a result of the increased scrutiny on these issues, I think in part due to the momentum that was out there and especially of negotiated role making..., I think a lot of things have happened. The associations and other higher education groups have tried to get ahead of this, which is great.... NASULGC [National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges] and some of those projects... [are examples]. [Also] look at the flurry of reports that have been written recently. I’m just amazed at how much these issues are now being covered in [the] mainstream press.

Less enthusiastic was a Commissioner who said, “I think they’ve had some effect on financial aid, although... the way they [proposed to address this issue] was ludicrous. ... On all other issues there’s been no impact.” Another Commissioner believes the follow-up efforts such as the national summits had zero impact. “Nobody comes up to me and says, ‘[Name] you weren’t at the summit. You should have been at the summit.’”

Members of the Department perceived the effort to have had substantial impact, pointing to articles in the professional and popular press, and to the large number of inquiries to the Department, hits on its web site, invitations to speak, and voluntary follow-up activities initiated by associations and institutions.

The views of interviewees from the higher education associations and agencies provide a diverse and generally more conservative assessment of the impact of the project. One study participant commented, “They certainly got our attention. I think we certainly have had a lot of conversations about it, so I’d say it had an impact.”

Most higher education association leaders rate the impact as being moderate. One person commented, “I do think that Secretary Spellings has sort of won over a lot of hearts and minds, but when it comes right down to change in terms of practice... I don’t know that there’s been a lot of progress...” Another said, “If there had been regulations coming out of negotiated role making, I think the impact, practically speaking, would have been substantial. In the absence of regulations, many of the recommendations, particularly the recommendations that relate to accountability and things like that, have been so watered down in legislation that followed the Spellings Report that I can’t say that the impact has been substantial, so I guess I think there’s been a stronger philosophical impact than there has been a practical one.”

Other association and agency leaders consider the Commission, Report, and follow-up activities to have little impact. “To date, I would probably give them a rating of minimum impact, and that’s largely because of the real negative reaction to what they were seeking to do... to control accreditation and the means by which they would implement many of the recommendations.” One individual commented, “I think they’ve had some effect on financial aid although... the way they [proposed to improve the situation] was ludicrous. I think the President and the Secretary did talk about need-based aid, but on all other issues in there there’s been no impact.” Another put it this way, “Well none of the recommendations have been implemented. And the ones that have been proposed have been stopped.”

Responses from college and university leaders—academic and administrative—were quite evenly distributed between those who said that the initiative

had a significant, moderate, or relatively minor impact—again making these judgments based on various definitions of “impact.” Commented one president, “I think substantial, but it’s still to be seen if they can make legislation to it. [It’s had a] substantial impact in having the conversation. I think substantial impact on the conversation, but I don’t know that they’ll be able to pull much legislation out of it.... I don’t know what the legislative impact will eventually be, but I think they’ve stirred the important issues.... By the way, I’ve heard... [Charles Miller] speak three times—pretty impressive guy.... I think Charles Miller handled himself very well at all the national meetings, where I talked with him, and played a major, major positive role in encouraging the conversation.” Another president noted, “I think it’s certainly kept the pressure on the whole assessment area, which I welcome. I think that’s important.”

Another campus leader commented this way, “I definitely think it’s had impact.... It’s had specific impact at [our institution]. We’ve done particular things with it as a result that we wouldn’t have done a year ago. I think the NASULGC [voluntary assessment project] and the AACSU [efforts are] obviously directly coming out of that. So I think there’s certainly been substantial impact.”

A chief academic officer made this comment about impact, “With some of the things that are going on with accrediting agencies.... I would say in that area it... [had] a significant impact. In terms of the Department of Education, I’d say that it’s had a significant impact on them as they’ve developed policies.”

Another chief academic officer from an institution coming up for accreditation commented this way, “Well it certainly had an impact on us.” He/she went on to explain that roughly 38 presentations had been made on campus as a part of the accreditation self-study and review process, and every one of those made reference to the Spellings Commission.

A chief financial officer noted, “Well, I think it’s promoted a structured dialogue on some of these issues in a way that maybe they hadn’t before. To a certain extent most of it is ... common sense and we all kind of knew it. What was nice about the Report is that it was easy to read. It wasn’t terribly complex. It distilled it down to some fairly important issues and explained it in a way that people could understand. It sort of created an agenda for a dialogue on some key issues. In that regard, I think it’s very positive. It’s just so easy to write a big report about big issues, and it’s so hard to make something happen.... I think it’s started, but I don’t think it’s really going anywhere.”

Another senior business officer said, “It’s focused attention.” Another interviewee commented, “I would say it’s had a pretty substantial impact... but only in terms of getting information out there. To me that’s all that I’ve seen. I haven’t re-

ally seen actual implementation. Whether it's positive or negative, I'd say it's pretty substantial." In a somewhat similar vein, another person commented that the initiative is influential "because they're doing something. Whether they're doing the right thing or not I don't know, but they're doing something."

A number of those who feel the initiative has had little influence, point to the absence of tangible outcomes: "I think the word is still out.... I can't say because I don't know of the impact." Another person responded, "Well, that's still a work in progress." A senior financial officer put it this way, "I am not that aware of the follow-up activities, [yet]... it's a high level report, got a lot of visibility. Quite a bit of press, not just within higher education, but more popular press. So I think... it is going to have an impact.... There [were] some... positive things [in the Report] about student aid and encouraging higher education to be more innovative and more efficient. And those things all resonate very well." Study participants from the media regard the impact as "moderate" at this point in time.

One campus leader simply said, "I would say at this point [it's had] no impact."

7. To what extent do you think each of the following factors have been significant in accounting for this impact?

There were varying impressions among study participants about the importance of the party in power and views of the Bush administration as influences. However, there was a strong and shared view that perceptions of the NCLB program were quite significant. In some quarters, for example, there were anxieties growing out of a fear that the Report was suggesting a version of the controversial NCLB program for higher education. Other factors that study participants believe were particularly significant influences in responses to the Commission and its work were concerns about a potential loss of autonomy for higher education, the belief that what was being proposed was a standardized one-size-fits-all approach, and anxieties about increased government intervention. Other factors that have been mentioned as potential influences—the composition of the Commission, facts and data considered in making its recommendations, the manner in which the Report was disseminated and publicized, the approach and styles utilized by higher education national and regional associations, the approach and style of institutional or campus leaders, and the belief that the issues discussed by the Spellings Commission were already being addressed by the higher education community—were seen as less important and less universal influences within the higher education community. Another factor that study respondents considered to be very influential was the publicity given to the Commission by the Internet and electronic and print media—particularly Inside Higher Ed and The Chronicle. The overall sense was that this was

quite a significant factor, although there were differences of opinion as to the direction of that impact. Other factors that individual study participants mentioned as significant influences were opportune timing, expeditious work by the Department and Commission, Department leadership, an absence of early preconsultation and perceptions of a hidden agenda, failure to understand the higher education culture, insufficient involvement of the Washington-based higher education associations, misconstruing and misusing research findings, conflicting views of higher education as a public versus private good, fears of funding cuts, charges of complacency, the critique of student loan policies and practices, failure to make a compelling case for change, and cultural and political differences in approach.

a. Intensity of criticism and language used in the Report

More than one person said that the intensity of the criticism and language used in the Report “got the attention of the community.” Almost without exception, the Commission and Department of Education members interviewed believed the intensity of criticism and language in the Report was a very significant factor, and they had strong reactions to the perceived reaction of higher education. One Commission member said he/she found that “the academy tends to censor people who are critical especially when it comes from outside.” The interviews revealed that “there were arguments about tone from day one until the end” and suggested that while “some of the academy people were unhappy with the language” at the same time “the... majority of the Commission was comfortable [or] wanted stronger language.... The academy must not be used to that... because that did create a lot of anxiety.” There was “strong encouragement from everybody but a few of the academics on the Commission to be direct and open.” Similarly, the higher education association and accrediting agency members felt the intensity of the language was a very significant factor.

The tone of the released draft Report was seen as perhaps the most important instance of the intensity of criticism and language. One Commissioner acknowledged that “the early release of the bad draft played into all of this.” A representative of a higher education association accrediting agency said, “They undermined any lasting impact by telegraphing their hostility in the draft.”

Another spoke to the language in the Report itself: “I think that we are talking about the.... Report on two different levels.... The Spellings Report was talking about preparing higher education for global competitiveness in the future, and people are reading the Report as a comment on the current state of affairs of higher education” which contributed to a certain defensiveness.

The presidents and chancellors who were interviewed saw it as significant, although they were less negative in their perceptions. One said that “here are people who are very highly respected in the academic community and ... they’re telling us there are issues that we need to look at and get on top of.” Another president/chancellor who felt it was only somewhat significant said that it was “a really wonderful academic discussion.... I didn’t see what was so negative.... It was just different views.... I thought it was all pretty healthy.”

The chief academic officers were split. While some saw it as not significant at all, most felt it was, indeed, a significant factor in the response the Report received. One person who saw it as very significant referred to it as “incendiary language.”

Almost all of the chief business and administrative officers saw it as significant or very significant, although they expressed different points of view. One study participant said that he/she “thought the language was very positive.... It did a nice job of describing the issues [and] it wasn’t overly alarmist, but it also didn’t minimize the efforts.... It caught people’s attention. What it did was raise the issues well without overly being negative.” But another business officer said that the language “lessened the good impact” and is “keeping the Report from having as much effect as it could have.” Another said, “Some people believe that the intensity of the criticism isn’t necessarily appropriate.”

b. The approach, style, and/or critical comments of Secretary Spellings

The Commission members generally felt that Secretary Spellings’s approach, style, and/or critical comments were significant factors in understanding the response to the work of the Commission. One described Secretary Spellings as “very compelling” but noted that she, in other forums, talked more about “the questions of access to higher education, and ‘why do we have so many youngsters who aren’t going to college, and if they start college, aren’t finishing.’ It was much ... more in the tradition of No Child Left Behind. She was really lamenting over the state of preparation and admission generally rather than any thought that colleges and universities had done something wrong.” The Department of Education members saw this as very significant. One said it had “tremendous impact” and it was “important that she stay as tough as she has been.... She’d been on point on message and ... she stayed the course.”

The higher education association and accrediting agency members were divided on the question of Secretary Spellings’s approach. The majority felt that it was a less significant factor, although some saw it as very significant. One said that the Secretary “has been very measured and very careful, being clear about criticisms

or concerns, but immediately focusing all that on we need to move forward.... She was able to... separate herself from the more negative reaction to the Commission itself.... I think that if she had handled it differently... I just don't imagine things would be as they are now." Another said she "moderated some of the negativity that Miller engendered." Interestingly, the Secretary's use of her personal life examples drew criticism, with one person saying it was "stupid.... She turned selecting a college into buying a car... without... appreciating the difference that's involved." Another who felt it was a significant factor said it caused a "credibility problem" because "she's talked about her experiences as a parent in trying to get information about institutions she was researching for the benefit of her children. And I don't think that that's played very well because... higher education institutions think that there already is a lot of... useful information out there—some of it even on the Department of Ed's web site." One person said that "she used examples that would resonate with students and parents..., but she could have used examples [about] the need for accountability [and] the economic impact of greater accountability in higher education, [which] might have resonated better with... higher education professionals, a lot of association folks, [and] accrediting agencies."

The institutional leaders interviewed felt that the Secretary's style, rather than her intentions, had an impact, with one saying that "her intentions were good.... She had a little bit of edge to her.... An academic would have said the same thing but a little differently." Another simply said that "I don't agree with her, but she's the Secretary so I listen to her."

Chief academic officers and chief business officers saw the Secretary's personal style as having considerable significance. Some echoed the criticism of the Secretary's use of personal examples, suggesting that when she said, "My daughter is going to college and I don't know anything about the institutions" they would have responded that she should "read your own web site." It was called "an attempt to engage the feelings of parents more than... an attempt to explain what was really in the Report." Another felt that "her remarks during the press conference or the presentation of the final Report in some cases... could be considered inflammatory."

c. The approach, style, and/or critical comments of Committee Chair Miller

All groups, including the media representatives, saw Committee Chair Miller's approach as a significant factor. The Commission members and Department of Education members felt Chairman Miller's approach and style had a very significant impact on the Commission. One described Miller as "running this like a Congressional committee chair. He's got the staff, he's got the majority, and unless somebody does something, he can write the report as long as he doesn't lose his

majority.... It was not a deliberative body in the end.” He/she referred to Miller as “angry” and said his comments “took the energy out of the Commission. We spent our time fighting him instead of improving higher education.” Others suggested that without Miller, the Commission might have focused on other issues, such as “why after 25 years of intensive work to essentially eliminate the predictable gaps between majority and minority, between suburban and rural...those gaps still [persist].” Miller did not want to address that issue “because any way you slice the participation discussion, you’re going to talk about what happens in middle school and high school. And his view, which he said several times very clearly, [is] that we don’t want to be known as ‘the guys that blamed somebody else.’”

The higher education association and accrediting agency members saw his role as significant or very significant. One called him “enormously significant... a lightning rod.” On the other hand, one person who saw it less significant said that Miller’s comments “as critical as they are, are very big picture comments ... geared toward a... sense of what higher education can be and how it can better serve the needs of stakeholders. I wonder if Secretary Spellings characterization would have been better received if she had taken more of that global view.”

The institutional leaders saw Miller’s approach as very significant, with one saying that “he probably has contributed more to the negative reaction and other purports more than Spellings has.” The chief academic officers were evenly divided on the significance, but the chief business officers saw it as significant, which did not always mean negative. One said, “I thought he did... a fairly good job.... It was a fairly reasoned approach.”

d. Political pressure, including concerns about the party in power

There were widely varying reactions to the issue of political pressure, but this was considered less significant overall than many of the other factors. Commission members were divided on the significance, while Department of Education members believed that it was significant. One person said it “was clear... from the beginning... this was not a White House commission, this was the Secretary’s commission. The Secretary doesn’t have a political operation, the White House does.” Another suggested that “democrats want to take credit for being the education Congress. So it’s a good fight. People are fighting as to who gets to take credit for all of this.”

The responses indicate that, overall, representatives of higher education and accrediting agency groups did not regard political pressure and concerns about the party in power as a significant influence. One person interviewed said, “They didn’t like it because of the party in power because they saw it as an extension of

an essentially market-driven approach to higher education that goes all the way back to the first House bill on reauthorization.” Another cited “bipartisan support for accountability at all levels of education” but noted that “the department itself believes that her inability to promulgate regulations was largely due to the unpopularity of the Bush administration, but I don’t really think that’s true.”

Institutional leaders felt that it was a significant factor, as did the chief academic officers. One who disagreed said, “It is not really a partisan issue fundamentally.” The reactions of the chief business officers covered the range of responses, but most regarded political pressure as a prominent factor in understanding reactions to the Commission and its work. Two suggested the prevailing “cynicism and frustration with the Bush administration particularly in higher education [would] hurt the impact” of the Report. Another said that “both parties view this as a ‘hot button’ issue that they can use to their own benefit if they can capture the sentiments of their constituents and somehow be seen as actually addressing them.”

e. Perceptions of the Bush administration

The responses of those interviewed varied widely as to the significance they attributed to the role of perceptions of the Bush administration in reactions to the Commission. Study participants from the media viewed this as a very significant factor. The Commission and Department of Education responses included one statement that there was a perception that this “is the No Child Left Behind for college, which is not the case.” The varying responses of higher education association and accrediting agency members included one respondent who felt that the perception of the Bush administration had a negative impact: “People saw it as part and parcel... because the Secretary is after all an appointee of the President, she worked in the White House prior to being in the Department, [and] she was in Texas.” But two others said that “the negative reaction wasn’t because it came out of the Bush Administration,” and “Bush is unpopular because of Iraq. I think that most Americans sort of compartmentalize education, and domestic policy’s been completely separate from that.”

Similarly, the institutional leaders offered comments that reflected a variety of views. One said, “Many of the Congress people that I know were taking a non-partisan view” while another said that people “connected [the Spellings Report] with policy... about... the No Child Left Behind Act.” Among chief business and administrative officers, most regarded the perceived connection with the Bush administration as a significant factor, with one person terming it a “political report.” In this group, however, there were also a number of individuals who thought this was essentially inconsequential.

A reflection of the bipartisanship some saw associated with the Report was the comment, “I think that this will stay on the agenda. It won’t be because of the republicans or the democrats. It will be because I believe there will be significant interest of the constituents of all of our legislators that it will remain an issue.”

f. Perceptions of the No Child Left Behind program

The perceptions of the NCLB program received one of the strongest responses as a factor that significantly impacted the Commission. The concern that this would be NCLB for higher education crossed every group, and the level of concern seems related to whether one sees NCLB as positive or negative. As one participant in the interviews described it, “It may end up [that] your view of NCLB [as] a good thing or a bad thing may influence how you view this.” Although Commission and Department of Education members saw it as having considerable influence, one interviewee focused on the positive aspects, saying that “a majority of the Commission... were willing to bet that No Child Left Behind turned out to be good policy after all.”

The study participants from higher education associations and agencies almost all said this was seen as NCLB for higher education. “Particularly with the call for some kind of standardized measure of student outcomes, the sense that this was NCLB for higher education created a fairly negative impact.”

Most, but not all, of the institutional leaders saw the perceptions of NCLB as a significant influence, with one pointing out that “there are common core values in both places.” Chief business and administrative officers with few exceptions saw it as significant. One chief academic officer described the dichotomy of reactions by saying that “if you have people who believe the NCLB is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to K-12 education... you can almost see that maybe there is something that every third grader should know. They certainly should know how to read and write, and it almost doesn’t matter what school they’re in or what their career path might be.” But this might not apply “once you get into higher education where its nature has to do with self-determination and both the acquisition of a liberal education but also the skill set in a particular discipline.” Another described the issue by saying, “I’m not sure that people believe the NCLB has really had a significant impact.... There are some questions... whether or not that program is working as well, [which leads to the question of] ‘is this going to be just another initiative like that’... that has been particularly important on the part of the faculty members.”

g. The composition of the Commission

The significance of the composition of the Commission seemed to differ based on the roles of those being interviewed. Commission members and Department of Education members were divided in their views. Higher education association members saw it as having moderate significance and institutional leaders saw it as very significant, while chief academic and business officers' perceptions were varied. There were those who felt the composition of the Commission was good, with one person indicating that "the Commission was good. The Report was terrible.... Some of the issues were the right issues, and some real issues were never talked about." Another who saw composition as less important said, "It should have been more [influential]. I know Secretary Spellings was very careful to say 'mix across ... industry and the academy...' across the academy, [and] people... were brought in to represent the community. She went to great pains to make that as balanced and as strong [a] commission as she could. And I don't think we get enough credit for the number of different vantage points that were at that Commission She should get a lot more credit and our recommendations should not be viewed with so much suspicion given the variety of those of us on the Commission." Another said, "There were very talented people on there, whether one agrees with them or not. And because of the stature of the people, there was more rather than less attention to the Commission." A third said, "The composition of the Commission was one of its strengths.... Secretary Spellings... views education as something that really ought to be responsive to all stakeholders, not just the higher education establishment. And so she has brought a lot of different voices to the table that I think have been ignored for a very long time."

Others identified problems in the composition of the Commission. One participant said the composition was "very significant because we had some real bomb throwers on that commission; then we had some strong industry leaders." A representative of a higher education association or accrediting agency said, "They were missing students, faculty.... The faculty there were not representative." One person said that "it was a fairly balanced committee. That played a role in having it not being as hard hitting as it might have been."

Among the institutional leaders, even those who saw the composition of the Commission as very influential to the community's responses to the Report, viewed that impact in different ways. One who indicated that it was very significant said, "Starting with the chairperson, to individuals who were chosen, it was stacked ... against higher education.... It was clear that there was already... an outcome they had in mind.... I didn't feel that they did an objective job of gathering and presenting the data." Another said, "I thought it was pretty good.... They had

very good, talented people.” Underrepresentation was a concern for community colleges. “There’s one community college person on the commission even though we’re half the enrollments in the community...”

h. The facts and data considered by the Commission in making its recommendation

In general, this item was seen as having lower impact than other factors. Even so, there were questions about what data were made available and how they were used. The Commission and Department of Education members were divided on this. One Commission member said, “I have boxes of stuff that I was given that we never ever talked about.” “...They collected and assembled wonderful sets of data, some of it was very biased... but we never ever talked about it.” Another said the presentations “created a context for us.” One who felt it was less significant said that “we intentionally did not commission new work.... There was such a significant body of research out there.”

The higher education association and accrediting agency members expressed concern about the data, saying that “the data that they used did have a significant impact on the negativity of the impact.” Another said, “I think there was an approach that higher education was less than perfect, that there needed to be some change, and... you can go out and find... data that confirms that.” Another noted that “it really wasn’t a data-based report.”

A representative of the chief business and administrative officers said, “There was certainly nothing I saw in the Report that I thought was factually wrong. Obviously the interpretation of it could have gone different ways. Given this was a group of busy people and the time frame they had, they actually did a pretty good job at looking at data.”

i. The way the Report was disseminated and publicized by the Commission/USDE

There were differences of opinion about how the Report was disseminated, with some seeing it as productive and some seeing it as a lost opportunity. The Commission members and Department of Education members, along with some higher education association members, seemed to indicate that they had not taken advantage of the opportunity to engage the public. One said that “we released [the final Report] at the National Press Club. We invited Commissioners, we invited the academy, we invited the Congress. That may have been the opportunity for

us to do something a little more consumer-oriented and gotten the American public engaged.” Another suggested that they might have “[taken the] case to the American public earlier... to have them create the burning platform. Tap into families and their fears. Tap into their need for information and help them understand we were working on their behalf.” One person interviewed said, “I don’t think the Department was really on message from the start and I think it was too easy to put the higher education community on the defensive.” Another said, “The various education summits that were held left most of the participants feeling that there really hadn’t been opportunities for exchange... that they were engineered in a way that just left you feeling not so good.... They would report out by table, and the reporting out folks were folks who had been appointed by the Department, and even though a lot of them were really good people... [their reporting] wasn’t the perception of the folks there. So it just didn’t feel like a fair opportunity for exchange.”

On the other hand, a higher education association agency member said that “the way they did it with the follow up of the hearings and the forum and the summit... was all very astute on their part.... We’re talking about the Spellings Commission as much today as we did a year ago. And that, frankly for them, is an accomplishment. And I think it’s tied to how they put the Report out.”

The release of the earlier draft Reports also got the attention of people. A Commission or Department of Education representative said, “It was not our intention to make every version public. And it was not our intention to have every conversation behind the scenes made public initially. In hindsight I think it worked in our favor... because it engaged the public like nothing else in this conversation. It engaged the entire academy—everyone was paying attention.” Conversely, a higher education association member who called it very significant thought that the “release of an earlier draft... had a big impact” and was handled badly. One person questioned whether the leaks were “part of a pretty well thought out campaign. ‘We’re going to leak things and there’s going to be a reaction and we’re going to move away from that a little bit to show that we’re responsive.’” Another felt the leaks were very significant because “they really got a lot of attention to the Report by doing that.”

The chief business and administrative officers also expressed varying views. One said that “they did a nice job. It was certainly well promoted in the press when it came out. Anybody working in the higher education community would have to be oblivious.... I think we all knew what was going on and what its potential significance was.” Another questioned how it was disseminated: “If you really want to have an impact with something like that you have to go to each of the major newspapers in the country and talk to their editorial boards. You have to talk to the

owner/publisher of *Time* and *Newsweek*. The *Wall Street Journal* ... picked it up but I'm not sure it was a strenuous effort by the Spellings Commission to do it." The media representatives were split evenly between not significant and significant.

j. The approach, style, and/or critical comments from higher education national and regional associations and spokespersons

Clearly, the comments of the higher education and accrediting associations were seen as significant and largely as negative by Commission and Department of Education members, one of whom said that "to the extent that they are fighting it just gives me more energy to say if we weren't working on the right thing there wouldn't be this much [impact]." Concerns that were expressed include the associations' and agencies' ability to influence the media, the letters distributed to members, and the representation at the town hall meetings. One person described how, at a town hall meeting for parents, "the left side of the room—the first three rows—were all either accreditors or members of higher institutions and they hijacked the meeting, and I finally stepped back and said, 'How many of you have actually read the language in the latest version of the regulations.' Not one hand went up."

Another talked about "the fact that the higher education community did not embrace this [effort and that] has been the most serious flaw of all. I pleaded with [the Commission and Department] to create a framework in which they [higher education] can partner with you ... give the higher education community a sense that you are with them and encouraging them." This person also felt it would have helped to look beyond the one-size-fits-all approach to have "greater sensitivity to mission variability between say a community college and a research university.... Tuition is not a crisis at community colleges. Revenue is. The tuition crisis is at the elite privates."

Others felt that the most significant reaction came later, during the push for implementation. One cited "the many, many letters from the various big 6 associations to the Secretary applauding her for the Commission and their findings and recommendations—very positive letters of support. ... So there was a very positive response from many on the final Commission Report, but as we moved into actually implementing some of those recommendations, that was when the pushback started to come. I think folks thought ... 'We made it through the Commission and now things will slow down,' and when the department continued to keep up the pace, then folks started to feel threatened, and it turned very negative." A similar comment was "What I heard from folks in the field is that the associations didn't alert their members early on what was happening and so when the Department

started to move on some of these actions they were caught kind of with their pants down and [the] went into high gear. I don't know if that's true or not but I think it's pretty interesting when you look at the shift in attitude and collaboration on these issues."

The chief business and administrative officers predominantly saw the activities of the higher education associations and agencies as significant. One noted that "there didn't seem to be this... cohesive body that represented higher education that everybody saw was at a level equivalent with the Secretary of Education, and to this day I don't think that anybody knows what the AAU [Association of American Universities] is, or NASULGC, or ACE [American Council on Education].... So [the message] didn't come out as a coherent [message reflecting] all of higher education.... There wasn't anybody [in higher education that everyone would have] seen as the counterpart of Margaret Spellings. Margaret Spellings was on the news every day. It's one of our problems. Could we have created such a person? Sure.... So every time Margaret Spellings appeared somewhere that person would have been interviewed as well. ... There would occasionally be a quote from AAU, but they didn't give it the same lift."

There were also those who saw the response of the associations and accreditors as positive. One who said it was a very significant factor said, "They did a nice job.... Everybody was reasoned.... Nobody came out and said this is the perfect or this was the worst thing that was ever done. Most folks that I saw were giving balanced perspectives on it.... There was some very interesting observations, which ... in some cases, they actually were... a little more in depth in terms of some of the issues than [the] Report itself had been." He/she continued to support the work of the associations and accrediting agencies, saying that "... ACE did a really nice job.... There was a very helpful interpretation by NACUBO in terms of some of the public policy implications for it.... Some of the higher education research associations... talked a lot about the issues associated with the national database and the whole assessment model and the complexities associated with it."

k. Concerns about a potential loss of autonomy for higher education

This was seen as a very significant factor by all groups, but there was a clear difference in how different groups perceived this issue. Representatives of the Commission and the Department of Education did not think that autonomy was as much a focus as the need for accountability. One member indicated that "I don't know if it was loss of autonomy as much as it was fear of the unknown. I don't think that we ever came across as threatening to take away their autonomy. I think we were just asking them to be held accountable." Similarly, another said, "We're not

getting in governance. . . . We're just asking you to demonstrate what you're doing with the investment we're making."

The higher education association and accrediting agency members uniformly saw it as very significant. One person said that there was "a lot at stake in this arena . . . because the chosen vehicle for realization of the recommendations is government control." Another said that "even though the Secretary tried to separate the purpose of negotiated rule making from the Commission's recommendations . . . they got blended together, and . . . it did create some fear [that] the goal was to federalize higher education."

With few exceptions, the institutional leaders, including chief academic and business officers, felt this was a very significant issue in helping to explain reactions to the Commission and its work. One president said, "I'm [personally] not concerned about it because I believe in order to keep the autonomy we have to be accountable and transparent . . . You can retain your autonomy if you do the right things about being accountable." A chief business officer said, "The one-size-fits-all issue is a much more important [issue] than the autonomy." Another said it was "huge . . . Those concerns cause people to then be very wary of what some of the things are that might come out of the Report." One person had a slightly different take, saying "one of the keys . . . in academia seems to be freedom of speech, academic freedom. And the sense is that this encroaches upon academic freedom."

I. Concerns that what was being proposed was a standardized one-size-fits-all approach to assessing performance

Every group saw this as an issue of major significance, and their arguments were tied up in the mission of the various institutions, populations served, and types of colleges or universities and reflected "the feelings of different institutions that their sort of niche position was not well understood." Of particular concern was the difference between community colleges and four year colleges in terms of student goals. There was a great deal of polarity in the responses of the Commission members and the DOE members, and they had very different perceptions. One Commissioner said, "at some point . . . you have to say that one size does fit all if you're talking about basic learning . . . [but] most of the Commission understood that we weren't describing a system of higher education in which one size fit all." Another who felt it had less impact took the position that "It said the institution sets the mission. The accreditor ensures that there is a target set . . . that there are goals against the mission and the accreditor assures that there is progress being made." Another Commissioner who felt it was very significant described the con-

cern about one-size-fits-all by saying, “even though this [reaction] was not fact based, it created such fear.... It had a big impact ... on the progress....”

The higher education association and accrediting agency members felt that it was very significant but saw differences in the reactions of different institutions. One said, “It was very significant with the privates, but with the publics and the community colleges there was not that significance.”

Almost every president and chancellor said it was a very significant influence and several suggested that it has led to a great deal of discussion. There was a similar reaction by chief business and administrative officers. A participant described it by saying, “the concern that we would have is... applying monolithic standards against all sectors. The reality is an urban community college is not going to have the same graduation rates as Princeton has. If there are some naive standards applied across the board that don’t look at the context of the institution—what its goals are, what its students’ goals are, abilities are.” Another described it further by saying that “there’s just a lack of understanding about institutional differences.... Some of those differences are real and some of them are perceptual. But it sets off a chain of events and resistance to what’s going on and turns what might be a positive experience into a very negative one.”

m. Withheld signature by Commission member David Ward

The decision by David Ward not to endorse (sign) the final Report was generally not seen as a particularly significant influence on reactions to the Commission’s work, primarily because he was the only one from higher education on the Commission who didn’t sign. Some of those interviewed expressed that they did not have a clear understanding of why he didn’t sign or that his refusal to sign deflected conversation on some of the concerns others on the Commission spoke about. One Commission member said, “I think it would have been significant if the five or six of us most directly associated with higher education had all withheld our signature, then Miller would have gone up and said, ‘You see these guys never want to change.’” Another said that “I don’t think David withholding his statement took away the commitment that the other Commissioners had for our outcome, and I don’t think the withholding of the signature has hurt us ... in [our] ability to get the job done.”

There were different reactions among the institutional leaders. One said that “Miller’s unwillingness to compromise at all [on] ... the one-size-fits-all approach ... is why [David] couldn’t sign it.... He [was] representing ACE, which [represents] ... all higher education and so that was a particularly sensitive issue

for him.... If they could have gotten ACE to sign onto this report it would have had a much greater impact in higher education initially.” Another saw the impact of the withheld signature differently, saying: “It’s better to stay on the inside and keep fighting. I think what he’s done is basically taken himself out of the debate.”

n. The approach, style, and/or critical comments from higher education leaders at the institutional or campus level

The reaction to this factor seemed to depend on one’s position in the education community. One Commission or Department of Education member saw it as having less significance because “those leaders are just now becoming directly involved in this conversation. And that’s unfortunate because I find, for the most part, the leaders from the institutions and the campuses are much more reasonable.... We had kind of lost those relationships over time.... So the only communication with those leaders came through the associations.” Perhaps lending support to this observation was this comment from a senior higher education association leader, “Most of the comments that I’ve heard about the Spellings Report didn’t really come from leaders at the institutional or campus level; they came from the higher education associations here in Washington.” On the other hand, most of the higher education association and accrediting agency representatives saw the approach, style, and comments of institutional and campus-level leaders to have been quite influential in the overall higher education community response to the Commission’s work.

Most institutional leaders and chief academic officers felt institutional and campus reactions were less significant, as opposed to the chief business officers who thought they were reasonably significant. One chief business officer commented that it was the absence of strong commentary from institutional leaders that had made this a significant factor, because it was “making the point there was almost no thoughtful response from higher education leaders at the institutional campus level.” Another who felt it was very significant said that, in general, “leadership is going to set the dialogue that takes place.... A charismatic president who says ‘These are important issues which we need respond to’ is [going to] move it in one way or a president who is fairly cynical or who says ‘this is not important—this is just one of those things in Washington.’ I think the energy at the institutional level is going to be strongly influenced by how the senior staff present it.”

o. Concerns about increased government intervention

All groups rated this as a significant factor. Commissioners and Department of Education people felt that it was very influential, even though they believed it wasn't justified. One said, "The one thing that's come out loud and clear afterwards... is this whole notion... we're going to federalize accreditation. Nobody knows, even begins to know, what that means, but that... has had resonance." Another took issue with the idea, saying "if you look closely at the proposals on the table with increased transparency and accountability and focus on results there is less of a need for any kind of government intervention and compliance."

A higher education association and accrediting agency representative suggested that "we learned we really value individuality and feared that that was threatened." An institutional leader acknowledged that there needs to be accountability for the vast amount of money spent in higher education, but said that he/she "would keep the accountability at the state level.... If we do a good job at the state the governing boards... the federal government won't have to be involved." There were also some mixed feelings toward the role of government. One chief business officer said, "It's important in the sense that some of the interventions are extremely important.... If we could rethink the management of financial aid programs in this country [it] would be an awesome step forward.... That kind of intervention would be a good thing. But the general idea of just more regulation and more things to do is obviously a concern. We are an over regulated industry [already], and now we're having to start to deal with all the private industry financial regulations."

p. Belief that the issues were already being adequately addressed by the higher education community

The idea that the issues were being adequately addressed by the higher education community was generally seen as less significant than a number of other factors. There was a general sense that the higher education community verbalized, "they are doing this," but were skeptical that they may not be. One Commission member said, "There is a general feeling that this was a discussion long overdue." Another who saw it as not particularly significant said, "Many of those claims were pretty empty once you started pushing on them. And by [higher education's]... own admission. Probably the most telling is when folks would say to us 'we've already got student achievement—we're working on it.' Well you've had 15 years to work on it. How much more time do you need? There just has not been significant progress

in the past 15 years since this was first included in the Higher Education Act.” One Department of Education member said, “There may have been pockets but certainly not a coordinated effort.”

A higher education association and accrediting agency member said that “you constantly heard ‘we are addressing these issues,’ ‘we’re at the beginning of addressing those issues,’ ‘we are doing things here.’ Spellings saying she couldn’t find the information was ‘disingenuous.’”

The comments by institution leaders and by chief business and academic officers acknowledged the existing skepticism. An institution leader said, “I think people in higher education believed that. I don’t think anybody else did.” Another said that “they’re not being adequately addressed at all. That’s part of the problem. We run from this kind of stuff collectively. I think assessment is a real issue.... Access and opportunity are real issues, and I think governance is a real issue. All those things are real. All you have to do is read the paper every day. Higher education just seems to have this immune syndrome that hits whenever there’s criticism.” A similar comment was that “higher education has addressed pieces of this, not I would say not in a (comprehensive) fashion.” A chief business officer said, “Institutions like to think they were doing everything possible so I think underneath they realize that there is still more to do.”

q. Publicity given to the Commission and related activities by the Internet and electronic and print media (e.g., *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Chronicle*)

The overall sense was that this was quite a significant factor, although there were differences of opinion as to the direction of that impact. One Commission member said, “It was very significant. I think in many ways... the person who’s had the most influence of anybody is Doug Lederman and his reports in *Inside Higher Education* every time the Commission met. I had more people say that they had read it, asked questions about it, and I also thought that Doug got it more right than anybody.... [He] picked up... that [it] wasn’t working.” An institutional leader pointed out that “it was good to get it... on the public agenda.” There was some concern among Commission members and higher education associations that the information was possibly not balanced and that the coverage itself could have “created an environment of mistrust.” Another said, “Publicity is good. At least it makes people aware. Where I wish we could have been better is a more balanced view so that we create a better context on the two sides. I think one side got more attention.” Another aspect was that “... it gave Miller and maybe some of the people who thought

they were going to have more influence than they did. They really thought that the *Chronicle* and *Inside Higher Ed* were more influential than they really are—and they still do.” This was echoed by the comment that the *Chronicle* and *Inside Higher Ed* were “becoming sort of a mouthpiece for the most controversial remarks made by Miller and his associates.”

The higher education association and agency members saw the benefit of the publicity provided by these publications, saying that “with the amount of publicity, this... couldn’t be ignored” and “if... those two publications had chosen not to focus on this... there would have been in general less attention, less impact.” They also expressed concern that the publicity didn’t reflect the actual working relationship. One person interviewed said, “We all... developed a profound respect for each other. And... a willingness to really work together to try and accomplish something good. And I think we did, and had there been regulations [resulting from the Commission’s work] I think they would have been good regulations. But that didn’t come out at all in anything that was written about negotiated rule making, and it made it seem like we were all at each other’s throats, and that just couldn’t have been farther from the truth.”

The availability of information provided and the accessibility was on the mind of one chief business officer who said, “What’s so different now... is the ability to almost instantly [get information]. There’s nothing you can’t understand. If you don’t understand terminology, the references... click your way back. To me that has really probably made it easier for people to think about the issues much more intensely than they might have a few years ago. I remember when some of the big reports came out in the 80s. You just didn’t have the resources to deconstruct what it’s all about.... I also think it’s allowed a lot of people to react quickly.”

8. Are there other factors that you feel were significant? If so, please name them.

The additional factors identified by the participants included:

Opportune timing: “The Secretary walked into a convergence of issues. You had... escalating tuition. You had all this global competitiveness. You had the national assessment of adult literacy results that came out and showed that only 30% of our baccalaureate degree holders can read complex material.... It just seemed to be... a really important time to have this conversation. I think if this conversation had happened even 3 years ago it wouldn’t have gotten this kind of traction.”

Expeditious work by the Department and Commission: “Basically Congressional folks snickered at us early on in the Commission. ‘We’re already going to have the [Higher Education Act (HEA)] done before you guys even issue a report. This is so far past having any impact, all these issues are going to be resolved,’ and on and on, and then Congress never passed an HEA last session, and then all of a sudden because of that and all these other things the Commission Report gained a lot of importance and prominence.”

Department of Education leadership: “This Secretary is probably one of the strongest leaders. She’s sharp and she’s bright and she has some backbone. This is not an issue folks usually want to take on and that’s why no other Secretary has done it. [Examples can be seen in] the fact that she reorganized the Department and put the Undersecretary in charge of all things higher education in the agency and brought on such a strong leader in Sarah Martinez Tucker. There has just been a lot... that has happened. I think it kind of scares the higher education community... This isn’t going away.”

Absence of early preconsultation and perceptions of a hidden agenda: The way in which the announcement was made—“the actual formation in the sense that all of a sudden... it was ‘Oh the Secretary is going to form a commission and will make an announcement in 2-3 weeks’.... There wasn’t enough of preconsultation to say this is what I intend to do. There was a big, giant secret. And then everyone started getting pieces of the secret, but they weren’t getting it directly. I think it started wrong because there was never this initial [communication, alerting the community to the fact by the Secretary or Department that] they see problems on the horizon, nor was there a call for involvement: ‘I hope you all join us to come up with members.’” Another person commented, “The whole thing seemed like a setup. And it was almost as if a decision had been made early on in President Bush’s administration, you know we’re going to do K-12 first, and then we’re going to hit higher education.”

Failure to understand the higher education culture: “Failure to understand higher education ultimately. You are not going to reform higher education from the top down.”

Insufficient involvement of the Washington-based higher education associations: “They also intentionally bypassed the Washington associations.... There is a belief... and it’s been stated in Congress and [to] others... that the Washington associations do not represent their members. How they went about this was to go directly to people on campus—except for David Ward. David Ward was ultimately brought in, and of course was the only association head put on [the Commission]....

Miller basically said to us that he didn't think the associations represented higher education ... that we inside the beltway were part of the problem and isolated from the real sense out there and that's why they took the Commission all around the country and so forth."

Misconstruing and misusing research findings: "... When they trotted out things like the National Survey of Literacy and said that it showed that most college students couldn't read, couldn't understand, that was just ... maddening to people who really understood. I mean that was a survey of everyone who's ever graduated from college, and the part that reflected recent graduates had lots of mechanical problems. And just the continual harping on individual pieces of data like that and misconstruing or not properly construing them caused a huge amount of harm. It was hard to speak to the academy once they used data incorrectly."

Conflicting views of higher education as a public versus private good: "As a nation we're really struggling with the idea of to what extent education is really a public good or a private good. I think the meanings that we're getting more and more is that it's more of a private good than a public good."

Fear of funding cuts: A key factor in higher education's reactions to the Commission is "the fear that higher education ... would lose funding ... the whole issue of the affordability of higher education ... if it came to the point where it was too expensive and they would put tuition freezes and cut funding. [Because] I think that's always been an issue particularly in higher education where that can happen.... The states are not funding higher education the way that they used to."

Charges of complacency: "this complacency that we are the best higher education system in the world—higher education thinks that. And it may very well be true.... [When] a report like this comes out and says, 'well maybe you aren't as good as you think you are,' that complacency has some impact."

The critique of student loan policies and practices: "The investigation into student loans is going to create momentum that this Report may not have otherwise had."

Failure to make a compelling case for change: "They never really captured the imagination of the people. They never really had the confidence of the people that this was a really high level, thoughtful effort that they constructed. It was perceived too early on as a ... preset conclusion to present a small number of arguments that a few people held very strongly about a particular kind of accountability.... The kinds of issues like transparency, like affordability, and access ... in my mind were not addressed direct enough—like the value of diversity and the ways in which

we can leverage that diversity... and the issues that come with self-satisfaction. There are a [number of important issues] in there about... what's happening to our graduation rates and this and that. Those are real issues that we should be taking on both institutionally and as a larger enterprise. They get lost because everybody's worried about whether they're going to impose a standardized test or not."

Cultural and political differences in approach: An important (negative) factor influencing reactions to the Commission and Report was "their [in]ability to construct a conversation and a study and a process that lead to some constructive recommendations.... [This effort] was significantly hampered by the more ideological... and the political gaps... between the political environment, the Washington environment, and higher education. Where in one case [the preferred approach is to] regulate, push for one-size-fits-all, accountability—meaning something very different to them from what we would say. They are looking for something that comes closer to standardization and efficiency or lower costs.... We should each be accountable, but we're so different that you can't use the same measures. [We need an approach that acknowledges] that each of our institutions and sectors is better for having the other there, and the whole site is better by far for having this range of institutions."

9. The Report of the Spellings Commission put forth six recommendations. How important do you consider each recommendation to be for the future of higher education?

In providing some general background, one Commissioner noted, "We tried to talk about the future and to look for the leverage points that would change the current system so we didn't have as many specific detailed recommendations as some people would have liked.... Everybody said focus on a limited number of problems. That's what we agreed on early... that we should focus on a limited number of important problems and come up with solutions. Problems mean problems. Talk about what isn't working not what is... [but] the more big ideas we put on the table the bigger anxiety we got from the academy. We have some big ideas in there." Another Commissioner also offered a general comment, "They're all very important.... I'm very concerned about the number of high school graduates that aren't ready for college. I'm very concerned about the new dynamic of the 15 to 18-year-old population. I'm very concerned that we don't have the ability to enroll more working adults into some kind of experience that gets them into their first credential. And I am concerned about lifelong learning.... We've got to [address the issues of] access... affordability ... transparency, and... quality." Commented

a third Commissioner in the study, “The recommendations have never been treated as recommendations.... We never got them down to where they took bite.... These are generalized goals that are very hard to say aren’t good goals. They are good goals.... I wanted us to pick two or three major things and go forth. Instead, we got six goals [at] 50,000 feet.”

a. Improve preparation, address non-academic barriers, and provide significant increases in aid to low-income students

This recommendation was seen as very important for the future of higher education by virtually all study participants. One higher education association/accrediting agency member called it “the most significant issue” of the six, and one of the institutional leaders called it “crucial.”

Another institutional leader felt it was important to overcome the disadvantages faced by lower-income families. A chief business officer who said it was “absolutely [number] one” in terms of importance, shared an anecdote about an urban school district program that offered incentives for students in the top 10% of their class. Although the program was successful in some ways, “we get students in the top 10% ... and they immediately place into remedial level.... They’ve achieved what they have achieved in the public schools through good behavior and good attendance.... The majority of students who arrive on... campus cannot get onto college level studies and the probability of them not persisting into college level studies is very high. Having to spend the first 2-3 years before you can take your first [college level course] ... gets into the financial aid issues.... Nationally we have to do a better job.” Another chief business officer added that “getting them into the door and ... hooked on the concept of higher education is more important.... Even more important than increases in aid is letting low-income students know what the options are for financing their education.” Expressing some pessimism about this goal was one study respondent who said, “It was important, but it wasn’t realistic.... Everybody’s been trying to do it anyway.”

b. Restructure the student financial aid system, and improve the measurement and management of costs and institutional productivity

With only a few exceptions, this recommendation was seen as very important for the future of higher education. Interestingly, two college presidents said it was not particularly important in their view. One Commission member called it “the most important thing.” Even so, there were a few chief business and chief academic officers who, while giving the recommendation an overall rating of very important, separated out the issue of measurement and management of costs and

deemed it “not important.” One said, “I’ve got to separate that into two questions. Restructuring the financial aid system I consider to be [extremely important] ... improving measurement, management costs and institutional productivity [is relatively unimportant].... If they would have... separated the reduced state aid from the increased tuition costs, it would have made a real difference.... We don’t have an increase in the cost of public higher education; budgets are about the same in real terms as they were 30 years ago.”

An institution leader focused on the problem with measuring costs by saying, “[on] any kind of productivity measure... the community college is... the lowest cost and... the most efficient and... serves the most people.... Harvard or Princeton [spends] 5 times as much.... [They provide] incredible support for faculty and for students on a per capita basis... but it’s all appropriate in their version of what they’re trying to do.” Another point made was that “colleges seem not to be price sensitive at all... and... there’s no elasticity in tuition. It just seems to go up and up. So everyone thinks you’ve got to talk about accountability and cost.”

The chief business officers interviewed had strong feelings about this recommendation and the issues surrounding it. One chief business officer said it was “very important” and talked about student decision making. For them “the bureaucratic complexity of financial aid and the steps that are required make it almost impossible.... Often they arrive without the ability to pay for their first semester or they have to defer a semester.... A lot of them lose momentum and they give up. It also is a problem for adult students who typically register very late and again their ability to access financial aid ... makes it difficult.” Another talked about the importance of simplifying the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] form. A third chief business officer said that “restructuring the financial aid system ties directly to the aid to the low-income students.... Measurement and management of costs could easily become the first issue that is addressed because it’s one of those popular issues [for] politicians.”

c. Create a robust culture of measurement, accountability, and transparency throughout higher education

This recommendation was seen as very important by almost all of those interviewed. A Commission/Department of Education member said simply, “Unless you have some sort of accountability system—a transparency—you won’t know if the other things are working.”

One higher education association/accrediting agency member articulated a point made by several people when he/she said, “Everybody thinks that’s a good idea, but nobody knows how to do it.” Another higher education association member seemed to confirm this perspective by saying, “finding ways to document curriculum is truly transformational... one faculty member said, ‘... You won’t know if [a] liberal arts education has transformed the lives of these students until 30 to 40 years out.’ And I said to him ‘that may in fact be true, but the reality is... parents who are going to be paying money to send their kids to these colleges and the students themselves don’t want to wait 30 or 40 years.’”

A chief business officer suggested that “what’s interesting is that there are a lot... of students who don’t make their decisions based on the measurement and accountability and transparency of the institutions that they are looking at... Measurement and accountability and transparency would not have affected their choice about where to come to school.”

d. Promote a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement in pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve learning

This recommendation received high marks from the Commission and Department of Education members, as well as the chief academic and chief business officers. A chief business officer said it was very important because “when you do this for... students they get a better education, they’re better prepared to enter the workforce, they’re more competitive, they’re more attractive to employers.... In some cases it just makes a difference between... students dropping out and a student persisting.” The institutional leaders and higher education association and accrediting agency members offered more divergent ratings. One institutional leader said, “I suspect a lot of my colleagues would not give it that high of a mark. I think you’ve got to have a special culture for a president and faculty to talk about innovation and creativity.”

A theme that appeared across many of the groups was, as one institutional leader put it, that “those things are happening in higher education and will continue to happen. I’m not sure we’ll be able to tie it back to the Spellings Commission.” One higher education association member said it was “very important” but “universities are doing that all the time and it’s a failure to recognize that it’s going on.... I don’t attribute it to the Report.” A chief business officer said, “The thought that that’s not happening and won’t happen unless you develop some standardized test is absurd.”

e. Develop a national strategy for lifelong learning to help citizens understand the importance of preparing for and participating in higher education throughout their lives

There were mixed reactions to this recommendation. The chief business officers, chief academic officers, and media representatives thought it was quite important, but the other groups had varying views. One Commission/Department of Education member said that “[a national strategy is] not the real issue... the bigger issue is how do we align all these programs and resources and make it transparent so that adults can maneuver the system.... The system is too complex for them.”

One institutional leader said, “It’s already happening... adults are now... more than half the enrollment in the country. The marketplace is responding.... I don’t think the federal government needs to tell us that we need to offer lifelong learning opportunities.”

A chief business officer said, “It’s very important [but] I’m not sure it’s as important to the public as maybe it should be, and I don’t see that changing.”

f. Increase federal investment in and efforts to attract the best minds to strategic areas that are critical to our nation’s global leadership and competitiveness, such as in science, engineering, medicine, and other knowledge-intensive professions

This recommendation was perceived to be very important by the chief business officers and chief academic officers, by the majority of the institutional leaders and by all but one of the higher education association and accrediting agency members. The Commission and Department of Education members saw it as important or very important. There were some comments of the role of the Commission in this discussion. The higher education representative who said the recommendation was not important said, “We’re all... working on continuous innovation, we’re working on lifelong learning, and we’re clearly working on the STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] area [and] the Commission didn’t cause that to happen.” But a chief business officer said, “Achieving this is critical. My hope is that the Spellings Commission Report can really help that get some traction.”

An institutional leader suggested that “we ought to be preparing the best minds... that’s where I would spend my money... to spend... a billion dollars on math-science education, to develop more advance[d] science teachers, and more engineers and more technicians.”

A chief business officer said, “It’s very good but we’re going about it in the wrong way... When you can make more money coming out of college... as a ... personal trainer than you can as a beginning engineer, there’s something wrong. Well how... are we going to get the best mind[s] into it if that’s what the outcome is? How are you going to get kids interested in it? And you’ve got to start it really early. And we’re trying to do it at the tail end to give them more money to go to school... We have to change the culture.... You need to work hard to have an impact in any of these disciplines.”

10. A number of *specific changes* were proposed in, or inferred from, the Spellings Commission Report, among them, the following. For each, please indicate how important you believe it is for advancing excellence in higher education.

a. Giving more attention to assessing learning outcomes

People interviewed in every category, almost without exception, felt that increasing attention to learning outcomes was very important, with one institutional leader calling it “the most required element at the end of the day.” While there was no debate that assessment of learning outcomes is needed, what form these should take, and whether the Spellings Commission, Department of Education, or accrediting agencies should be involved in the process was a matter of contention. One higher education association/accrediting agency representative who called it less important in this interview said, “I do think we assess learning outcomes... we give grades. Obviously [it] is important. To suggest that the assessing learning outcomes as inferred from the Spelling Commission is very important is a different matter.” A chief business officer asked what was meant “when you say learning outcomes... are they really going to add to society when they come out? They may have learned a lot but then are they productive citizens?” Another added, “Standardized testing is making the cure a lot worse than the problem.”

A chief academic officer referred to the NASULGC initiative and said, “If we do it voluntarily then it’ll be okay. But that’s not a particularly useful reaction.... [The Commission] could have gotten a group of people together and maybe come up with something really innovative and creative and gotten all of higher education... to say ‘great idea.’”

There was also a question of how the accreditors fit into the debate on learning outcomes. One chief academic officer said, “The accreditors are basically fighting for their lives.... They would be very happy with some kind of overlay or national system because it takes the onus off of them, and they just say ‘that’s what it is you have to do’... and that’s part of accreditation.”

b. Changing the system of financial aid

This was also seen as very important by those interviewed. One Commissioner asked whether they had actually made any change in the system. He acknowledged that “at one point, we got really close..., [but] we never tackled any of the tough issues.” He/she indicated that one Commissioner put the idea on the table “why don’t we just scrap federal aid and give every sixth grader in America a 529 account or \$10,000 that they can only spend if they stay in school and go to college?” Another possibility was “a three year (baccalaureate).”

One of the higher education association/accrediting agency representatives who felt this was an important issue indicated that “the emphasis on need-based aid and the criticism of merit-based aid that the Report has is defensible and important.”

Presidents and chief academic officers also saw this as an important issue, as did the majority of the chief business officers.

c. Developing external measures and/or peer comparisons to assess learning outcomes effectiveness

While the majority of respondents still saw it as important, there were a range of opinions. The Commission and Department of Education members perceived this to be moderately important. One said, “That will come over time.” The institution leaders saw it as more important than did the higher education association and accrediting agency representatives. One president suggested that he/she was comfortable with things like external benchmarking, which are “part of Baldrige.” A chief academic officer who perceived it to be of less important did so “because I don’t think they’re every going to be able to do it decently.”

One chief business/administrative officer commented, “[I think we need to pay considerable attention to it,] not because it’s really important but because we’re going to be asked to do it. So it’s an important issue we’ll have to grapple with, but I think in societal interest it’s not all that important.” Another chief business officer felt that “giving attention to assessing learning outcomes” was important, “but I think that peer comparisons and external measures are more important.”

d. Developing external measures and/or peer comparisons to assess institutional effectiveness

Presidents and chief business officers consider this to be an important agenda item, while the other group had varied ratings that tended to be lower overall. One Commission/Department of Education member suggested, “That has to evolve once they start assessing learning outcomes.” One higher education association member pointed out that there are “a lot of peer comparisons... from the national research council rankings.... Comparison invariably leads to people taking a look at themselves and deciding to make improvements.” One of the presidents noted that this goes back to the “concerns [about] one-size-fits-all... We’re working from a variety of measures in how to assess our effectiveness. And I don’t want anybody else telling us how to do that.” Similarly, a president pointed out that “people’s missions and approaches are different.... We have a consortium of... colleges that share all of our data. And we produce a report so we can see where we are, [but] it’s a confidential report that only the [participants] get. But... Spellings... is going to make it all public and that’s where you’re going to see some of the problems.”

A chief business officer expressed his/her opinion that “I think that’s going to be more important to either building or sustaining credibility with constituents.”

e. Clarifying institutional, general education, and major/programs teaching/learning goals

This item received high marks from the Commission and Department of Education members, while with other groups, ratings were lower and more varied. One Commission member called it “our biggest problem. We don’t have a common understanding of what all of these pieces are.” One chief business officer who saw it as very important said, “You can’t do learning outcomes if you don’t have the goals.”

f. Enlarging the scope of accrediting agencies and the accrediting process to include more attention to institutional and learning assessment and outcomes

This issue of the appropriate scope of the accrediting agencies was considered very important by the institutional leaders, but the opinions of other study participant groups were somewhat dispersed. The comments reflected mixed views of the accrediting agencies and the accrediting process. One Commission/Department of Education member said, “I don’t know that I want to enlarge the scope of the re-

gional accrediting agencies solely. But I do think the accrediting process... need[s] to include more attention to [institutional and learning assessment].... I'm very concerned about role clarity across the different types of accrediting agencies." Another said, "I don't think we need to give them more responsibility. Our issue is that they just need to be doing what they're supposed to be doing. This is not a new thing." A higher education association member said, "[It was important] so long as that's generated by the accrediting agencies and not the federal government."

One of the presidents who had served on many accrediting teams said, "The fact [that] we look at ourselves makes it suspect and I think on these accrediting teams we ought to have some outside people rather than ourselves.... I think accrediting, as it now, is going to have to have some changes." Another said, "I think there should be more accountability of whether students are learning anything when people are paying to learn something."

A chief academic officer who saw it as important said, "I don't know that enlarging the scope is necessarily the solution." Another noted, "The accrediting agencies are really feeling the squeeze because they need to be able to be a positive professional force for universities to improve."

One chief business/administrative officer suggested that accreditation is a "good old boy network.... If you had 4 CEOs from business come in, I don't think they would have said the same thing [as another college officer doing accreditation].... Throw the whole damn thing out and start over." Another said, "I'm not sure you need to enlarge the scope. They've already got a whole standard on institutional assessment and a whole standard on student outcomes assessment."

g. More clearly communicating indicators of institutional and learning outcome performance to present and prospective students, parents, and the public

Nearly everyone interviewed saw this factor as important, with most perceiving it to be very important. One theme here was providing information needed by students and parents. A Commission/Department of Education member said that it was "a big part of making informed decisions." A higher education association/accrediting agency member described it as "part of the transparency, which is important." One president, who described it as very important noted that "we have to tell the story on that." But a chief business officer, who gave it a lower rating called it "dangerous because it's hard to understand." A different spin was used by a Commission member who suggested that "first we have to get the public interested in higher education. Then we'll get them to be smart consumers."

Whether having indicators implied that they would be used to compare institutions was an issue raised in different ways by different groups. A higher education association member who felt it was an important factor also said that it “raises the comparability issues... it may not be... perfectly achievable.” A chief business officer said, “It’s [about] clearly communicating, but it needs some comparability as well.”

h. Developing more standardized approaches to data reporting for colleges and universities

This item was considered less important than many other issues, especially by Commission and Department of Education members and chief academic officers. The higher education association and accrediting agency members and chief business officers generally rated it as important, with some calling it very important, but the overall ratings were somewhat lower than previous items. A chief academic officer who ranked it as not important said, “[It isn’t] necessarily... going to lead to advancing excellence in higher education.”

There were very different opinions expressed. One Commission/Department of Education member said it’s “not important. We don’t need standardized.... I don’t want standardized assessments.” A higher education association/accrediting agency member called it “worth consideration.” While one higher education association member said, “There is a lot of standardized data reporting to the extent that data is available.” Another noted that “the information that’s available to parents and others is not necessarily information that they’re asking for.” The comparability issue was raised again by one person who suggested that “people are able to interpret information within [a] context and I think that that’s the best we can hope for.”

The difficulty in establishing standardized approaches was noted by one institutional leader who said, “[I] was on a task force 10 years ago that tried to do that and it was a miserable failure.... We couldn’t define anything.”

There was concern about how the data would be used to compare institutions. A chief academic officer called it important but was concerned about “standardized approaches.... It’s not a-one size-fits-all.” A chief business officer said the issue was not getting standardized data, “but more understandable information to be gleaned from the massive amounts of data that’s already reported.” Another chief business officer said that he/she was “skeptical of the universities complying with the standardized approach.”

i. Standardizing approaches used by colleges and universities relative to the transfer of credit

The transfer of credit issue was not considered important by the Commission and Department of Education members, the chief academic officers, or the higher education association and accrediting agency members (with one exception). The institutional leaders gave it the highest rankings, and the majority of the chief business officers saw it as of considerable importance. This issue seemed to have very polarized reactions based on whether the person being interviewed believed credits should transfer from institution to institution.

One Commission/Department of Education member said he/she “struggle[s] with that one. Some would say that it’s a standardized approach to say ‘don’t look at the source of the accrediting institution...’ It should be transparent. I don’t know that it should be standard.” Another noted that “the commission wanted to do that in a way that would be completely insensitive to the institutions’ judgment.”

A higher education association/accrediting agency member made a key point by saying, “if a standardized approach to transfer credit... means that transfer credits should be counted by all institutions in the same way, then I’d say ‘no that’s not important ... that takes too much away...’ I don’t think we do it all that badly right now. I think each individual institution and program evaluates the transcript of the student coming in and decides which credits are given general graduation credits and which credits are given toward a major and they do it to some extent on their knowledge of the institution coming in.” He/she suggested that “this [issue is being raised by] the for-profits [institutions]. And there probably is something of a bias against granting automatic credit to the for-profit institutions.” Another suggested that by considering all college courses as equal regardless of the source institution, “it turns higher education into a commodity and does not serve the country well.” A similar answer was that “the autonomy of institutions to determine what their policies are going to be on accepting credit for students is important Meaningful measures of... acceptable credit transfers like comparability... equivalency, age of credits, those are the... things that we ought to be relying on, not necessarily... broad brush kinds of rules about transfer of credits... I don’t think that the approaches should be standardized in such a way that everyone should have to accept everyone else’s credits.”

Some of the presidents suggested that the real question was about transfer credits from community colleges to four year colleges. One said, “Institutional autonomy is a part of it... [Our state] has joined four other states by legislating it because the four-year colleges wouldn’t cooperate.” Although he/she suggested that another option was to “develop a series of articulation agreements with the

institution that are faculty based. So the communication faculty talk to the communication faculty, the science faculty talk to the science faculty [and they work it out at the disciplinary level]. We basically work out our own articulation agreements so that the students are protected.” Another felt the issue was that it is “important to access.... If you want a student to graduate in four to five years, it’s an important question, but if that student needs that course for a major in pre med, [that’s another matter.]...”

A chief business officer who felt it was very important spoke of the way this impacts community colleges, saying students had “gone on to be doctors and lawyers and attorneys.... The quality of our education is there, but I know a lot of students suffered when they got to four year schools and their credits didn’t transfer..., so that was a waste for them to have even taken the course if it doesn’t transfer.” Another said, “I just can’t imagine telling a research university it has to take [courses from] a junior college.” A different approach was taken by a chief business officer who suggested that “we should set a standard for what the first year of college ought to be ... what is the base understanding you want the student to have when they come out of their freshman year. Regardless of what their major would be, regardless of where they are.... Then you’d take care of the transfer problem.” Another chief business officer saw timing as the problem, saying, “that’s very important. I’ve heard of students transferring to our institution and it takes months after they get there to find out which of their credits are transferring. And that’s pathetic. I wouldn’t enroll as a transfer student without knowing how many credits were transferring.”

A very different approach was taken by a chief business officer who said, “that’s very important ... politically... we’re getting killed by the anecdotes that people hear second and third hand, which in most cases aren’t true. So I think it’s important to just take that off the agenda.”

j. Devoting additional attention to assessing and improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of college and university operations

This issue was considered important or very important almost across the board. Two higher education association/accrediting agency members suggested that colleges were already operating with high efficiency. An institution leader who said it was very important stated simply, “We’re not going to get more money from the states if we don’t.” Another noted, “That’s not more than 15% of our organizational expenses. More than 80-85% is... basically the teaching.”

A chief business administrator said, “Much more of that goes on than anybody gives colleges and universities credit for;” but an area of concern is that “somebody else will impose his or her definition of efficiency on us without really understanding what we’re trying to do. And whether that’s Charles Miller or Margaret Spellings or somebody else, that’s a real worry. The answer for us is just get out in front and be better at it than they would.”

11/12/13. *Thinking particularly about your institution (agency, association) what has been the reaction to the recommendations of the Spellings Commission? Can you describe your institution’s (agency’s, association’s) reaction more specifically? Has your institution (agency, association) responded through a formal statement or response? If yes, what positions/points did the statement make/take? Please provide a brief summary of the major points. Can you provide a copy?*

Those interviewed reported differing reactions by their organizations, agencies, and institutions to the recommendations of the Spellings Commission, and some responded with formal actions or statements.

Reports by the representatives of the Commission on the reaction to the recommendations were evenly divided between somewhat favorable and somewhat unfavorable, while the Department of Education representatives said their agency had a positive reaction. One person noted that the Report contains recommendations of varying significance, simply because of the committee process, saying, “to get consensus, [people] need to make sure that their issues are included. There are some things in there that I don’t know are that significant to the future of higher education.” Another noted that his/her organization was concerned about one-size-fits-all and “the idea of changing the relationship between the government and higher [education] particularly giving the Secretary more control.” They did not indicate any specific actions taken in response.

The representatives of the higher education associations and accrediting agencies generally felt the reaction in their associations was somewhat unfavorable. At the same time, there was variation with some who saw it as very unfavorable and some who saw it as very favorable. This group had perhaps the strongest action response. One person, whose organization’s reaction was “pretty critical” said, “I would probably say that we have endorsed the recommendations and ignored the Report.” Others talked about trying to educate the Commission about the challenges and the need for additional flexibility. Another said the recommendations initiated many discussions in which they realized that there was a “huge overlap”

in concerns. Several of the associations indicated that they had prepared some kind of formal written response, either as a letter to their members, a letter to the Commission, a resolution by their board of directors, or as written testimony for the regional hearings that followed the release of the Report. Some of these responses were made available on association web sites. One response was the ACE statement issued on behalf of the six major associations. One said that although there was no “planning that said we had to mount a large campaign” they responded by developing and distributing “a common communication that members could use as they see fit. There were five probably distilled talking points.” Another action taken in response was to “[tell] our members it’s time to weigh in with your regional accreditor.” The theme of working with Congress was also mentioned. One association member said that “I don’t think we’re [going to] bother pushing back in a negative way. What we’ve done... is to try to work with Congress to come up with solutions that are practical.” Another indicated that “the department... underestimated the ability of the associations to... marshal Congressional support.... We worked very hard to achieve that.”

The institutional leaders interviewed also described varied, though generally more favorable, responses. The most common response across institutions was that many were already in the process of developing the types of measures discussed by the Commission. One said that he/she is using the recommendations to push forward on assessment, saying, “my mantra has been... motivating our faculty to develop these approaches to documenting, providing evidence about our student learning outcomes... or else the government will do it for us.” One of the institutional leaders wrote a letter to a prominent regional newspaper to talk about how “one-size-fits-all doesn’t work for higher [education],” while another said he/she “would not make a public statement about it” although there was a sense that “if... the conversation could be framed a little more differently, some of these things are very good things to talk about.”

Most of the chief business and administrative officers interviewed indicated that the reaction was neither very negative nor very positive. The remainder was fairly evenly divided between somewhat favorable and somewhat unfavorable. Similar to the comments made by institutional leaders, several indicated that they already have assessment efforts in progress. One said that “... we’ve acknowledged that there are some good recommendations.... We have already got initiatives underway, so [it] reinforce[d] those things to have us do more and faster. But at the same time I think we’ve pointed out that there are some areas that we’re not comfortable with.” Another said, “I think much of higher education’s response has been lacking in the ability to effectively articulate that there are local stories here that are driving local issues.” Several said the Report generated discussion and that

they kept faculty and staff informed or conducted public presentations about the contents of the Report. One chief business officer noted, “we have had discussions at the president’s executive committee [and] at staff meetings, but no real examination of the Spellings Commission.” Another said, “We talked about it in public places, stakeholder groups.” None of the chief business and administrative officers interviewed indicated that their institutions had issued a formal response, except through their associations.

14. Has your institution (agency, association) undertaken or accelerated any initiatives (e.g., task forces, committees, or improvement initiatives) to address any issues raised or reinforced by the Spellings Commission Report? Select all that apply.

One higher education association/accrediting agency member made a general comment to address all these initiatives by saying, “[we] think these should be by and large institutionally led initiatives with the accreditors as enabling that and scrutinizing to make sure it’s going on.” In response to the initiatives, several people indicated that these initiatives were underway, but that progress was not specifically attributable to the work of the Commission.

Reviewed/refined approaches to assessment of student learning

A strong majority of the people interviewed in every group indicated that they have taken steps to review or refine approaches to assessment of student learning. Not everyone attributed it to the Report, but one person said, “the Commission Report... if anything... validated... what we’re already doing. And it’s given us a little bit of a push to keep doing it and to keep doing it better.” Another said, “[The Report] gave us more support... and... the Spellings Commission motivated us to move a little faster.”

There was emphasis by those interviewed on the role of the accrediting agencies. A higher education association member said their actions have been designed to “stress even more the importance of accreditors addressing outcomes and accreditors addressing transparency.” He/she described the CHEA [Council for Higher Education Accreditation] Accreditation and Accountability Special Report saying, “...we pulled together the key recommendations from five years of reports and pieces that we had done and reissued it as a special report on accountability, urging that accreditors take more action in these areas” including templates that “[say] to accreditors, ‘here are ways to address greater transparency.’” Another higher educa-

tion association member noted that they “haven’t changed the standard [but they have been] clarifying the standards and training better [including developing] new training materials, which we hope will make the existing standards easier to understand for the evaluators.” Another described “bringing together a focus group to look at the student achievement standards and to make recommendations on how they might be reformed.” Another person described a “voluntary system of accountability.... We’ve had several task forces headed by presidents working on its development. The system that they’ve proposed includes reporting on the cost and measures of success, things that the Spellings Commission talked about. But it also includes reporting on student engagement, the kinds of things that NSSE [National Survey of Student Engagement] measures as well as reporting on learning outcomes, measured by instruments like the CLA [Collegiate Learning Assessment]. We’re really trying to promote a lot of accountability.”

A president/chancellor described “workshops on the assessment of student learning” and participation with the state higher education organization. He/she also said that they “worked with the [state] Department of Education and other education community partners to align high school graduation requirements with the knowledge of skills needed to succeed in college... [and] developed efficiency effectiveness measures to make sure that the universities take full advantage of their facilities and can focus their resources on teaching and learning.” This president/chancellor also said they have been “developing accountability frameworks and dashboards... we’ll provide system leaders and the public with acceptable data.” Another president reiterated the need to work with elementary schools and high schools as part of this effort.

A somewhat different perspective came from another institutional leader who said that “in addition to what the state came up with, we have put [together] another set of data... the contributions that we’re doing to the society as a whole, which... many of the parents and students might not have an interest, but a lot of the legislators or policy makers would be interested.”

Two of the chief business officers indicated that assessment of student learning was already “a real priority” and the Report “didn’t trigger any new initiatives that weren’t already underway.” One said, “Ever since our last accreditation, assessment has been a hot topic. We are looking at the assessment piece... in connection with our accrediting agency.... Accreditation would be the driver for us.”

Undertaken or refined approaches to benchmarking or peer comparisons

While not as many interviewees responded affirmatively to this initiative, at least one-half of most of the groups said they have undertaken some action in this re-

gard. One Commission/Department of Education member who was not involved with benchmarking said, “While we thought it was important to have comparative information for consumers what we realized when we got into it—it’s kind of smoke and mirrors.... [People] were so far from being at a point where they could do any kind of comparisons or benchmarking that we focused primarily on developing approaches, making it transparent. There may be some opportunities for comparison across institutions. But I think there’s still so much work to do before they can get to that point.... This is one area that the government cannot push.” He/she also added that “this isn’t a new behavior for [them].... There’s just not enough done for them to be able to do this around student learning.”

Three of the higher education association/accrediting agency members supported benchmarking, but they indicated that they were not the ones who would be doing it. One said, “We’re not opposed to it, but that’s not what our association does.” Another said, “[It’s not] relevant to what we do.... We have been... urging actions in these directions for a long time and trying to put out effective practices or tools that will help.” Another suggested that an inventory of resources would be useful, saying, “[there are a] lot of different kinds of measurement tools that you *could* use. So that is a resource, but there’s still more needed.... Nobody has put together a database of what benchmarks are already out there, with groups of people who have already gotten together and started to do this.”

A full half of the chief business officers reported that they are involved with benchmarking, with one saying, “[we] tried to get more... comparisons... not just with the academic area but with the administrative area.” Another said, “We believe strongly in benchmarking. The key is choosing the right institutions against which to benchmark.” An interesting point made by a chief business officer was that “part of the problem is you can’t be the only one that’s doing something in order to have a peer comparison, so something has needed to happen.... Frankly, I think it’s the accrediting bodies... [that] create the need for institutions to calculate the same data so that you can share it.”

Developed or modified approaches to data collection and dissemination

One higher education association/accrediting agency member said, “We have always tried to emphasize the importance of... appropriate data,” and another said that “we’re always looking at refining.... We’ve... been trying to make better use of technology.... I can’t say again that this is because of the Commission Report. It’s really just what we do.” Another discussed using various types of data from the VSA, including “not only the graduation rates of students in four to six years, but

whether the students' cohorts who didn't graduate from their school graduated from other schools, still engaged in their education at the school in which they initially enrolled, [or] whether they're engaged in education at another school. So while the database that the Commission called for has not been set up in the federal government, we think that [the] national student clearinghouse database can provide very good information that helps us understand students in the systems." He/she indicated that the database had "data on 91% of all students enrolled in the United States."

One of the institutional leaders described having an "accountability framework and related dashboards, which will provide policy holders, system leaders, and the public with easily understandable and acceptable data performance." However, a chief business officer said, "It's been very frustrating to us because we wanted to get national data on our students and have not been able to."

Reviewed/refined approaches to transfer or credit

This was the least mentioned initiative, by far, of those asked about in this question. Less than one-half of the accrediting agencies and almost no chief business officers indicated that they had taken any action on this. A Commission/Department of Education member said, "Obviously transfer of credit is much larger than accreditation.... That affects millions of students."

It was certainly a topic of interest for the higher education association and accrediting agencies. Three of the higher education association/accrediting agency members reported that they have undertaken work on this initiative. One said, "We've worked hard on this transfer of credit over the years, and we feel as if for the most part that's pretty successful. The only area where it's not successful is between proprietary institutions that are not accredited by regional accrediting groups.... We're opposed to anything that requires a regionally accredited institution to have to take credits from any [programs] that are not regionally accredited." Another said, "I don't think that most of our institutions know that we already have a policy that says you can't discriminate in accepting credit on the basis of who the accreditator of the transferring institution (was). All of the regional accreditors have that policy because [it was] required of us. So you know, I think we've pretty much done what it was that they were asking us to do in the Spellings Report—short of mandating that credit always be accepted, but that's something that's happening at the state level within systems, which is probably a more appropriate place for it to happen." Another said, "We want there to be a national policy statement on trans-

fer of credit and that's why we're pushing so hard for legislation. We're encouraging our students to... cultivate some good relationships with institutions so that they can gain confidence in the quality of the education that's being offered at their institutions and would be willing to enter into (articulation) agreements... building bridges with other institutions to try to show that their credits are worthy of being accepted, and trying to create pathways for students, so that they can articulate their credits and degrees into higher levels." Another perspective offered was that "there's this whole parallel universe that's forming.... We have for-profit institutions that... go all the way through the doctoral level and first professional degrees.... A student could literally get their entire education in a for-profit institution.... There's articulation happening... where public institutions aren't even being considered."

A chief business officer said it is a policy issue in his/her state "in the relationship between the community colleges and the state system schools where there has been a loss of credits for students.... Everybody agrees there's just so much inefficiency for students taking the same course twice because it doesn't transfer—it's all part of the cost of higher education issue that's very significant." Another said that it was not an issue for them because they don't take transfer students.

Other Comments

Other initiatives described were as follows:

Commission/Department of Education

- Shift from identification of problems to solutions
- Trying to both streamline the federal student aid system but also increase the amount of money that goes to our neediest students
- The six associations of university presidents met in September following the release of the Report and agreed that each would focus on different elements raised by the Report. And it was agreed that AASCU and NAICU, being very mission driven and very small groups of mission-defined institutions, and NASULGC, with the land grant definition, would take up accountability and assessment as their lead. ACE agreed [to take on] the access challenge... along with CHEA and with the... group of governors that are dealing with high school curricula in relation to college preparation... an initiative called ACHIEVE.
- Trying to see if we can encourage the regional accreditors to do a better job of persuading policy makers that they really are involved in national institutional accreditation.

- Observing how others overseas, particularly in western Europe but also in parts of Asia, have actually used the CHEA model. Because they don't want the government to do this and they'd like a nongovernment entity to do it ... , most of them have developed much stronger, visible, public boards. CHEA has been trying to do that.
- Having the accreditors actually see if they could take on mission-specific assessment.

Presidents and Chancellors

- "We're working on lifelong learning."
- "By necessity, we watch our costs and we try to keep our tuition as low as possible."
- "We're actively raising private financial aid to augment the public financial aid that's available."
- "Articulation... we're very aggressive to reach out to underserved populations to make sure they get opportunities to come here."
- "[We have] a set of roundtables with the industry to look at and explore all of the different competencies that the industry needs to [missing], and then we're trying to take all of this information and incorporate it."

Chief Academic Officers

- "Our budget proposal required that we include our retention and graduation data."
- "Delaware study of productivity... you submit data related to productivity. So what you can find out from the Delaware study—what's the cost of an FTE credit? What's the cost of a credit hour in that department by looking at faculty salaries? What's the percentage of part-time instruction? So when I look at, for example our computer science program, it's so much more expensive than our English program and our history program ... you get a sense of what your more expensive majors are and how many graduates are you getting from those programs so you can ask 'does it make sense to invest in those programs? Or should you think twice about adding new faculty?'"

Chief Business and Administrative Officers

- “An institutional priority for us for a number of years ... in our current strategic plan ... has ... been focused on the achievement gap between different categories of students in trying to achieve parity of outcomes. Obviously there’s a major concern about black males. It goes along where females do better than males in higher education and all those achievement gaps. We are one of the achieving the dream institutions, which is a national community college initiative to try to basically deal with the issues of lack of parity of outcomes.”
- “Institutional costing/financial” areas are addressed.
- “We have an initiative underway regarding transfer of credit ... primarily within the state but also in the end it will relate to students who transfer in from out of state.”

15/16. Did your institution (agency, association) initiate or actively participate in efforts to support, challenge or refute the directions, specific proposals, or initiatives advocated by the Spellings Commission or related follow-up activities by the Department of Education? If your institution, association, or agency initiated or actively participated in such activities, what was your rationale for this decision?

The higher education association and accrediting agency members interviewed were unanimous in saying that they had initiated or actively participated in such efforts, but they appear to be the only groups to have taken action across the board. Only one Commission/Department of Education member, two institutional leaders, and two chief business officers indicated that they had taken any similar action.

One approach taken by the higher education association and accrediting agency members was lobbying efforts. This lobbying took place “within the department with Chairman Miller, within the Senate, within the House, everywhere ... active lobbying. ‘Advocacy’ is probably a better word.” One described the organization’s efforts as “extremely active.... We worked with a number of the staff people with regard to accreditation issues. We testified. We were involved in the [Department of Education’s] Accreditation Forum.... We were involved in The [Department] Summit. We were involved in the regional hearings. We were part of negotiated rule making.” One described lobbying efforts as supporting the recommendations while at the same time opposing “the approach of negotiated rule making.” Another effort in response to the Spellings Commission involved encouraging Congressional support. A higher education association/accrediting agency

member said that his/her organization encouraged “Congressional opposition” to mandatory measurement of learning outcomes, and felt they “had a lot to do with urging that [Senators] write those letters.” An institutional leader said, “We wrote letters to our congressmen.” Two noted that they “participated in the Summit in Washington.”

These groups also communicated with their members. One person interviewed described writing “to our members to tell them where the problem areas were and to solicit their views.” Another said that the recommendations validated actions they were already taking, such as “bringing together a focus group to look at the student achievement standards and to make recommendations on how... the whole process for assessing student learning might be refined.” One higher education association/accrediting agency member described the presentation of the “paper about the voluntary system of accountability” after which the “final Report... called for voluntary efforts to measure learning outcomes instead of mandatory ones.... We think... we had some effect on moving that away from a mandatory to a voluntary recommendation.”

Such efforts also provided the higher education associations/accrediting agencies with what one member described as “an opportunity to strengthen our leadership role with the community.... We were part of a larger higher education association world and they were appropriately turning to us with regard to ‘what... are we going to do about accreditation?’” One said, “People started writing back and saying ‘you know, it’s not so easy to gather qualitative information about graduation rates and licensing.’”

The substance of responses to questions 17 through 19 is addressed within the context of responses to other questions throughout this report.

20/21. In your opinion, to what degree will the work of the Commission, and the reactions and responses to it, lead to lasting change within higher education? If you believe the work of the Commission will lead to lasting change, to what extent will the change be favorable or unfavorable for higher education?

Will the work of the Commission have a lasting impact, and if so, will that impact be positive or negative? Study participants expressed a variety of views on the subject. Most believe the work of the Commission will, indeed, lead to change. With several notable exceptions, those interviewed across all categories saw any resulting change as favorable for higher education.

The question of whether the Commission's work will lead to lasting change produced varying responses in the groups interviewed, including some recognition that the valence of the impact might differ from institution to institution. The Commission members and Department of Education members, with one exception, anticipated significant, lasting change, as did most of the presidents and chancellors. The higher education association and accrediting agency members also generally predicted the initiative will lead to lasting change. The chief business and administrative officers, on average, were mostly neutral in their assessments. Media representatives were also clustered around the more neutral responses. With very few exceptions, those interviewed across all categories saw any resulting change as favorable for higher education. One study participant put it this way, "How can you argue against accessibility, affordability, and accountability? Those are all good things and if the Spellings Commission helps with that, great."

A theme of the responses was that the Commission's work called public attention to the issues in higher education that would result in change. One Commission member indicated that "the meetings raised the dialogue and got things in the press and put the spotlight on them.... Now that accreditation is sort of out of the dark..., over time we'll probably do something good about it." Another suggested that some in higher education were waiting for the administration to change "without having had a chance to do anything, but I think they're wrong and I think that document will live. I think the genie will be out of the bottle." A Department of Education member suggested that the higher education community realized that "this may be the last chance they have to get in front of this.... If they don't figure it out now someone is going to figure it out for them." On the other hand, one person interviewed, who did not believe that it would result in significant change, attributed that to the fact that much of the work being done was in progress before the Commission came to be.

A higher education association/accrediting agency representative felt that there would be "generally favorable" change, including "much more transparency [and]... much more attention to where students come from and what happens to them." He/she also suggested that "ultimately there's going to be some set of standardized learning outcome measures" and expressed concern about how the measures would be used. Another said that there had been prior attempts at legislation on controlling costs, so the issues were not unfamiliar to people. One person added that "the Spellings Commission opened our eyes to... the notion that things need to be expected of higher education, and more needs to be expected of higher education in the future [and]... words like 'accountability' and 'building an accountability architecture'... are going to become part of the vernacular of higher education in the future."

One institutional leader said that there were two initiatives—U-CAN [University and College Accountability Network] and VSA—that “are a consequence of the Spellings Commission,” and “that when scholars look back and write about this [in] 10 to 20 years... [they will] say it moved higher education in the direction of being more transparent, making more information available and to begin looking in a serious way about outcomes assessment.” Another agreed that it may have “accelerated efforts at the association level.” Similarly, one institutional leader who felt there would be significant, lasting change suggested that what will “emerge from this are stronger accrediting agencies whose rules [will force] institutions to be publicly accountable about their outcomes and having sophisticated assessment systems.”

A chief academic officer who predicted little change said, “In the short term it’s going to move... issues. I don’t think it will improve higher education.” One chief business and administrative officer believed there would be significant, lasting change, which would not be attributable solely to the Commission, but would involve “things that the Commission has highlighted and talked about.” Another said that it is still “seen as a republican report” and “in the end politics will play an important factor in how successful the Spellings Commission Report is in including change.” Change, one study participant suggested, would depend on “whether it be the Congress or whomever to follow through and make sure there is lasting change. I think Congress can do a lot if the appropriate people get a good understanding of what’s required and what are some of the pitfall.... ACE and the other higher education organizations can be really key in making sure that they get representatives of the higher education to the table to have that dialogue. I don’t think higher education has always been [good] at communicating to Congressional leadership as far as what is needed.”

Another chief business officer who was “hopeful [and] more optimistic” said, “If it would help to improve student preparation and the alignment of primary, secondary education with higher education, that is a really good thing. If it would help with student aid and provide [greater] opportunities for low-income students ... to get higher education ... those are things that ... the Secretary is in a good position to influence.... Some of the other things that they’re encouraging, they don’t have as much direct control over. Learning outcomes, improvements in productivity, improvements in innovation ... it really gets down to the faculty and administrative leadership within higher education to respond to that.”

Although most people felt that any change would be favorable, a limited number of those interviewed did not. One saw “plusses and minuses ... student aid will be favorable, and one-size-fits-all will be very unfavorable. Transfer of credit and

uniform general education requirements across universities will be very unfavorable.” Said another, “The waterfront of educational institutions is so diverse that it’s not going to be good for all institutions.”

22. What lessons about the dynamics of change within higher education can be derived from this case?

What lessons about the dynamics of change within higher education can be derived from this case? In commenting on lessons about the general lessons that might be learned change, many study participants’ comments reinforced the importance of considering various stages in the change process, as discussed previously. Their comments also provide reinforcement for the notion that, in addition to *stages*, there are a number of *themes* that are vital across the various phases of the change process, among them *leadership, communication, culture, assessment, and planning*.

Leadership and Communication

A number of study participants talked about the importance of leadership and communication in their reflections on lessons to be learned about change in higher education from the Spellings case. One institutional president put it this way, “I think that what we can learn ... is that we need to be more proactive and not so reactive.... That means we need to lead. Individual associations, individual colleges and universities need to develop a communications plan, so that we can tell our own story. We haven’t done a very good job of that in the United States—including why the diversity of the colleges and universities and schools that we have is such an asset.”

A chief academic officer who commented extensively on the same themes said, “I think that higher education somehow has to develop a way of responding to these things with a... cohesive publicly identifiable voice.... There needs to be some cohesiveness, some unified way to react, and people who will take this on as a mission and for whom this is a passion. Higher education hasn’t been very good in getting together to have a singular and cohesive voice in the areas that commonly [external constituencies] are concerned about.... It’s hard for [research universities] to get together with the county colleges and community colleges. Frankly some of our agendas are at odds with one another. [They are] different... not better [or worse]. We have a hard time documenting and... articulating [these perspectives in a cohesive manner].... Each sector has fought for its own little piece of the pie and not thought about the pie itself.... If there were some better leadership, there

are enough points of agreement or common interest that we could have focused on those things.” Where would the impetus for that kind of leadership come from? [At the state level,] “it would be natural for it to be the leader of the state’s flagship public institutions [that play this role]. But there’s a great deal of resentment whenever the leader even says that they’re the state’s flagship institution.... So we must first get over that. And it’s a battle... [and] very, very hard to do.... And I don’t know really what the solution is. Some parts of that may relate to the rhetoric that we use. It’s all about *quality* and *excellence*, which [often is taken to] mean if we are excellent somebody else has to be less excellent. [We need, instead, to talk in terms of institutions with differentiated missions but all important for access and excellence—all parts of a whole. [We need to explain] that the county colleges have every bit as much of a role to play as research institutions do—it’s just a somewhat different role. Every once in a while within [a state] there are flashes of that kind of cooperation and what it can achieve.... [when different parts of] higher education actually band together]—the community colleges, the state colleges, the four-year colleges, the senior publics and the research universities.... [All work] very consistently and cohesively with a singular message. That should [be] done nationally. Higher education consists of a number of different sectors, [and] they all have different agendas. There are as many internal battles as there are battles between higher education and the external forces that are trying to intrude on it.”

A study participant from a higher education association/agency expressed some similar concerns about the importance of cohesive and unified leadership and communication. He/she expressed the belief that “to some degree the most inclusive higher education association failed to provide the kind of broad leadership that was most needed, and “the vacuum was filled by people outside of higher education or by individual parts of higher education.”

Another chief academic officer talked about the importance of having effective communication and leadership in working with key stakeholders to encourage shared commitments and understandings. “... Universities like ours and our peers haven’t really done a very good job overall of engaging K-12 or P-12. We’ve done it on a pretty limited or tentative basis overall.... We have not made the transition to higher education as seamless in many cases, as it might have been.... The other side of that coin is that the state departments of higher education, local schools, and others have not always wanted to partner.... So it’s really been a problem from both sides. We have in some cases not been clear enough about what our standards and expectations are. We haven’t communicated; we haven’t told our story as well as we might have. I think the other longer-term issue is that higher education now is viewed so much as a private investment rather than as a public good that the public, or at least the public’s representatives, look at it more as a consumer industry

than a social force.... We could have done a better job I think publicizing higher education as a public good rather than just a private investment—in contrast to a lot of other countries that have put a much higher share of their national wealth into higher education at all levels than we have in this country. I don't know what the higher education associations could have done... because higher education is such a diverse community of institutions....”

Another study participant offered the following observations: “There are some things colleges and universities ought to have been doing—and we should have been doing them before we were forced [to act]. The issues having to do with assessment and outcomes are important. Not just from the consumerism point of view.... Outcomes [also have] to do with ‘how well are we educating out students?’ If you're taking in students with this ability and producing students with that ability, did we actually add value here or did we sort of just baby-sit them and not mess them up for four years [while] they would have matured...? So, some of the things that Spellings [focused on] we should have been doing before they brought it to our attention.”

For one chief business officer, the primary lesson learned was expressed in this way, “I think that we are falling behind as a nation, and so we really need to take action if we don't want to fall further behind.... We need to be more open to different ways to allow change to occur and not be so close-minded within our own higher education community. [We need to be] open to [new]... practices and other methodologies.”

A chief administrative officer commented, “I think that what plays out is a conflict that existed in higher education between faculty and staff, and visionary leaders who understand the need to change and [believe] that higher education is a dinosaur and that we run the risk of becoming increasingly obsolete if we don't address these issues. A lot of faculty feel this way, ‘We've been successful for a long time; we're competent professionals. We've always worked this way. Why change?’ Is hitting someone over the head with a club the best way to promote change or do you try to do it subtly and gradually? I think that whenever you write a major report like this with lots of big ideas for change, it becomes hard for a lot of people to deal with.... It becomes a criticism rather than a map. It would be nice to sort of tackle the issues one at a time—[for example], let's deal with the financial issue... a doable problem. I think that what [the Commission] did well this time was that it wasn't quite devastatingly critical. It didn't just say ‘everything's awful and you guys don't know what you're doing.’ It framed the issues in a way that said ‘yeah, we've been good, but we could be better.’ I like that. But I do think the complexity of the agenda [means that]... there's not really a road map to implementation on any of those issues, and so it's hard for people to sort of think through [it to deter-

mine how to proceed]. That is probably the problem . . . [It is somewhat like] the problem we have with strategic planning on our campus. We always want to be sure we have some things in our plan where we can do instantly and build credibility for the plan, so people can say ‘we can see already that things are being addressed in a productive way.’ I’m not sure the Commission Report is packaged with some clear wins. I actually think that what is needed is next steps. [The Commission Report] is like a preamble to a great strategic plan, but you don’t know what you’re actually going to do to get it done If [leaders from higher education, the Commission or the Department] could have immediately moved to some small positive steps, I think that would have made a big difference.”

In a related comment, a higher education association/agency leader spoke of the importance of “managing the message.” The Commission needed to “manage their message about what level their goal setting was taking place at. I don’t think the Department did a good job with that. They articulated a report with goal setting at the *potential* level, but it was perceived as goal setting at the belief level, and that’s why the higher education community became alarmed I think the higher education community could have responded in a much more constructive and positive way”

Also commenting on the issue of leadership and its importance to successful change, are remarks from a chief business officer: “Who are the people sitting around the table? Do they represent the kinds of folks you want to have represented in such a setting? Yes, that matters.”

Another study participant commented specifically on the importance of leadership communication skills, “There are only so many people that make good [senior leaders for higher education] because of their perspectives. I [am] amazed by . . . folks who are so tied up in their work and are really good at their work, [but] you just can’t take them out of it. I used to love talking to folks in the lab who were really, really good [at talking to a broad range of audiences] because they could take a very, very complex subject and explain to me why they needed this new piece of equipment. And they could do it in a way that I would understand it, and they didn’t treat me as if I was dumb. They would do it in a way that was common sense. We need a real heavy dose of common sense.”

Giving voice to a similar “lesson learned,” was a senior business officer who said, “To me the most important lesson is the degree to which [we need more effective leadership communication from] colleges and universities, proponents of higher education, and policy makers who see themselves as representing the public, the perspectives of higher education to the public. [The] miscommunication . . . has reached this point of seriousness is to me—[and that is] the biggest lesson—that we’re not communicating. And at its worst you could say we’re adversarial. At

best, we're just not communicating. And so instead of collaborating on issues of real concern to the country, to students and their families we're fighting over the kinds of issues that we've been talking about—whether it's a standardized test or who is the best judge of financial need of students... or the kinds of data should be collected in order to provide public service information. Everything is now a case of 'us versus them.'"

What might be done to overcome this problem? "A big part of it is finding a way to quietly and not so quietly begin to address the issues systematically. I put [the responsibility for taking the lead on this] on higher education.... I think you can do it individually, and I think you can do it collectively. I'll give a specific example that I know best, not because it's the best one but it's the one I know. It's the cost study. Why not say 'as a community, 'look, there's a point about all this stuff about transparency.' And if people don't think that was a good study then do another one. But let's report in a systematic, voluntary way. [So, for example, we could propose that] NACUBO is going to present a template for how we can report and ACE is going to endorse it. And we [would] hope that within three years two thirds of the colleges and universities in this country are reporting [using this form]—putting it on their web sites and so on and explaining what lies behind it so that in a relatively standard way I can look at different places.... [I believe these kinds of efforts would have]... the effect of reducing the suspicion level."

Commenting on lessons learned, a commissioner said, "Well I think we need a [continuing] national dialogue about the topics [raised by the Spellings initiative].... The public does better in public policy response when they're informed..., [and] I don't think it should be left up to the overseers and the so-called experts and certainly not the policy people in Washington.... So, the more we can bring this to the public's attention... the more information and transparency we have, we get more trust, and... better decisions [will result]."

Another interviewee offered the following comments, which speak to the value of criticism in promoting improved communication and change: "I think that something like this spurs colleges to explain what they're already doing better, and also hastens their pace in terms of making changes that they're considering. I think colleges did a much better job at explaining their processes... than ever before. For example... I think the accreditation process is much more understood today than it was before the Commission because of the Commission's criticism of that. I think that colleges and... accreditors did a much better job of explaining what they do and how they do it. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that people still think that that's the right way to do it, but I think it's forced colleges to kind of explain what they're already doing. And then in terms of change... we're seeing a number of efforts now on accountability and giving information to parents beyond the U.S.

News ranking. Again I think that it is because the criticisms of the Commission... [that] work in that area increased ... or hastened [these efforts].”

Commenting on the importance and challenges of leadership and communication on complex topics was a senior administrator who noted, “I think the Commission tried to tackle an extraordinarily complicated and incredibly difficult set of issues, and I think that because of that it might have almost been hopeless to try to come out with something that is really meaningful and effective across higher education If they focused on student aid and student preparation, I think those are issues [that they and we] can deal with. [Those issues are] applicable across higher education [and might have had a greater] likelihood for acceptance by the larger community.”

From the perspective of a study participant from the Department of Education, “It’s not a new lesson. Change is hard.... [Often with corporations, it’s often the case that the need for change—the crisis or the problem to address—is unmistakable]. There’s a trigger there that is absent in higher education. The trigger there is you lose share and then the shareholders get upset and you’re put on a burning platform.... Even if you’re still sitting there saying, ‘No, things are good,’ [the platform is obviously on fire and everyone knows that]. In higher education, in many areas there is this false sense of ‘We’re doing okay, as long as I have more applicants than I have slots for and as long as people are willing to pay more money.’ So what’s missing is that trigger that says ‘it’s broken and you have to fix it.’ To that end, [my] job is creating that burning platform to get people to understand we’ve got to change.”

Commenting on the issue of communication, a business officer noted, “I do think ... the language you use can be a huge distraction from the content you are trying to communicate I feel like that’s a significant lesson—I don’t know that that’s unique to higher education.” Commented another study participant, “Higher education is not like General Motors where you can write out a directive and give that to your 15 vice presidents and have them give it to each of their 15 assistant vice presidents and in 2 days all 300,000 employees know that this is the way it’s going to be. There are a lot of people in higher education who believe that there are changes that should be made ... and [that] it should be a national priority and the [country] as a whole should be more concerned about these changes and be more committed to them That can have a deep lasting effect on the nation. But the way... this Report was presented is that higher education has screwed this up and ‘we need a new sheriff in town to step in and make them change.’”

Another interviewee commented about the importance of message clarity and logic by saying, “I think that the Spellings Commission has within it a profound internal contradiction, which is the recognition that we need broader access to our

institutions, that we're not educating... a large [enough] number of students... [but at the same time]... that the outcomes have to be improved for all students. There is a fundamental contradiction between educating a higher percentage of the population and looking only at outcomes and expecting the outcomes to be all higher. The population is a bell curve ultimately in terms of ability and interest, and you can enlarge that percentage but you are not going to change the nature of a bell curve of outcomes. And the notion that you can get better outcomes for everybody in a mass education environment... it seems to me, is a fundamental contradiction...."

Another theme raised by this interview participant relates to the potential problem of over- or under-stating an issue being addressed, "We are always going to have a distribution of institutions in this country that are going to range from the ridiculous to the sublime with 4,000 institutions, and if you try to cram more students into it you aren't going to change that. We have the best system of higher education; we have [the best institutions and we have some of] the worst. We were very proud to say 'well, we're the best in the world.' Well... we are the best of the world when you look at the top 100.... If you look at the next 3,900 or so, we don't have a lot to brag about. [A kind of natural selection process allows the full range to prevail.]" For this higher education association leader, overstated, understated, and overly generalized messages undermine the attention to the significant challenges at hand.

Also commenting on the issue of communication was a study participant who said, "The lessons are the dialogue needs to be more informed and more thoughtful and more open to different perspectives, where everyone gets led toward contributing toward a solution rather than arguing.... So the structure needs to be less divisive and less narrow. Another lesson is maybe higher education needs to be challenged by uninformed and thoughtless recommendations in order to focus attention on the real issues. I see this as a wake-up call. [Another] lesson is [that] higher education cannot abdicate its responsibility for meaningful change.... It gets what it deserves if it continues to sit back and not take a visible lead role in promoting change.... It leaves itself vulnerable to blunt instruments...."

Said another study participant, who is a leader in a higher education association, "I think a lesson to the community is you've got to be more responsive when there's just so much evidence out there about the need for change. I'm not talking about change that should necessarily upset people. [For example], look at the extent to which we still use the language of 'full-time students' and 'curriculum for full-time students'... and look at who goes to school and how. Many are part-timers. We've been talking about these students being 'nontraditional' since the 60s. When does nontraditional stop? When does the nontraditional become traditional?"

Culture, Assessment, and Planning

In offering observations on lessons from this case that have broader applicability to change in higher education, a number of study participants also commented on issues related to the culture of higher education and the importance of planning.

Another senior administrative officer commented, “I get exactly that same kind of reaction... in my small little world [as the Commission did]. I mean just total resistance [to campus change efforts]. It’s like [people are] just going to resist [on principle], whether [they] think it’s a good idea or not.... I’ve been told its just sort of the academic approach—you always play devil’s advocate.... I have to tell you I’ve tried getting consensus [and collaboration] and that doesn’t work either if it’s not something that [people really] want to do. So I don’t think [the Commission] could have done it differently. It’s just not going to work in this [higher education] environment. So you get it out there and people complain and they moan and they just get all up in arms But in the end you might get a little bit of change. [It’s] a necessary step for [promoting change in higher education]. If you [look at this from the point of view of the change agent and if you] look at this in 10 years... you probably don’t get everything you wanted. Hopefully you got 50% or 70% or whatever it is, and you look back and you say ‘wow things did really start to change.’ I would think that’s what’s going to happen. I think if they’d softened the approach] it would be 10 years [later] and you still wouldn’t be anywhere.”

An institutional leader talked about lessons learned that relate to issues of culture and assessment in this way, “I don’t know if it was just the right thing, but they functioned in ways to achieve their goal. [The fact that the Commission or Department seemed surprised by the reaction of much of the higher education community]... says to me they didn’t do their work well because the process should have brought in some of those views ahead of time. I’ve just been there. I mean I can recite for you the time that I, as a dean, had a conversation with the social sciences division who argued you cannot evaluate a faculty member until 40 years after they teach because ‘you have to wait to see what my students do with what I’ve taught them.’ And I’m saying, ‘well that’s wonderful job security folks, but it just isn’t going to work that way. We’re going to decide if you’ve got tenure in the next 3 months... not 40 years from now.’ I know that point of view out there that you need to give me all the independence in the world. [Some say] ‘Only [lesser] schools... need to do assessment. [My leading institution] doesn’t have to do this. You just go out and hire... great faculty members and just let them teach. Why in the world would you assess whether they grade papers well and what their students learn. You just let them teach.’ Well we all know that for every star that does that well, you’ve got a couple people sitting out there reading yellow notes

from 30 years ago and the students are bored to tears and aren't getting anything out of it. But the academy really says 'let me do what I want to do because I know it best and you don't. And we'll find out 50 years from now whether it worked.' As long as that's a major part of the culture [it affects change efforts of various kinds in higher education], and the Commission and Department should not have been surprised to get this kind of reaction."

A chief business officer views inflexibility as a characteristic of higher education that plays an important role in the dynamics of change, "We all know that [higher education is] not flexible. And some days I could say that's not a bad thing, but I think [this situation] really... highlighted the difficult time we have to make changes in higher education. One of our greatest strengths is the individual disciplines that we have within our structures. And one of our greatest weaknesses is the individual disciplines. Because... of those specific disciplines it is very, very difficult to get a faculty, a department, a discipline to have a broader perspective beyond their little world. In order to really bring about change we have to have a greater perspective on how we can pass on education to the next generation and we're just so tied up in our little silos that it's very hard to do."

A university president offered a similar observation as it relates to cultural barriers to discussions of assessment: "I think if I kind of take a step back, part of it is at least in the 28 years or so that I've been part of higher education, higher education inherently has... resisted any form of assessment by outside entity. Their view has been that well, you know, 'we know what's best. And when we see quality we'll know it...'"

One Commissioner responded this way, "two lessons. One is... we often say... that there really isn't a higher education system in this country, just a lot of loosely coupled activities.... I've come to conclude that's wrong. There really is a system, not in the European sense that we have a minister of education, but in the sense that it's one market, it's one federal financial aid system, and it is actually one accreditation system. So [from that perspective] you can't believe that you are going to change higher education one institution at a time. [Rather, you would change it by identifying] some best practices that are going to reverberate all through [the system]. You're going to have to figure out how to get the system as a whole to rethink some of its basic premises. That's very hard, but at least in my own mind, I'm clearer now what has to be done than I was before.... [To do this requires a focus on things like accreditation or finances] because they are common. I mean, whether we like it or not, the federal aid system impacts... all [of higher education, and in a similar sense] accreditation uses the same language everywhere, and the market, in fact, drives a great deal of this. And as... research has at least demonstrated to me... it is a remarkably integrated market. Even though there are differ-

ent niches and different price points and all of that, it is remarkably integrative. You can build contingency models that do a wonderful job of predicting crisis. [Ideally, you would want the elements of the system to come to think of themselves as part of a system, but at least now,] it doesn't. That's where my [concept of] dislodging events come in. If you can figure out what is the dislodging event that makes higher education think of itself as a system, you're halfway home.... One [example is the idea of a] shift to a three-year baccalaureate. If you got a couple of the great big state systems to do it, everybody will follow suit quickly, and then everything is up in the air. And, among other things, if you shift to a three-year baccalaureate, a lot of faculty who pooh-pooh the measure of learning outcomes would suddenly rush to them because they would need to know what's working and what's not working as we shifted to a three-year baccalaureate.

The importance of understanding the nature of the higher education culture and what this higher education association leader sees on the dedication to continuous improvement, is another lesson learned "I think [the Commission and Department] underestimated the kind of constant curricular improvement and change that is going on in higher education."

A member of the Commission commented on the cultural resistance he/she sees to change within the higher education community, "[Higher education is] a very insular group. Most faculty go into teaching and higher education because they want to be in charge and they want to be isolated to some extent. It's an industry that is resistant and slow to change.... The tactics that have been used to stop change are very old and tried and true and have been very successful to this point.... Part of the challenge has been that the public... state legislators... and business leaders to some extent are a little intimidated by the academy. I think what's happened over time is that the public at large is getting much savvier.... People are now starting to expect [of higher education what they have come to] expect now of the health care industry."

The importance of monitoring and assessing threats and opportunities in the environment was another lesson to be derived from this case. According to one chief academic officer, "This storm was brewing before Margaret Spellings ever came on the scene, so [we should have known this, and should have been] saying, 'let's head this off at the pass. Let's be proactive.' So, the... lesson is that we were very reactive instead of being proactive, and that somebody should have been watching the landscape to see what was brewing."

Commenting on the importance of planning that takes cognizance of the culture of higher education in promulgating change, one higher education association leader stated, "When you do strategic planning at the campus level and you recognize the culture of students and faculty and researchers, you [realize you]

have to have buy in, even if you from time-to-time believe your constituency is wrong or not interested in appropriate change. If you don't have their buy-in it is a culture that won't change, and if you try to force the change, the changes you get are undesirable outcomes."

Giving voice to a similar point of view is this study participant who commented, "If you want real change to occur it needs to occur on campuses. I don't think change can be externally imposed by politicians. If you understand the change process, top-down change is not lasting change. Transformational change has to occur within the institution..." Higher education association and agency leaders express the sentiment this way, "... [The] ultimate agent of change has to be the higher education institutions themselves. That is not to say that they can't be stimulated or prompted or encouraged or goaded into change, but that it can't be mandated, simply because it is so contrary to the culture that dominates..."

And, finally, a study participant, who takes away from this case the idea that the Commission designed and implemented their plan very successfully, commented, "I think the Commission is a good case study in how to manage an influential national conversation.... Get attention, have resources to sustain the attention, put out a challenge, and see if you can get results. Would [the various associations that have voluntarily launched new initiatives] have done what they've done... absent the Commission? Obviously... leverage matters. I [do] think that... if the Commission had gone about its work somewhat differently, it might have gotten more, but I'm not sure how much more from the [higher education] community [itself]."

23. Looking back, what thoughts do you have about other ways the higher education community (associations, agencies, institutions) might have responded to the changes being recommended by the Commission or the follow-up efforts by the Department of Education?

There is perhaps a higher level of agreement among interviewees regarding this question than any other in the study. Nearly all of those interviewed, across various roles and perspectives, believe that the higher education community could have responded more effectively than they did to the Commission and the Report—before, during, and after the release of the Report. An overriding theme was regret that the community had responded to the Spellings initiative more as a problem than an opportunity, had appeared defensive and reinforced images that the academy is resistant to change, failed to use the situation as a platform for effectively telling higher education's story, acted reactively rather than proactively, and missed opportunities to provide needed leadership.

An Opportunity Rather than a Problem

The most basic conclusion is that the higher education community could have—should have—treated the Spellings Report as an opportunity, rather than solely as a problem.

One senior leader of a higher education association put it this way, “Well, I wish the higher education community had found a way to be more positive. We tended in our public statements to pick out the wrong, damaging things they were talking about and didn’t spend enough time acknowledging the right things. That final statement that ACE put together with the six presidential associations... made a positive statement. I wish we had the balance to do that all along. The academy did a little damage to itself by appearing just super negative. [Higher education] criticized Chairman Miller for “the harsh criticism. The higher education response was in like kind to his comments.”

Reflecting this same view, a university president said, “I think the higher education community could have been more forthcoming, it could have released more data, it could have been more self-reflective, it could have been more critical but not in a negative way—[it could have] done some analysis. Almost from the beginning it was a kicking and screaming kind of thing.”

Another president commented, “I should not be surprised but the knee-jerk response of ‘we don’t like it and we are going to try to fight it’ led by [several higher education association leaders].... The tendency to do the knee jerk... disappoints... me. [My view is that]... this train is out of the station. I mean something’s going to happen. I’d rather be directing where the train goes, than sitting here saying ‘I hope we don’t launch the train.’ One would hope higher education would learn from its own processes of education and communication and sharing and shaping instead of just going to the battle grounds.... It’s easier to teach others how to do it than ... do it ourselves.... [Our behavior] reinforces the view that we have a narrow interest to protect and we’re going to protect it. And that interest is that ‘you give me your federal money so I can run my operation the way I want it to run and you trust me.’ Well, if I’m on the federal government side I’d say, ‘I’m not sure I want to do it that way...’ [Our] methods of response do not serve to reduce the skepticism about our processes and openness and interest in producing educated people. [I would think our response should have been something like]

- 1) We appreciate the sentiments which have led to the work of the Commission;
- 2) We wish there had been more dialogue as a part of the work of the Commission and we want to promote that now, and here are the steps that we want to take to expand the dialogue. Here are the points that the Commission is making that we agree with and have great empathy for; here are the concerns we have about where

the further work could go, and here are things that we can support and we encourage the Commission to do to follow up on what it has found so far.”

One senior business officer said, “I think that higher education did respond defensively and so I think that already there is this contentious relationship that has been established between the Commission and the higher education community. I think that higher education could have responded differently just by spinning the objectives and saying ‘the Report... the Commission is absolutely right... this is an essential national priority and we believe that financial aid is a critical issue and should be number one.’”

A business officer commented, “The higher education community, in general, should have responded to the Commission Report saying ‘we agree in many ways with what is being said.’ That should have been the headline. Higher education should not have opposed it, questioned it, challenged it. Higher education should have said, ‘We agree with some of the fundamental observations and perceptions that are being made about higher education’... Higher education should have created institutes, agencies, think tanks... across institutions [to develop] thoughtful solutions to the issues raised by the Commission... not in response to the Commission, but in response to the needs of higher education.”

From the perspective of another campus leader, “... the six presidential organizations [should have come] together and said, ‘look, like it or not we need to take not only these recommendations, but put together our own thought piece that ... responds to this in a way that is positive... politics will tell you can’t [sweep] this one under the rug. You’ve got to really work with it and embrace it... and say ‘thank you.’ [Then say], ‘Now we’re going to take this [Report] and we’re going to do something with it.’ And say to Congress, ‘[we] will be back in your next session to give you a full report on two or three of these and the session after that on a couple more.’... And maybe the six presidential [associations] should have hired a couple of folk to go across this country and go to every single legislator and meet with the leadership and talk about it and say, ‘Look we just want you to understand what we’re doing and really explain it to them.’ Because this is politics and explain it to them and say, ‘look you’re going to be hearing from some of your presidents’... I think we should have had a national effort put together. It was a golden opportunity I think to respond to a national discussion. It would have been a small adjustment [to make] too. No it’s not over yet. Hell I think we could still do it. All it takes is the six presidential organizations to come together—[to shift the message of our advocacy efforts]. I understand [the president of ACE’s]... arguments. But, damn it, you still take that soapbox and use it. George Bush will be out of office in another year. Margaret Spellings will be gone. We’ll still be here. We need to get rolling with this thing and make use of it.”

Noted another, “I think instead of just trying to say ‘no’ to the whole issue it would have been—it would be—better if a lot of associations had embraced it and tried to work with... [the Department] to follow up with efforts, to make it happen.... I think among the community colleges [the response has] been positive, but I think among the four year schools it’s been, you know, ‘Don’t do this [to] me... just leave us alone.’”

One interviewee from the Department of Education described higher education’s reaction as one of “fear.” “I won’t name the president that was visiting with me who said, ‘How dare you ask me to be accountable to you on student learning outcomes.’ I just looked at her and said, ‘You should have no trouble making your case...’ I just don’t get the fear. Another interviewee from the Department said, “There’s some great stuff happening in [colleges and universities] and rather than trotting [out] champions, [higher education] spent time trying to say, ‘you don’t trust us. Just leave us alone.’ I think it was a huge wasted opportunity. That is probably the most disheartening thing of all.... Rather than [analyzing] where some folks are and what do we need help on, [higher education] just started throwing up barriers.”

Defensiveness and Appearances of Resistance to Change

A number of interviewees from various perspectives expressed the view that the higher education response came across as defensive and argumentative, rather than as an attempt to engage in genuine dialogue. Said one interviewee, “I think there was some overreaction, but I also think that was partly in response to... the way that the Spellings Commission opened the debate. And I think everybody could have been a little calmer.” Similar sentiments are expressed by senior university officials, as cited in quotes above on pages 88–90.”

A chief business officer commented, “I think as I understand the process that we’ve gone through there has been some ‘connection’ along the way, but higher education doesn’t usually go willingly most places. So, I think there probably could have been more connection and interaction along the way that might have dispelled some of the “2 X 4-edness” of the Commissioner’s comments.... I think that that’s very difficult [to promote meaningful change] without great connection, coordination, and consultation.”

Another study participant said, “I think you could make an argument that if more reasoned voices in higher education had come forward [and created]... a more balanced impression about how higher education had viewed all this stuff, the Department might have felt less pressured to make knee-jerk decisions. Obviously this is Monday morning quarterbacking.... I don’t think the Department

was wrong to listen to the cacophony and... conclude [higher education doesn't] like this [so] we have to find some ways to get stuff done, because there's no way it's going to happen organically. The other reality is that higher education doesn't move all that well itself unless well pushed and pressured."

A system head commented, "I would make the comment that higher education was too defensive in [our rhetoric]. What we've actually *done* [is reasonable] as opposed to *how we responded* in a public relations/media commentary."

Another study participant, who has followed the initiative closely, made this comment, "I think that the only thing that they probably should have done a little differently is that I think [the higher education community was] a little too defensive. I think that they could have explained a little bit more about how colleges work without being as defensive as they were, and I think that the biggest example of defensiveness was the fact that David Ward didn't sign onto it... I think in terms of the perception of higher education, the fact that the President of ACE did not sign onto it... gave this perception that colleges were... defensive about things being suggested.... I think it reinforced a defensive reaction and that colleges are unwilling to change. That's what the critics were calling for and I also think that he was the only one reinforced that even more."

A higher education association/agency leader said, "I think the Commission taught us some lessons about how to use debate to encourage change. I think the Commission showed us in the higher education community that we need to be very, very careful if all we are going to do is oppose suggestions for change.... I think that even if [the Commission] had very much diluted the recommendations and [included] a lot less criticism... there [still] would have been opposition. I mean there's just this history of difficulty."

Effectively Telling the Higher Education Story

Speaking more generally of the issues addressed by the Commission, one chief business officer said, "I think we have for many years been not as creative as we should have been about being able to articulate for people what is... going on in our community that is driving up the price [of higher education]. I also think we're not very articulate [in explaining] that our community is not one community. And so we let the *New York Times* get away with doing a cover story about the skyrocketing tuition and they quote \$37,000 a year and [suggest] that 150 institutions charge that.... We're also not also good at making clear what really is true as opposed to what people like to say.... We haven't been very effective about communicating what are the component parts of the financial picture. Now part of that

comes from the fact ... that we don't want students to be choosing on the basis of price.... What we want is for them to choose on the basis of program, on the basis of location, on the basis of academic experience. So we do have a long history of not wanting people to think about our price.... But that's made us, I think, less good at talking about... what it costs... and that's why it costs what it costs. And not be defensive about it. Just say this is what it is." See page 84 for additional comments from chief academic officers.

A chief academic officer offered the following observation about one of the challenges impeding efforts to tell higher education's story more effectively, "Well, it would have been great if we could have found the language that was similar to the language that the people leading the Commission were trying to use and listen to them.... I [attended one of the Department Summits and was] in a subgroup and people were talking about learning and student outcomes [and if you take that discussion into a faculty senate on our campus] ... nobody would understand what you were talking about.... Only the people in engineering, business [and certain other professional disciplines] would [understand it].... Those disciplines that have external accrediting bodies like ABET, formerly the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) ..., they tend to know. [And... if you use that language in liberal arts fields, people won't understand what you're talking about.]... I think if there's a way to find a common language—a language that would be understood both by the Commission as well as the higher education community—but that didn't happen."

A system head commented, "To our funders and to our citizens who support public education, to our parents, to our students, and to our employers. We have got to get better in terms of accountability to the various stakeholders. And I think the conversations all helped us to think through that a little better. I think the days are over where we say send us some money and we'll do good things."

Commented a senior business officer, "Higher education's ability to ignore itself is ... a tremendously interesting thing."

Proactivity versus Reactivity

Commenting on the dynamics during the Commission hearings, one Commissioner expressed the sentiment that "... Commissioners [representing higher education] failed to express effectively or educate the Commission effectively on a positive way out of this.... That is, we were too reactive.... It was probably necessary for all of us to be much more proactive." But he/she felt that

various constraints—tightly structured meeting agendas, the ‘autocratic style’ of the Commission Chair, and interpersonal tensions that developed between individuals—meant that there weren’t many options... not much leeway. I [do] think they came to respect... [one of the leaders of a higher education association said], because when push came to shove they couldn’t push us over.”

A chief academic officer noted, “I think when this all started [higher education associations and leadership nationally should have recognized that was not] a typical... partisan show... [that is going] to go away with the election. They misread that.... I think that earlier on higher education should have taken this on and begun to develop its own effective set of proposals or processes. They should have taken the high ground. [The fact is that] all we do if you talk about access is to bemoan the fact that we have to increase tuition every year and then we blame it on the state because they’re not providing enough support and they’re moving away from that traditional contract that we had (that as a state institution they were going to cover two-thirds of the cost of educating the student and now it’s 40 some % only based on actual cost not based on what we need to educate students.) But that’s just a fact, and at some point we have to say what the alternatives are—how we are going to do something different or are we going to come with a renegotiated arrangement or contract with the states....”

Another chief business officer expressed a similar sentiment, “We knew what the Report was going to say. We knew when it was going to come out. We could have had the Washington agencies and different presidents have some thoughtful prepared responses to it, which wouldn’t all be everybody agreeing about everything.... [A number of associations posted responses on their web sites, but]... what was wrong with them is they didn’t say anything [much. Essentially], they said, ‘maybe you’re overemphasizing this or maybe you didn’t understand this quite as well or just the way we do...’ For me [higher education’s response to the Commission was] a non response. [We said things like,] ‘We wish you would meet more often.’ Or ‘you don’t understand us’... That certainly didn’t make the public... the government happy.”

A president offered the following observation, “I suppose that... [we could have been] more measured in our response and gathered... information and data [before responding]. Here, again, I think we were asleep at the wheel. We didn’t have the information at our fingertips... apparently we could get it together. [Without it, we were] backed up against the wall... and were defensive or sounding defensive.”

A chief academic officer commented, “What higher education needs to do is come up with its own proposal. They need to present a viable alternative to what

we should have done with No Child Left Behind, but no one came up with anything better. And so it stands. And the same thing with higher education.... [VSA is an alternative to what the Commission and Department were proposing, but in some ways—from the view of higher education—it is actually worse than what the Department might have imposed.] Because they went over the top. [VSA] did more than [the Department of Education] ever would have.... But we [do] need to look at [the issues raised by the Commission very carefully]. Higher education has a responsibility to look at it because if we don't there will be another Spellings Report.... That language was so incendiary. Look at the words. Somebody must have had a thesaurus out... [and that made it difficult for higher education to have a more moderated response.]”

Leadership

In thinking about higher education's response—what it was, what it could have been, and what it might be in the future—a number of interviewees commented on the issue of leadership.

One chief academic officer explained, “I think that higher education somehow has to develop a way of responding to these things with a... cohesive publicly identifiable voice. Right now I don't think that you could identify who are the advocates for higher education on a national scale. So if you say ‘environment’ [you might say]—Al Gore. If you say ‘poverty and economic growth’—Bill Clinton. You could go down the list. But who would [come to mind]... if [the topic is] higher education? I can't name anybody. So there needs to be some cohesiveness, some unified way to react and people who will take this on as a mission and for whom this is a passion.”

A higher education association leader expressed concern that “to some degree ACE... failed to provide the kind of leadership [that was needed], and the vacuum was filled by people outside of higher education or by individual parts of higher education. And that was a negative consequence of change that you read out of this. [I'm talking not about] the associations [in general,] I'm talking about ACE [that was the one association that had the greatest opportunity to provide broad leadership. The situation was] the Commission generated results, and [ACE's president] is unable to convince anyone else to join with you in opposing it, you have isolated yourself.... It's important to note that everyone... from higher education voted for the Commission's Report. There were two private college presidents on [the Commission]. There was a community college president on it. Two people from the public sector on it. When they all voted for it, [that]... gives [support]

to it. [It's a problem]... when you not only vote 'no,' but you're the only person. Had a group of higher education people joined in voting 'no,' then it changes the dynamics."

A similar point of view was expressed by a business officer who commented, "[I] was shocked that [David] Ward... didn't... sign it.... [Had he signed it,] he could have been [higher education's] leader. [Even though I might have the same concerns he did,] I would sign anyway... and [then he could] take it to... his constituent group and say, 'you know I agreed conceptually, but... [I certainly didn't] agree with everything.' It's just generally understood that you have a consensus and everybody signs up and then you figure out what you can do to make it work. That's the approach that I would think most of us [would have taken]. I mean you're on committees or you're on councils and you don't ever agree with everything 100%. But do you do a little fitting in... I just thought that was a very [significant] lack of leadership."

A chief business officer commented about what higher education could have done differently in this way, "One of the problems in higher education is the fact that we've gone now two generations without the leadership in higher education either able to make trusting investments in each other or in the sense of permitting one other to speak... forcefully on issues or being supported enough by higher education... to speak candidly on issues that need to be addressed.... I've thought a lot about it because I think it needs to change.... We need to renegotiate some of our roles in society and with society, in particular with the federal government, and you can't do [it] if you don't have two parties willing to talk about it."

On the Other Hand

Not everyone agreed with the perception that the leadership approaches were lacking in this situation. One president commented, "I could argue that I think the higher education community has been pretty responsive. You've got the VSA, you've got UCAN. You've got everybody now talking about outcomes assessment. You've got new energy with the regionals [accrediting agencies] around this topic. So I think the higher education community has been pretty responsive."

Speaking of David Ward's decision not to sign the Report and the positions take by other leaders, a chief business officer said, "I think overall I was pleased with the response.... David Ward did not sign it and... my reaction was his response and explanation why was fairly well done. And there were others in higher education... that acknowledged to a large degree that there were positive aspects of the Report, and agreement on some of the issues, but it's just that the recom-

mentations seemed to be too simplistic, too broad given the complexity and differences in higher education. And they pointed that out to them.”

Another business officer said, “My sense is actually that the associations have done a good job of trying to acknowledge the good parts of the Report and work on them—like financial aid. I don’t think they’ve been as negative as some people might have like them to. I think they’ve done a good job actually.... The bits and pieces I know.”

24. Looking back, what thoughts do you have about other ways the Spellings Commission and/or the Department of Education could have promoted the changes being proposed?

Nearly all study participants had comments and suggestions about the approach employed by the Commission and the Department, and they had thoughts about other strategies and methods that could be used to pursue the directions advocated in the Report. Some suggestions focused on the structure and the make-up of the Commission. A number of interviewees from all perspectives expressed the view that more could have been done—and could still be done—to create a clearer message as to the need for the Commission, the Report, follow-up activities, and the reforms they advocated. The need to more directly and actively engage a broader array of constituencies from higher education, including faculty, was discussed by many as an area where improvements were needed.

There were various perceptions as to the appropriateness of the Department’s decision to use negotiated rule making as a part of the change effort and also of the timing of that action. According to a number of study participants, this decision created mixed messages about the willingness of the Department to collaborate in the way that is familiar to the higher education community. The Department explained that it saw the negotiated rule making process as a way to initiate focused and meaningful discussions—to debate and reach greater clarity and compromise. In its view, it was open to listening, compromise, and hoped it would envision the process as ultimately beneficial to all; this message did not seem to come through to many in higher education.

Not all study participants offered suggestions as how the Commission or Department might have handled their roles differently. Several participants believed the approaches and strategies used were very appropriate and effective given what they understood to be the goals of the initiative.

General Approach/ Communication Strategy

A number of those interviewed offered comments about the general approach and strategy employed by the Commission and the Department, as well as other ways to promote the changes being proposed.

A higher education association leader offered the following observations, “I think ... if I had been Secretary... [I] would have gone to the associations and said, ‘I’d like for each of you to identify ten of your presidents or leaders... to come to Washington to sit down with members of the department and we will share ... what our perceptions are of the future needs of higher education, the concerns that we have that we think need attention, and then we want to hear from you what your concerns are.... We don’t want to just hear about money because we know that money is a problem, but no matter how much money there is, it will always be too little. So let’s not talk about money; let’s talk about education itself and what you see as the realm of the possible and just have a dialogue and make it a joint project from the get-go.’ What is critical is getting the higher education community—including the faculty—involved. If... faculty don’t own the problem it doesn’t get solved, and if higher education doesn’t own the problem it’s not going to get solved. The question is how do you get higher education to own the problem? And [the Commission and the Department] had no understanding of that and they still don’t... and that’s [an] irony.... [It seems to me that] something happens to people when they get into federal government that they think they’ve got to govern. There are profound problems with higher education. I think the Spellings Commission identified a lot of them, but we need to get the higher education establishment to own the problem in order to solve it, and they went at it in such a way that they never got buy-in.”

One university president evaluated the approach in this way, “... [It all] depends on what their... goals are. One scenario would say they did it just fine. They’re trying to get attention and get it out there. And... maybe it wasn’t in their interest to collaborate and to water down what they were trying to say up front. [If that was their goal] ... it was better for them to come out with an absolute position and collaborate later. And that fits with [the strategy of] political jockeying. [However], that’s more acceptable on the political side, I think, than on the academic side. They could have had some of the same [conversations in a way that was more customary] for the education side. [That would have involved] giving more evidence of being inclusive. [Even if there are disagreements] you can always do minority reports and say, ‘Here’s where most of us are, but we also recognize this point of view,’ so that you co-opt the opposition by saying, ‘We already know some of the points you are going to make about this,’ and then you reduce the

impact ... of that negative response when you get it.... The two cultures [political and academic] play by some very different rules.”

A study participant who is very knowledgeable about the work of the Commission and Department offered the following observations, “I think Charles Miller... made a strategic decision that the way to get higher education’s attention... was to stake out some fairly extreme positions, and I think in some ways they were more extreme than... where he wanted to go.... I’ve gone back and forth on whether some of it was accidental. He doesn’t do much by accident. [Higher education] didn’t make up the fact that he had talked about using standardized testing in a more significant way than higher education has been accustomed to in measuring student learning outcomes. [Also, Chairman Miller released those issue papers that basically blamed the faculty for the cost problem in higher education. Commissioner Bob Zemsky has referred to the Chairman’s decision to use a ‘2x4 across the head of higher education.’ That was a choice, and I think he made it quite purposefully.... I know the people in higher education feel that he chose an oppositional rather than collaborative strategy. Whether [that’s an accurate conclusion] or not, I’ve gone back [and forth in my thinking].”

Another study participant put it this way, “I think the way Department of Education presented this guaranteed that there was going to be resistance.”

One president focused his/her comments on the style of “the two personalities at the helm, namely Margaret Spellings and Charles Miller.” His/her view was that their style really got in the way of people being able to step back and say, “These recommendations aren’t bad at all, these are the same kinds of things that we’re [also] talking about.... [Charles] Miller has this kind of in-your-face style, and that was very, very negative, from at least in my perspective, from the very beginning. So, in a sense, by having someone like that... at the helm did not really make it possible for people on both sides—on all sides—to take a thoughtful, objective, rational approach to... receiving the initial recommendations... from the Commission because they automatically jumped to the conclusion that... [the recommendations] were tainted because of the temper that he was conveying.”

Another study participant talked specifically about the desirability of greater patience on the part of the Commission and Department. “I think there’s no question that ... the Department, ironically, may have misjudged [the extent of resistance they would encounter], and I think the department was too impatient.... There’s a lot more support for the underlying ideas than the Commission and Department [realized]. If they had more confidence in the fact that higher education would get on board itself, I think they might have felt less obliged to aggressively push federal answers to the problem.”

Another individual—a chief business officer—commented on the issue of “rigidity” and “prescriptiveness” by saying, “I think they might have been somewhat less prescriptive and rigid in their recommendations, and should have seen this as sort of a beginning partnership and collaborate partnership rather than imposing rather blunt and rigid solutions for a rather diverse group of institutions. I think its recommendations would have been taken more seriously if [the Commission and Department would have seen themselves as a] collaborator and not an intervener—if there is such a word. Their dialogue sessions didn’t really seem to be genuinely unbiased. [In all, there was] too much politics involved.”

Another individual who followed the work of the Commission and follow-up activities of the Department very closely suggested that both “might have taken on a smaller mission/charge to begin with.... I think they probably tried to do too much and ... that [undermined efforts] to put any of these things into place... Maybe they should have just worked on one or two specific issues, for example, fixing the financial aid system or increasing accountability— through accreditation—and they might have gotten more done.... The Report focused on many different areas, [and] ... Secretary Spellings herself... focused only on some of those areas.... [It would have been more effective if she would have focused on those themes] ... from the beginning.”

A chief academic officer offered this summary comment, “Certainly they could have done things differently but I think it was a group on a mission. There really wasn’t anything swaying them.”

Structure and Representativeness

Some comments concerned the structure and make-up of the Commission.

One higher education association leader said, “... One of the mistakes, I think, was that they tilted everything toward the for-profit institutions [in the membership of the Commission and in the composition of the negotiated rule making group]. Of course this is a market-driven administration... [and perhaps because of that] the Department overloaded [these groups]... with the for-profit representatives.

One Commissioner offered this recommendation in hindsight, “I probably wouldn’t include any [higher education] association person... on [the Commission]. [It’s difficult for such individuals not to] succumb... to the pressures of the academy instead of [voicing their]... own views.”

Commenting on the composition of those invited to attend follow-up meetings hosted by the Department, a higher education association leader remarked, “I would gather the far more representative group [more broadly representing

the diverse sectors of higher education]. I would have been more honest about the results of those meetings. Many people [who attended] thought that... what [the Department] published as a result of the meeting was not the meeting that they heard. I would [also] have solicited suggestions... from the higher education community... as opposed to packing the [sessions with people who had particular points of view] and [the reporting out of] unrealistic goals ... and [outcomes from the meetings].

Creating a Clearer Sense of the Need for the Commission, Report, and Follow-Up Activities

A number of interviewees from all perspectives expressed the view that more could have been done—and could still be done—to create a clearer sense of the need for the Commission, the Report, and follow-up activities within the higher education community and among other constituencies. Having a clear message was mentioned as one important facet that is needed for achieving this goal.

One member of the Department of Education indicated that he/she believes it should have been possible to more clearly communicate the compelling need for change, “The burning platform, not just for the public at large, but for the business community, and the higher education community, so that ... people understood we’re coming at [higher education] ... not because we think [it’s] ... broken. We’re coming at... [higher education] because we think the system needs better access and persistence....” He/she expressed the intention to continue to work on this “... with the American public, absolutely. With higher education, I just don’t know how fractured our relationship is and whether there’s a willingness to hear [what we’ve been trying to say].”

A president made the following observation, I think [it’s important] to step back and [explain] why people should get any education.... taking a very fundamental and basic approach [to explaining] why... people get K-12 education, and then why college and [postgraduate education is important]. I think if you ... [explain in that simple] fashion, people [will be able to better comprehend] the important strategic value [of higher education] for our country. [Without this understanding, people may not appreciate that] in the same way that we became a superpower... we could [fall from power as a country].... If there would have been more focus on scenarios or consequences of inaction, there might have been a little less defensiveness or resistance by higher education.”

Commenting on the issue of creating a shared sense of the need for change, another business officer said, “What was the focus of doing all this? Was it ‘how can we work together and help make it better,’ or was it, ‘okay, I’m from the govern-

ment and here to help you. We need to get these things resolved because these are problems.” This interviewee felt that the second of these two messages was the one communicated and thought that that was unfortunate.

More Effectively Engaging the Higher Education Community

Reaching and engaging the appropriate groups with the message is important in promoting change, and there was a sense among a number of those who participated in the study that there were shortcomings in this regard. As a member of the Department explained, “We initially did rely on the associations a lot [as a communication channel], and I think that has been detrimental. I think we should have regional [and institutional] leadership...” Similarly, this individual noted that it would also have been very helpful to have had more involvement with faculty and disciplinary groups. “I’m not trying to make excuses, but there are hundreds of disciplinary groups in higher education because it is so decentralized and we didn’t have the savvy on how to reach folks directly..., which is why we went on these regional tours. But it was very, very difficult [to reach all the groups we needed to].... We thought that when we went out on the road that there would be more focus on sharing best practices and kind of ramp-up activity. The activity and progress is really hit-or-miss and what we ended up doing is listening to ideas on how we could work together on how to move this ball forward—although it’s not reported in the press.”

The lack of direct involvement of faculty was mentioned above and earlier (Question 5), and there is the perception that this added to their negative reaction and resistance. As noted above, one individual from the Department of Education commented, “The issue with the faculty probably more than anything else is that they were not engaged on the front end. We had a really tough time reaching out to faculty they are so spread out.... Their concerns about their lack of involvement were justified.” So, finding a way to reach and engage this audience was, in retrospect, an area for improvement.

Another suggestion for broader engagement came from a senior business officer who suggested that a good approach would have been to have “... more meetings with some of the national organizations at their annual meetings.... [Secretary] Spellings could have introduced it gradually and... gotten more feedback from national organizations. I know that they held a lot of town hall meetings and other things and the Commissioners went around the country, but I don’t know if they really touched on national associations....”

Another participant in the study offered the following observations: “I think the Commission and the education department might have been better off if they had [not] attempted to... do too much federally.... Part of the problem goes to the way higher education in this country is set up. I think the Commission identified... the right goals, and the right problems, and to some extent the right solutions.... The biggest problem was that this perception that it would be federally dictated or mandated or driven. To some extent the difficulty of moving this bizarre loose confederation of institutions and higher education and public university systems in the direction of a set of national goals is very difficult. So getting movement, nationally, without overstepping the bounds, federally, is difficult because where else do you look for that kind of movement? I think the Department’s view was that was the quickest way to get movement [was through accreditation], because the accreditors basically touch every institution. If I were to try to sum up, I think the idea that higher education needs to change and in these various ways, and again, I think there’s a lot less argument about that than about how to accomplish it.”

A chief academic officer offered the following after-the-fact critique: “They could have worked with higher education. They could have shown some appreciation for American higher education. We don’t have the world’s worst. We have an excellent system of higher education. And one of the things that we do that’s good is to have levels of higher education and we do want to have access. We value education and we value postsecondary education in this country. But we weren’t seen as partners. We were seen as failures, which is not true. And there’s this idea that someone else can do it better—that [for-profit institutions] can do it better.... And it’s smoke and mirrors, you know. Look at [the most popular profit institutions; their students are] all part-time. That’s not... what [most] students need. And cost. Some of these alternate providers are very expensive. But somehow [it’s assumed that] they are just better.”

A chief business officer expressed the view that the Department could have fostered better collaboration and outcomes if they had worked more closely with the presidential associations. “I have to wonder if they might have been able to work with the higher education... presidential... associations, [since that] would have provided access to... more focused peer communities.... The Department of Education can talk about the issues of the postsecondary education [system], but... you have to look at the portfolio of higher education and say ‘What are the appropriate respective roles of the elite privates to the two-year community college[s] that are teaching cosmetology and dental hygiene?’... We’re all playing different instruments in this orchestra, so how can we all work together? Not necessarily playing the same notes, but at the end of the day [playing in a way that] sounds... good. So their job should be the orchestra conductor. Let us play

the flute and the trombone and the drums individually. We don't have to play the same.... You would have had that diversity.... It would have been [a] better way to acknowledge the different roles that we can play and should play—that we're positioned to play.”

For one individual, trust was seen as a major barrier to collaboration. “I don't know enough about that bureaucracy, but unfortunately I have a very dim opinion of... departments of education—[at] both the state and federal level. I just don't have a high opinion about them at all. Sorry, I just don't. I could give you some stories.”

Focusing particularly on the developments following the release of the Report, another individual from the Department noted, “There were lots and lots of letters [that have come in] applauding [the Secretary's] focus on these issues....” He/she noted that “resistance increased when it was announced that we had decided that it would be best to move ahead on negotiated rule making, and also when the loan scandals broke, a lot of things happened. [We felt we needed to proceed] on negotiated rule making for the Higher Education Reconciliation Act... and then through hearings..., but that gave the impression that we were coming at this from a federally handed approach. We were doing a lot of things simultaneously and [clearly that led to the impression that the Department has being more heavy handed than we saw ourselves as being]. And [developments within] NACIQI [National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity] also contributed to that impression... and] the press coverage... [contributed to that view, also]. If we could have... figured out a more direct communication strategy [with the higher education community we might have been able to better explain the approach we were taking and the reasons for it.]”

Negotiated Regulations: Mixed and Competing Messages

There were various perceptions as to the appropriateness of the Department's decision to use negotiated rule making as a part of the change effort and also of the timing of that action. According to a number of study participants, this decision created mixed message about willingness of the Department to collaborate in the way that is familiar to the higher education community. The Department explained that it saw the negotiated rule making process as a way to initiate focused and meaningful discussions—to debate and reach greater clarity and compromise. In their view, they were open to listening, compromise, and hoped it would envision the process as ultimately beneficial to all. Indeed, the process was developed for such a purpose. As the Department explained, “We absolutely tried to [make it

a useful deliberative process and hoped it would result in regulations that would be useful from all perspectives]. The proposal we started with was our best thinking. It was [prepared by] attorneys ... [and addressed specifics of] policy. [We were] trying to figure out what the best way [to address these issues was] given what we knew. It was just our best attempt.... It was our best thinking [not a 'hard' position, but a starting place for 'debate.' That's the purpose of negotiated rule making]. We tried [to encourage dialogue] and were interested in hearing 'alternatives.'”

This message did not seem to come through to many in higher education, and to some extent the nature and requirements of this very formal process—including the requirement for consensus on the entire set of issues being considered in the package in order for any part of it to be binding—can be seen as mitigating against these outcomes. Commented one higher education association leader, “I think ... that if [the Department] had not pursued ... the negotiated rule making process, they would have been more influential ... in the outcome. But I think they sort of galvanized friend and foe alike to be opposed to them and consequently strengthened the hands of Congress. (That's not necessarily bad.) So they came right in with a governmental intervention as opposed to creating more opportunities for public/private partnerships.”

Echoing this sentiment was another leader of a higher education association, “[By] ... going right to negotiated rule making... they went right to a federal solution and not a public-private solution. [In so doing] ... they made it very clear that they did not have confidence in the community to take action in a timely way.... I don't know whether it would have worked, but public-private partnership is another way of promoting the changes versus promoting them through a negotiated rule making and more recently through the Senate bill. [That said] ... what they saw [in the reactions from the higher education community], that probably discouraged them from thinking about a greater public-private partnership and may have been the impetus for the negotiated rule making.... I think they went into this ... with the assumption that the higher education community, no matter what the apparent behavior, was not going to be cooperative.... I didn't see them ever moving in the direction of [leaving] it up to the community to ... [take the lead in initiating change]. I never saw that, [though] I did hear a lot of protestation early on [that] this isn't about more government regulation.”

Another higher education leader expressed the same view about the impact of the decision to engage in negotiated rule making: “[There would have been much less resistance] had the Secretary not done negotiated rule making, and ... if the Secretary had [instead] worked with Congress... had done the summits (national meetings), done the accreditation forum, brought all the stakeholders to the table, and made it known that there were people in the higher education community that

had different views from the establishment—and believed higher education could be aspirationally doing a better job—and tried to influence Congress in areas that were philosophically important to the Secretary.... Because she decided to do the negotiated rule making, it was impossible intellectually for higher education to separate those two processes, and they became very defensive and pulled back.”

Commented another higher education association leader, “One of the reasons that I was in favor of negotiated rule making was because I thought that NACIQI was a little bit adrift. They were in a very bad position of... not having regulations that had been consistently applied over the last, say ten years.... They were in the process of having to figure out how... [to exercise their responsibilities] across a very diverse population of accrediting agencies. I believed [The Department] when [they] said that one of the main reasons for doing the negotiated rule making was to try to bring clarity to those regulations, and [some members of the group] negotiated on that foundation.... I think one of the things that... could have been accomplished in negotiated rule making—had it been limited just to the NACIQI process—would have been to get that clarity that would allow the NACIQI to do a better job.”

Another study participant who followed the matter closely, said “I’m still surprised that the Department decided to initiate the negotiated rule making session on accreditation [at that time, given the pending status of the reauthorization legislation].... I think if Senator Kennedy and Secretary Spellings had sat down together [much progress on a shared agenda could have been made]. [Once Senator Kennedy and Secretary Spellings became engaged in a public debate, with Senator Alexander] in the middle of it, [it’s] basically gone to war... over who had the right to do [what.... And I think in [terms of] content they were close..., [but] they ended up [in a public conflict] over whose authority it was to do this.” This individual also commented, that it was his/her view that “[in the negotiated rule-making sessions themselves... I think some people were using the jurisdictional argument as a cover to fight the substance.”

On the Other Hand

Not all study participants offered suggestions as how the Commission or Department might have handled their roles differently. Commented one study participant, “Again I haven’t followed it closely..., [but] I don’t think the particular things they have done have been inappropriate or ineffective. I think they have been fine. I think the bigger problem was... the publicity given early to the idea of standardized test and other things that have colored everyone’s—at least higher

education's view of it—and this [is an] underlying tension that's been there for a long time, and growing, [and it] meant that they were in a 'no-win' situation.”

Commented another study participant, “They could have tried the more passive fashion but I don't think it would have been as effective.” Making a similar point was a senior institutional leader who put it this way, “Well you know despite my criticism, I think that what they did was probably the right political ploy because I think by using the sledgehammer they got everybody's attention. If it had been a report that was just another mealy-mouthed compilation of 100 recommendations I think it would have sat on the coffee table. I don't know whether the Secretary or the Chair identified this strategy early on, but by picking on a select few possibilities, they really focused attention. The focus on the Report for me is assessment and accountability. And I think those two areas are higher education's weaknesses. You know they smashed us for it, and I think they got some attention because of it.”

Another said, “I've heard some people argue quite passionately, and somewhat legitimately I think, that if [the Report] had adopted a different [tone] [little would have changed, because the] people who complained about the tone were actually upset about the substance, too, and used the tone as cover for opposing the substance. [Still, a number of commissioners were] truly sympathetic... to [what leadership of the Commission] wanted to do in the biggest picture way, and I think [their] view is that [the Commission made a mistake]... by adopting that confrontational tone and undermining [the leadership of the Commission and the Report].”

