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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Leslie Gene Fout entitled "Perceptions of Political, Academic, and Corporate Leaders: Higher Education Accountability in Georgia." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Higher Education Administration.

E. Grady Bogue, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Norma T. Mertz, Michael Fitzgerald, Gary Skolits

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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**Perceptions of Political, Academic, and Corporate Leaders:  
Higher Education Accountability in Georgia**

A Dissertation Presentation for the  
Doctorate of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Leslie Gene Fout

May 2013

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to people in our world with few opportunities in life. May we all keep them in our hearts and minds and continuously strive for a world where every child in every nation has faith, food, safety, and an education!

## Acknowledgements

Crazier things have happened than me completing my Ph.D., but I can't think of any at the moment. Seriously. For those of you that know me, can you? In all seriousness, I have to thank Dr. E. Grady Bogue for meeting me for lunch years ago to discuss the higher education administration program. Dr. Bogue's guidance, encouragement, and "cheers" along the way kept me going. Thank you for believing in me when I occasionally didn't believe in myself. To the rest of my committee-Dr. Norma Mertz, Dr. Mike Fitzgerald, and Dr. Gary Skolits-thank you for pushing me to be my best. Needless to say, you made me better and I consider each of you valuable mentors and colleagues.

The best thing I earned out of this doctoral program was not my degree, but three new sisters – Edee, Kim, and Sarah! The Quad has become so special to me. You were truly the "Tennessee Volunteers" I needed to get me through this program and some changes in my life. I'm looking forward to whatever each of has in store for our futures and know we'll always be together whether we are living near or far. Plus, we need to keep each other updated on aspiring billiards careers!

Thank you to my other doctoral classmates, my current and former coworkers, and so many professionals I've met along the way. We have had some amazing experiences. I have learned something from each of you and will keep them close to my heart as I continue along my journey both as person and a professional.

I have some amazing friends spread out from coast to coast. While we don't see each other like we would like, when we speak, it is like we still live next door. Those are lifelong friendships and I am blessed to have each of you. Although some of us try to outdo one another

when picking fantasy teams or the costumes we might wear for Halloween, our lives are amazing and I look forward to more free time, more golf, more cookouts, and more “Card” games!

I want to thank my family. To my parents, Gene and Jackie Fout-you are my role models! I have learned so much from you and I value everything you taught and still teach me. Our world would be a better place if every child had parents like you. To my sister, Amy, who got all of the brains...thank you for not rubbing it in! You are so special and I can't imagine not having you as my guiding light along the way. Since I was often too proud to tell you, I always strived to be more like you. You and Andy have raised two great daughters, Drew and Sydney, who are just as beautiful inside as they are outside. Those girls changed my life. Drew and Sydney-keep smiling and dancing just like your Uncle Les taught you!

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Thank you God for blessing me with my family, friends, and my life! Please give us all the strength to love unconditionally and to serve you through helping others in our world.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability. A case study design was used to gain in-depth information. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 23 participants.

The findings of the study included the following:

1. Nearly every participant believed the mission and purpose higher education involved providing students with the skills and abilities needed to obtain gainful employment, and thereby make a positive impact on the economic development of the state of Georgia.
2. Approximately half of the participants believed higher education should cultivate an engaged citizenry.
3. No consensus was reached regarding the definition of accountability or the purpose of higher education accountability. However, nearly half of the participants used the words responsible or responsibility as part of the definition of accountability and almost half felt the purpose of higher education accountability was to demonstrate a return on investment to stakeholders.
4. Only one evidence, graduation rates, was identified as an acceptable and valid reflection of accountability by more than half of the participants.
5. The majority of the participants stated the best way to share accountability evidence to stakeholders was to improve the quality, type, and methods for communicating that information.
6. The majority of participants stated the most important step higher education could take to improve performance accountability was to work to improve communication with stakeholders.



Based on the findings of this study, a few conclusions can be drawn. Political, academic, and corporate leaders agree in most areas related to higher education accountability. The common ground among stakeholders is encouraging. Stakeholders believe that the mission and purpose of higher education is to give students the skills to obtain employment. However, corporate leaders do not appear to believe the purpose of higher education is to create engaged citizens like political and academic leaders seem to. All stakeholders agreed colleges and universities must enact accountability measures and be prepared to demonstrate those measures. To accomplish this, communication must improve since stakeholders feel this will result in a better understanding of higher education accountability expectations and outcomes.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Study

American higher education has grown from two higher education institutions in 1700 to 4,495 degree-granting institutions in 2011 (Snyder & Dillow, 2010; NCES, 2012). Total college enrollment during 2011 was an estimated 21.58 million and is expected to increase another 12 percent by 2020 (NCES, 2012). While the number of colleges and students enrolled in American higher education has increased, so has the revenue generated. Total expenditures on higher education in the United States were an estimated \$446 billion in 2010 (NCES, 2012). Colleges and universities received \$36.2 billion from state and federal government sources for research during 2008-2009 (NSF, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Education through the Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed college tuition increased more than six fold in just one-quarter of a century (Vedder, 2004). During the same time, student enrollment and government and personal spending have increased as did charitable giving. According to the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), a nonprofit organization that monitors private giving in education, contributions to colleges and universities have been escalating sharply over the last decade. CAE said that overall giving to colleges and universities in 2012 totaled \$31 billion (CAE, 2013).

The growth, expense, and resources dedicated to education have not gone unnoticed. President Barack Obama in February of 2009 spoke about this issue.

We need to stop paying lip service to public education, and start holding communities, administrators, teachers, parents and students accountable. We will prepare the next generation for success in college and the workforce, ensuring that American children lead the world once again in creativity and achievement (Obama, February 2009).

Later in 2009, President Obama stood before a joint session of Congress and declared that "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world." Improving access to higher education is achievable and vital for the nation's economic prosperity (Carey, 2009). In April of 2009, President Obama once again addressed the importance of higher education.

While our nation has a responsibility to make college more affordable, colleges and universities have a responsibility to control costs. And that will require hard choices about where to save and where to spend. So I challenge state, college and university leaders to put affordability front and center as they chart a path (Obama, April 2009).

Higher education has become an instrument for personal and economic development throughout the world. The global economy requires workers to obtain advanced skills and training. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to offer quality programming that forms the bedrock of economic growth, professional opportunity and personal enrichment in our nation (Drucker, 1994; Gardiner, 1994). Due to the sheer magnitude of resources dedicated to higher education and the importance of its mission, it is not a surprise that the topic of accountability has become more prevalent in the literature from both internal and external stakeholders (Chaffee, 1998; Donald, 1999; Newman, 2003).

With so much personal and public investment dedicated towards higher education, interested parties are beginning to question its results and use of public dollars. A study by the American Research Institute, supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts, found that only 38 percent of all students at four-year colleges and universities were proficient in reading and understanding such things as newspaper editorials. Furthermore, just 40 percent of these students were proficient in completing documents such as job applications, and only 35 percent were proficient

in quantitative tasks such as balancing a checkbook or understanding the terms of a car loan described in a newspaper ad (CEHE, 2007). A 2006 survey found that 44 percent of all Americans believe waste and mismanagement are “very important” factors in driving up higher education costs and an additional 37 percent believed they were “somewhat important” (CEHE, 2007). Spending on student instruction, as a percentage of total spending, decreased from 35.1 percent to 30.4 percent between 1980 and 2000 (Snyder & Dillow, 2007). By 2009, instructional spending was down to only 27.1 percent of total spending (NCES, 2012). With these alarming figures, it is easy to understand why there has been more conversation regarding accountability.

With the rapid growth of community colleges in the 1960’s, coupled with the recent growth of for-profit institutions, the United States has emerged as a pioneer, prototype, and worldwide champion for higher education training and research (NCES, 2011; Vaughan, 2006). Regardless of the size or Carnegie classification, educational leaders typically face the same issues: affordability, accountability, new-program development, productivity, quality, diversity, technology, for-profit competition, first generation college students, funding, and determining what is in the best interest of their students (Lederman & Jaschik, 2011; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003; Polonio, 2005).

Many stakeholders of education argue that state revenue shortfalls will continue and necessitate fundamental changes in education (Kelderman, 2009). "The situation is clearly not encouraging, but it does offer opportunities. Significant reform in any enterprise, including higher education, rarely occurs in good economic times...Most substantive change and improvement have come when money is scarce" (Bass, 2003, p. B20). With the amount of funds being directed toward higher education institutions around the nation, and the important role

college plays in training and workforce development, it is no surprise there has been a call towards accountability.

### **A Call to Accountability**

Trow (1996) defined accountability as “the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect” (p. 310). Over the last forty years, accountability has become a dominant policy accent of higher education both nationally and internationally. The emergence of accountability policy has brought about numerous initiatives with the intent of holding higher education accountable for its performance. A summary of several initiatives will show the increased concern for higher education accountability in the United States.

Data collection and analysis by policymakers have grown due to increased interest in accountability (Scott, 2010). In 1988, the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) began requiring standardized reporting of student retention and graduation for analysis by students, administrators, and policymakers (Leveille, 2005). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) uses reports to disseminate information to constituent groups. Each year, NSSE collects information from students regarding programs and activities that provide data about student learning and development (NSSE, 2011). In addition to students using the findings, colleges, their governing boards, and policymakers use findings to improve their student engagement activities. Likewise, students and their parents may use the information when identifying and selecting where to attend college. External entities, such as the Spellings Commission, believe the focus on accountability should be on public disclosure and transparency to provide consumer information



(McCormick, 2009). This transparency allows the marketplace, such as students and businesses, to reward institutions based on publicly reported performance information (McCormick, 2009).

The 1990's saw a dramatic rise in the use of performance indicators as a form of accountability throughout the United States. The increase in the use of performance indicators may be attributed to accountability being used as an evidence of quality, as a guide for decision making, and as a signal of goal achievement (Bogue and Hall, 2003). Performance indicators may be useful to different groups of stakeholders depending of the purpose and goal of what they would like to know. Enrollment, retention, degrees awarded, charitable donations, alumni attitudes, and placement rates are just a few of the performance indicators that may be used to gauge institutional performance progress (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

A 2004 Survey of Higher Education Accountability Statutes revealed that twenty-three states had enacted legislation expressly requiring a performance accountability tracking system (California State Postsecondary Education Commission, 2004). Forty-four states have initiated some form of accountability mandate while a majority of them have adopted some type of student assessment measures to improve institutional accountability (Leveille, 2005). Furthermore, virtually every state has a plan for formal assessment policies in higher education (Ewell, 2008).

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE), an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization addressing policy issues in all sectors of higher education, has been active in the accountability movement. NCPPE released several studies entitled *Measuring Up*, which established a report card looking at comparative results among states. These results are listed in six categories: college preparation, college participation, college affordability, college completion, higher education benefits to the state, and learning (2000,

2002, 2004, 2006, 2008). While a report card score provides information to constituents, it can be problematic. An accountability report for higher education that is merely a "report card" errs on the side of displaying outcomes without providing an explanation of special circumstances, level of state support, new initiatives, and progress made (Leveille, 2006). The NCPPHE, established in 1998 and comprised of civic, business and higher education leaders, is not the only group exploring higher education policy in the United States (NCCPHE, 2011).

The United States Department of Education released the *Spellings Report* in 2006 outlining six recommendations for improvement in higher education. Like the NCPPHE, the Spellings Commission consisted of a diverse collection of leaders from many sectors of the economy. This report called for higher education leaders to actively develop innovative ways of demonstrating accountability to a diverse set of stakeholders (Spellings Report, 2006). The commission's most important work may have been that it caused a variety of stakeholders to join the dialogue about the national condition of higher education (Zemsky, 2007). The Spellings Commission report had both practical and political implications, with the United States Department of Education and the federal government becoming more aggressive in regulating higher education and both sides of the political spectrum calling for more accountability in higher education (Bardo, 2009). While organizations such as the NCPPHE and the federal government have explored opportunities for improvement in higher education, research driven by higher education officials themselves has offered some insight into the growth of accountability in higher education.

The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) provides a forum for both research and dialogue on a national scale and by each state as well. Thanks to the Ford Foundation, SHEEO initiated the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education

which was comprised of a blue-ribbon panel consisting of former governors, legislative leaders, state higher education executives, college leaders, and business representatives (SHEEO, 2008). This effort released *Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education* (2005) which stressed the importance of accountability but suggested current practices are cumbersome, inefficient, and confusing. This report provides a vision for the future comprised of cooperation, communication, and commitment to fulfilling the mission and promise of higher education in the United States. This in-depth report holds all constituent groups accountable for the improvement of all levels of education.

Declining state revenues, public skepticism about the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education, and the increasing importance of a college degree in a global economy have made postsecondary accountability a policy accent that is here to stay (Burke, 2005). The increase in various forms of accountability policy means colleges and universities must provide more information about performance than they were years ago (Salmi, 2009). With the myriad of reports, articles, and conversations regarding accountability in higher education, the evidence of a call towards accountability has never been so pervasive. Furthermore, the goal of finding a common ground among the stakeholders has never been more important (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Burke & Associates, 2005; Wellman, 2001).

### **Accountability Perspectives**

Higher education has a complex mission. Unlike private business, higher education does not have a single data point effect, similar to a profit. Private business is accountable to its owner or shareholders. Higher education is accountable to a myriad of stakeholders. Students, parents, elected officials, governing boards, alumni, accrediting agencies, and business leaders all demand and deserve results. One issue continuing to plague higher education is the interest

from stakeholders and funders to know what students are learning and how higher education can meaningfully demonstrate its value in the education process (Kuh, 2001; Porter, 2012).

The National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education released a report in 2005 which offered informative but sometimes troubling information related to accountability efforts. The study said all too often accountability was a battleground between educators and policymakers and many educators believed externally imposed accountability was a tool to place blame or avoid responsibility for inadequate financial support (SHEEO, 2005). Many policymakers, frustrated because existing investments are not producing better results, believed stronger external accountability was the only way to get improvement (SHEEO, 2005). Although academic leaders are accountable for the operation of the schools, this study added these leaders cannot succeed without the support and feedback from corporate leaders. Leveille discussed the delicate relationship between key stakeholders.

State legislators see colleges and universities as secretive, over reactive, and quick to label any external imposition an attack on academic freedom or institutional autonomy. Conversely campuses view public officials as uninformed and unrealistic. State officials are seen as too impulsive about intervening in their eagerness to demonstrate to taxpayers that only their timely intervention can assure quality and contain skyrocketing tuitions.

(Leveille, 2005, p. 3)

Some research has garnered data concerning these key stakeholders' differences on accountability; yet there is much we do not know. As such, there is a need to study what Burke (2005) describes as the "accountability triangle" which entails the state, the academy, and the market (p. 23). These three groups have a vested interest in the success of higher education. Unfortunately, a lack of trust often encompasses these important groups as it pertains to

accountability. In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dr. Laurie Fendrich (2007), a professor at Hofstra University, shared that she believed all this talk of accountability was “bureaucratic baloney” (B8). Critics of more strict accountability use the concepts of academic freedom and professional autonomy when voicing their feelings toward government officials and other stakeholders not having the right to make academic officials formally accountable for their performance (Huisman & Currie, 2004). Of course, other people within higher education believe accountability policies are beneficial to continuous improvement. As such, there is no consensus as to the best approach to improve higher education through accountability policy.

The gaps among stakeholders’ perceptions are further explained in the *Futures Project* where legislators and higher education officials expressed different levels of importance regarding key issues (2003). For example, state legislators viewed accountability as extremely important whereas some academic leaders in higher education believed accountability was minor compared to other issues. Higher education officials have experienced the challenge to deliver quality educational programs to more students with fewer legislative dollars by more stakeholders than ever before (Callan & Finney, 2002).

Due to the challenging economy not only in the United States, but also around the world, higher education officials have begun to understand that accountability is a permanent fixture in their quest to lead their institutions. Academic leaders acknowledge the accountability movement and have begun to meet some of its challenges (Ewell, 2008). If education officials would like to continue receiving state funding, then they must respond to the challenge in front of them and address requests for public accountability.

Community and business leaders have become more actively involved in higher education. Not only do employers need highly skilled, highly trained employees, but they

understand the economic impact more highly trained workers will have on their respective communities and on their own business. As such, the market has become a player in the accountability movement as has state legislators and higher education officials. Business leaders have questioned the responsiveness of many colleges to the marketplace in an ever changing economy (Burke, 2004). Hall (2003) stated the public sector was perceived as inefficient, so they must become more like the private sector to become efficient and to save themselves.

Over the last quarter of a century, accountability policies and practices have received increased dialogue in state legislatures around the country. Whether it is evaluating graduates' performance, student satisfaction, or student engagement, the legislatures underwriting much of the costs of higher education want to see results (Burd, 2003; Callan et al, 2007). With the dramatic increase in accountability policies coupled with the decrease in available funding, it is clear there will be no more "blank checks for higher education," (Boggs, 1999, p. 4). Elected officials must enact accountability policies because an absence of such a policy would be seen as neglecting its role and responsibility (Leveille, 2005).

William Zumeta (2001) has stated, "If a contemporary but balanced accountability regime is to be developed, more trust must be built and sustained among the key players" (p. 186). Ruppert (2001) found state legislators believed that higher education has three key roles: (1) to strengthen and diversify the economy; (2) to prepare and train a high-skills, high-wage workforce; and (3) to raise the level of educational attainment of the state's population. While elected officials may believe jobs are the primary mission of higher education, academic leaders may have other thoughts regarding mission priorities. Elected officials have been known to accuse colleges of being more interested in autonomy and demanding financial support than

accountability or serving public priorities (Burke, 2004). The friction between these groups has created a climate of antagonism.

### **Recent Findings**

Accountability is here to stay. The critical question is whether or not higher education will respond to the challenges ahead. Will elected officials work with higher education officials to develop a better accountability system? Will elected officials and higher education officials meet the demands of business and community leaders? Like many critical issues in society, the accountability movement will take time, research, effective communication, and leadership from all stakeholders for American higher education to reach its potential in this new century. Three dissertations and a research study have been conducted to address this important issue.

One dissertation studied Tennessee political leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs. Roberson-Scott (2005) found public higher education institutions in Tennessee were not effectively demonstrating accountability. Fifteen people, approximately half of the Tennessee Senate and House legislative members serving on the educational committees, participated in the study. These leaders felt policies and practices have not resulted in increased confidence or better management in higher education (Roberson-Scott, 2005).

In another dissertation which focused on the Tennessee higher education leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs, Tanner (2005) discovered many of the academic leaders were displeased with the state performance funding program, while acknowledging the importance of accountability policy. Many higher education leaders voiced their concern related to other accountability policies including program reviews, report cards, and specialty accreditation (Tanner, 2005).

Yet another dissertation focused on Tennessee corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs. Tipton-Rogers (2004) discovered a substantial lack of awareness regarding current accountability practices in the State of Tennessee. In addition, the study found the need for more meaningful dialog, workforce readiness demands, stewardship of resources, and enhanced performance indicators (Tipton-Rogers, 2004). All three dissertations mentioned above uncovered new information pertaining to perceptions of higher education stakeholders but only in the State of Tennessee. The three researchers recommended their studies being replicated in other states to determine whether their findings would be similar or different to findings in other states.

Dr. Grady Bogue led a University of Tennessee research team exploring the extent to which there were differences among political, academic, and corporate leaders in five case study states regarding higher education accountability policy. This quantitative study involved a survey regarding individuals' perspectives regarding accountability. The states studied included Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Oregon, and Michigan. More than 1,800 emails were acquired by the research team of which this researcher served. An email survey was sent to the prospective participants asking them to participate in a 5-10 minute survey. More than 420 responses were returned (Bogue et al., 2010).

The findings of this study reported how the respondents defined accountability, the perceived effectiveness of some accountability instruments used in higher education, and the importance of specific purposes of higher education (Bogue et al., 2010). Findings demonstrated the complex mission of higher education because of its instruction, research, public service, public policy, and continuing education missions (Bogue et al., 2010). Participants believed there were multiple purposes of higher education along with multiple constituents. However,



there were differences among the participants in areas such as the evidences, instrumentation, and communication surrounding higher education accountability. As a result of these differences in the quantitative survey among political, academic, and corporate leaders, additional research is needed to garner in-depth, qualitative information.

Another quantitative study sought to identify the similarities and differences among corporate, political, and academic leaders' perceptions in Tennessee on postsecondary education accountability policy and investigate ways for improving accountability policy as evidenced by these stakeholders (Morse, 2011). This study for a masters' thesis followed up the Bogue et al 5-state quantitative study of which Tennessee was a part. Morse surveyed stakeholders from throughout Tennessee and received responses from 129 participants: 52 corporate, 40 political, and 37 academic leaders. While there were several differences in the findings of the Morse study, this study strongly corroborated the research by Bogue et al. (Morse, 2011).

The complexities of the accountability issue seem appropriate since the mission of higher education has found its share of tension. Should educators be concerned with teaching students to think, question, and search for the truth or merely become trained in a certain skill so to obtain a job? The answer may depend on the particular stakeholder group to which someone belongs. External stakeholders often rely on numbers to provide answers while higher education officials often believe numbers do not tell the entire story. Regardless, if higher education is to continue to serve the masses in the halls of academe, reaching consensus regarding accountability policy is imperative. Wellman (2001) acknowledges the process of policy design must be "a political negotiation requiring consensus about technical measures among parties who may not agree with one another on the purpose of the measurements" (p. 6).

Policy design with multiple constituencies is not easy. Key stakeholders can move forward with the sole purpose of helping themselves or forge some common bond to move the higher education and society forward towards continuous improvement. An essential need exists for collaboration and communication amongst the state, the academy, and the market to design accountability policy to meet the challenges and needs of society.

The three dissertations and one thesis mentioned above focused on three groups of stakeholders-political, academic, and corporate leaders-in the State of Tennessee. However, Tennessee is just one of fifty states. Dr. Grady Bogue and his research team explored this subject in a five state quantitative study. While this study reached a broad sample of education stakeholders and provided new information, it did not provide in-depth information due to its design. As such, further study is warranted to probe more deeply. This study complements and extends the previous qualitative and quantitative studies. Furthermore, this study provides in depth information not currently known regarding accountability in the State of Georgia.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The literature has demonstrated accountability to be at the policy forefront of higher education around the nation. With numerous governmental and non-profit organizations discussing the improvement of higher education through student success and engagement, retention and graduation rates, performance funding, and student learning - additional data from key stakeholders is needed. Three dissertations have provided information pertaining to political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability policies in Tennessee. These studies provided in-depth knowledge that was not known. The five state, quantitative study probed the perceptions of political, academic, and corporate leaders from around the country. Another quantitative study focused on Tennessee to extend the five state studies

findings regarding higher education accountability issues. Because of their design, background information regarding the differences of these stakeholders could not be obtained. Research shows that differences exist among political, academic, and corporate leaders on matters related to accountability policy. An in-depth examination of what differences exist and why they exist amongst stakeholders in Georgia is warranted. Political, academic, and corporate leaders are three key stakeholder groups in higher education. A need exists to extend previous research to discover what differences in their perceptions exist and why, what will promote substantive educational change, and what will improve higher education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability. The five research questions which guided the qualitative study were as follows:

1. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?
2. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition of accountability and the purpose of higher education accountability?
3. What evidences of higher education accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?
4. How can higher education accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?
5. What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

### **Significance of the Study**

Given the fervor of accountability discussion in the country, this study was timely, important, and provided information not currently known. The study could verify the three qualitative studies in the state of Tennessee thus extending the findings to an additional state. If similarities and differences are found in not only Georgia but throughout the country, stakeholders can do more to fulfill the mission and promise of higher education. Likewise, this study serves as a reference to current or aspiring college administrators, elected officials, and business owners. Stakeholders could make better decisions in future policy by identifying areas of discussion derived from the findings.

This study provides previously unavailable data regarding Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability in higher education. The resulting data may be important to those key stakeholders in Georgia so to enact change in higher education accountability policies. Furthermore, other states may benefit from the findings in their role implementing or creating accountability policies.

As a result of this study, much can be learned about how higher education stakeholders perceive accountability. Stakeholders can recognize the findings and the similarities and differences that exist between constituents. Consequently, if the findings are analyzed by higher education stakeholders, a greater level of engagement and open dialogue could result in improved communication and cooperation by policymakers and practitioners.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Like all research, this study had limitations and delimitations. First, the study was limited to twenty-three stakeholders in the State of Georgia: 7 political, 8 academic, and 8 corporate leaders. The intent was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants; thus,

some measure of breadth was sacrificed. The study confined itself to interviews of a sample of political, academic, and corporate leaders in Georgia who are elite in their area of expertise or have a specialized knowledge of this subject (Dexter, 1970). Due to the small number of participants, the information obtained is not likely to be representative of all political, academic and corporate leaders in Georgia or other states. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all areas of accountability policies and practices in Georgia or other states. While the findings may be suggestive of what key stakeholders perceive as accountability policy purpose in general, the findings are limited to the perspectives of those interviewed. While this study makes no claims of generalizability, the findings may prove beneficial for those who seek information on improving higher education accountability policy throughout the country.

### **Definitions**

While one purpose of this study is to discern the meaning of accountability from the perspective of Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders, the researcher will use the following definitions in conducting the study.

**Accountability** – Bogue and Aper (2000) defined accountability as a formally expressed expectation—a campus or board policy, state or federal law, or formal policy of another agency such as an accrediting agency that (1) requires evaluation of both administrative and educational services; (2) asks for public evidence of program and service performance; (3) encourages independent/external review of such performance evidence; and (4) requests information on the relationship between dollars spent and results achieved. Romzek (2000) defined accountability as the “answerability for performance” (p. 22). Leveille (2005) adds accountability is a systematic method to assure those inside and outside of higher education that college and universities—and students—are moving toward desired goals.

**Stakeholder** – Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002) defined stakeholder as students, society, and government participating in or benefiting from education. Maassen (2000) defined stakeholders as a specific group of external actors that have a direct or indirect interest in education. Maassen added the role of the external actors has become more important in the last few decades (2000). Honadle and Cooper (1989) declared a stakeholder can have access to resources that are required to implement an activity or has resources that can be mobilized to prevent the activity from being performed. Furthermore, Thomas and Poister (2009) defined stakeholder as an individual or group which can have a positive or negative impact on a given situation. A stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). For the purposes of this study, political leaders are defined as state senators or representatives in Georgia. Academic leaders are college presidents and vice chancellors and corporate leaders are defined as business leaders in the State of Georgia.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study and includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, summary of the method and procedures used, the limitations and delimitations of the study, definitions, and this organizational plan. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant research and literature related to the study. Chapter three presents the materials and methods used in the conduct of the study including the research design, site and population, research methods, data collection procedures, data analysis, and trustworthiness of data. Chapter four details the findings of the study. Chapter five includes a summary and discussion of the findings followed by conclusions, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Due to the growing global economy, economic development, the rising costs of tuition, and the decrease in revenues from federal, state, and local revenues, the last few decades have brought about a new policy accent on accountability in higher education (Huisman & Currie, 2004). The word accountability did not appear in the *Education Index* until June of 1970 (Morris, 1971). Since then, the word accountability seems to be ubiquitous in any discussion related to higher education.

Accountability in higher education has been an increasingly significant national issue over the past few decades as a result of rising college costs, disappointing retention and graduation rates, concerns by employers that graduates lack the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace, and questions about the learning and value that higher education provides to students (Leveille, 2006). Ingram argues colleges and universities should provide effective accountability because it engenders public trust and demonstrates the willingness to address important issues (2004). Higher education systems around the world have come under increasing public and governmental scrutiny with respect to what they do, how well they do it, and at what cost.

Historically, people turn to higher education to upgrade their skills or earn a degree that will give them an advantage in a volatile job market. Higher education will play a key role in the country's economic recovery, which is why a coordinated, high performing cooperative system of higher education throughout the country is so critical (Lowry, 2009).

There is an understandable tension between legitimate demands for accountability on the one hand and the desires for institutional and individual autonomy on the other. The challenge is

to find a balance which assures both the protection of the public interest and of the educational environment so critical to effective scholarship, teaching and service (Mortimer, 1971). While the expectation for accountability has grown, agreement among various stakeholders on different methods for assuring accountability is lacking (Achtemeier & Simpson, 2005).

This chapter will review the literature on higher education and the role of accountability in higher education. The first section will provide an overview of the critical role of higher education to the nation. The second section discusses the history of higher education accountability policies and practices and specific studies conducted to research the topic. This summary provides an overview of the last half of the twentieth century in addition to the first decade of the twenty-first century. The final section reviews accountability policies and practices in the State of Georgia.

### **Evolution of Accountability Policy**

One of the first calls for accountability was released by Kenneth Mortimer in 1972. In *Accountability in Higher Education*, Mortimer (1972) stated accountability “aims squarely at what comes out of an educational system rather than what goes into it” (p. 6). According to Roueche, Baker, and Brownell (1971), accountability for colleges permeates the entire community, both internal and external. They added, accountability implies “colleges must be accountable externally to the community and internally to the students who pass through their doors” (Roueche et al., 1971, p. 8). A key component of the accountability debate is that many people differ on what they perceive to be accountability as a definition or through its usage in higher education (Kuchapski, 1997).

The increased interest in higher education may be a result of the growing financial commitment for higher education. While the vast majority of students enrolled in college attend



public institutions, billions in grants, scholarships or loans are awarded each year to millions of students enrolled in both public and private colleges throughout the United States (Schnelder & Yin, 2011). Colleges and universities received \$52 billion from federal government sources for research during 2003-2004 (Snyder & Dillow, 2007). More than \$31 billion in private charitable donations were contributed to college and universities in 2012 (CAE, 2013). With so much public and private money given to higher education each year, it is no surprise there is an increasing call for accountability.

States need strong, effective, and efficient higher education systems now more than ever (Aldeman and Carey, 2009). Due to the economic, geographic and demographic diversity across the United States, different higher education systems, programming and appropriate accountability policies should be implemented (Carey and Aldeman, 2008). In this highly competitive economy, driven by the spread of globalization, people need knowledge, training, and new skills to compete (Aldeman and Carey, 2009). Yet, some believe colleges and universities are falling short of their responsibilities. With President Obama's 2009 call for more college graduates by 2020 and for every American to have some type of postsecondary training, it is certain that higher education systems will be vital to our nation's future success (Spellings Report, 2006).

The federal government has gotten into the accountability debate as well with both K-12 and higher education programs. The Bush Administration made accountability for funding a key component of K-12's No Child Left Behind initiative (Burd, 2002b). In addition to K-12 funding, the Department of Education acknowledged a new emphasis on accountability standards in activities it will be funding (Burd, 2003). National reports including *Measuring Up 2000* through *Measuring Up 2008* were published as an attempt to grade higher education on a state-

by-state basis. These reports, published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, an independent, non-governmental policy agency, completed performance assessments of entire states every two years between 2000 and 2008 (NCPPE, 2008). The findings included letter grades in six different categories including preparation, participation, affordability, completion, benefits, and learning (NCPPE, 2008). States receive letter grades in each performance category. Each category consists of several indicators, or quantitative measures—a total of 36 indicators in the five graded categories. Grades are calculated based on each state's performance on these indicators, relative to the best-performing states (NCPPE, 2008). Data for these studies were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education. These studies only use data that are comparable across all states. The findings identified preparation for and participation in postsecondary education among the most important policy issues. A major finding was that geography, wealth, income, and ethnicity still play a far too important role in determining the opportunities that Americans have to prepare for, enroll in, afford, and complete college (Callan, Doyle, & Finney, 2001). According to former North Carolina Governor James Hunt, chair of the NCPPE,

Despite the accomplishments of American higher education, its benefits are unevenly and often unfairly distributed, and do not reflect the distribution of talent in American society. Geography, wealth, income, and ethnicity still play far too great a role in determining the educational opportunities and life chances of Americans (Hunt, 2001, par. 6).

Education Sector, a Washington D.C. based think tank dedicated to education reform, conducted a comprehensive analysis of higher education accountability systems in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to identify what information states collect on their higher education institutions and how it is used to improve them (2009). In this report entitled,

*Ready to Assemble: Grading State Higher Education Accountability Systems*, Education Sector summarized the current condition of state higher education accountability systems and score individual states in 21 categories, ranging from how well states measure student learning outcomes to how well states link accountability information to funding. The researchers analyzed thousands of documents including web sites, policies, and laws with the goal of answering two questions:

- 1) What information do states collect on their higher education institutions?
- 2) How do they use that information to affect institutional improvement? (Aldeman & Carey, 2009)

The report analyzed systems that may be used to assess areas like affordability, degree production, research, and scholarship. States that publicized assessment tools were rewarded while states that did little to promote them were not. Aldeman and Carey did not evaluate state results but focused on the breadth, accuracy, and strength of state systems in their attempt to hold colleges and universities accountable for results (2009). While the report shows individual states are doing some things well, only 10 states received an overall "Best Practice" rating (Education Sector, 2009). Twenty-seven states earned the "In Progress" rating because of their lack of using and promoting data in their respective state. In addition, thirteen states earned "Needs Improvement" scores. According to the report, these thirteen states do little with regards to accountability programs (Education Sector, 2009). Overall, this study found 38 states have little or no system for measuring learning outcomes and 36 states have yet to develop a method for linking funding to performance (Education Sector, 2009).

Higher education leaders have been accused of not working with their stakeholders about higher education public policy issues (Atwell & Wellman, 2002). Individuals or special interest

groups often get colleges and their administrators to exercise favor towards the interests they represent (Mortimer and McConnell, 1971). In addition, “most governing boards in higher education are comprised largely of individuals whose backgrounds and values are more closely aligned with those of business and commerce than they are with the academic world” (Simpson, 2002).

A study by the Business-Higher Education Forum in 1997 found that business leaders saw higher education administrators as unwilling to change, failing to consider economic development needs, expecting financial support without providing transparency, and being inefficient (BHEF, 2004). Higher education officials responded by sharing that corporate officials proposed major changes, provided vague descriptions of the skills they required in their employees, were inconsistent in their communication, failed to comprehend the difference between education and training, and were too focused on making a profit than the role and mission of higher education (Business-Higher Education Forum, 1997). Since stakeholders come from so many diverse backgrounds, there is little surprise represented in this tension regarding the purpose, mission, and role of higher education.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) have formed a consortium to collectively build campus leadership and the capacity to implement meaningful student learning assessment approaches (Curriss & Lingenfelter, 2005). Their goal was to use assessment results to improve levels of student achievement. These organizations and their member institutions have developed a Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). One goal was to measure a set of core learning outcomes that include critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication. Although there have been a number of important developments

since collecting the initial data, there is still not a great deal of national data currently available from most institutions of higher education based on assessments of their students' learning (Curriss & Lingenfelter, 2005).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation along with the Lumina Foundation for Education recently funded a program to expand the Voluntary System of Accountability into community colleges (Moltz, 2009). This \$1 million dollar grant from the foundation was to bring together leaders from various groups involved in the advancement of community colleges. The purpose of this project was to find a "common set of metrics and data points to evaluate their effectiveness, both internally and against one another, developed specifically for their mission" (Moltz, 2009). Holly Zanville from Lumina believed this project was critical because community colleges often cannot tell where students get lost in their system. Furthermore, Zanville added if colleges do not know where students are falling off then how can colleges improve the problem. Eight community colleges were selected for the initial pilot study. Jerry Sue Thornton, president of Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio believed this project was important because it allowed them to try to improve education by sharing data with each other (Moltz, 2009).

Educational Testing Service, a non-profit education research and assessment organization involved in various education initiatives created the Seven Steps in Creating an Evidence-Based Accountability System for Student Learning Outcomes. Their Student Learning Outcomes Model is designed to assist colleges in demonstrating successful student outcomes and search for opportunities to continuously improve their endeavors (Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler, & Alexiou, 2008). To effectively create a student learning outcomes model, an organization should articulate desired student learning outcomes. The college then must conduct an assessment audit

to determine what outcomes to which they already have access. The assessment audit is followed by an assessment augmentation which indicates gaps between what the institution would like to be able to claim about student learning and what claims the currently available data can support.

The fourth step in this outcome model is to refine the assessment system so to keep, expand, or add important assessment tools but eliminate those not deemed critical to the student learning goals of the institution. Millett et al. (2008) refer to the fifth step as learning from efforts which encourage continuous evaluation of the institution's ongoing assessment programs. The next step reviews the shortfalls and successes in student learning as a result of analyzing the data from the previous steps. This review brings a clearer focus and should put the college in position to determine and implement future programs. The final step occurs when an institution has completed one cycle of the Student Learning Outcomes Model and committed to another round. As a result, the institution has begun the process of institutionalizing the model and creating a culture of evidence. This model will demonstrate a commitment to improving the institution and student outcomes, allows the college to effectively allocate institutional resources through a deliberate decision making process, and finally create a transparent system of accountability (Bardo, 2009). An ideal culture of evidence requires an institution to define and articulate its claims regarding student learning, to develop specific evidence regarding student learning, and to assess students' knowledge and skills (Bardo, 2009).

Former Harvard University President Derek Bok has explored a myriad of issues pertaining to higher education, including the impact of commercialization in higher education and how universities can improve. He has reviewed empirical evidence to assess the shortcomings of postsecondary education in colleges and universities while offering advice on

how to improve the enterprise (Bok, 2006). For example, Bok proposes eight student learning outcomes that are central to the educational mission: communication skills, critical-thinking skills, moral reasoning, citizenship preparation, an appreciation for diversity, preparation for a global society, the development of interests, and career preparation (Bok, 2006). In another book, Bok discusses the selling of the university and the rampant growth of commercialization occurring throughout higher education. Some see this as private business taking more ownership of higher education while others see this as academic leaders' search for additional revenue streams (Bok, 2003). While universities grow and change, Bok urges them to remember their core mission as they move into the future.

If implemented correctly, an accountability system will allow all stakeholders to build consent in the same goals and allow them to analyze data to determine if those goals are being met. An accountability system aligns institutional priorities with state goals, allows students, legislators, leaders of educational institutions, business leaders, and others interested in higher education to view progress toward those goals, and provides a basis for making policy decisions (WSHECB, 2004).

### **Changing Environment**

People are beginning to realize the United States is not the dominating performer it once was. For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education at a Glance 2007* report spotlighted the United States' drop in rankings for the higher-education attainment of 25- to 34-year-olds. The United States barely made the top 10 list with a 10th place ranking (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2007). The National Academies' report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future* stressed that other countries were catching up with the United States'

long-standing pre-eminence in the global marketplace and also in science and technology (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2007).

The ongoing conversations regarding higher education has helped to underscore one troubling fact: the United States does not have one metric, or even a handful of common metrics, that could paint a picture of the accomplishments of its more than 2,500 four-year and 1,600 two-year postsecondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). The only relevant information is the data individual colleges and universities collect themselves and then elect to share with various stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, legislators, and accrediting agencies).

Regardless of the type of college, its role is critical in advancing the individual, civic, and corporate goals of a vital community. A college is integral in raising the educational levels to create a quality workforce. Developing training programs for individuals and businesses allows the college to serve its community where they need it and when you need it. Colleges provide lifelong learning opportunities through continuing education, GED, adult basic education, and English as Second Language programs (Sampson, 2003). Many colleges play a critical role in business and workforce development by partnering with local economic development professionals to recruit or retain businesses in the community. Colleges often conduct research and disseminate it to promote technology transfer and create new businesses. Colleges also may promote livable communities through civic and cultural arts programming and often their athletic programs (Sampson, 2003). Furthermore, some believe American higher education is a guarantor of democracy and a guardian of liberty (Bogue, 2002).

Higher education will be a critical factor in preparing workers with the skills needed to adapt to changing job requirements. The transition from manufacturing to the technology-based



new economy dramatically raised the skill level needed to get a job. Eighty-five percent of all new jobs in America require some level of higher education (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). From 1973 to 2003, the percent of workers age 30 to 59 with some postsecondary education increased from 28 to 60 percent. Nearly three-fourths of the increase in the need for postsecondary education was due to employer demands for higher skills (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). In addition, higher education will be called upon to address the impending shortage of college-trained workers needed to replace the baby boomers, since by 2030 nearly 30 percent of the workforce will be at or over the retirement age (Sampson, 2003).

“American higher education has a long and rich tradition of seeking higher moral and civic purposes in its endeavors...Now more than ever, higher education is challenged to educate the leaders of tomorrow and to connect those future leaders with the world of today” (Hollander 1999, v). Some believe the purpose of an education is to create opportunities for people to become educated, well-rounded, civic-minded citizens (Barber, 1992). When noting the change in the role held by higher education, Malveaux (2003) said, “Once upon a time, higher education was seen as a public good that brought value to our society. Now, higher education is perceived as a personal investment in which the public has limited interest” (p. 2). While Malveaux believes the public might have limited interest, many would disagree (Vedder, 2004).

Parents, students, community organizations, elected officials, and private businesses expect a return on their investment in higher education that is quantifiable and measurable in terms of values which are often counter to those originally envisioned for higher education institutions (Baum & Ma, 2007; Dickens, Sawhill, & Tebbs, 2006; Trostel, 2010). The value of a college education has been expressed in the same way as returns on financial investments. With this comparison, the net return on investment would be approximately 12 percent per year,

over and above inflation (Hill & Rex, 2005). During the second quarter of 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics shared that earnings of a person with a bachelor's degree are estimated to be 77% higher than those of high school graduates (2012). A recent study reported for every dollar California invests in public higher education, the state will receive a return of \$4.50 or 450% of their initial investment (Kaye, 2012). Education is not a business, however, and measuring its performance is much different than measuring a product being sold for a profit (Hersh & Merrow, 2005). While some believe the purpose of higher education is merely to improve the economic development of a region, others see things from a different perspective.

While many see the critical need of training highly skilled employees for business and industry, others are not as receptive to the intimate relationship between higher education and private business. "Our efforts to be responsive by reducing costs and placing priority on certain offerings that are in greatest demand by economic planners can be the neglect of those fields of learning which are most crucial to the kind of high-quality liberal education that is best for the public interest" (Farquhar, 2003, p. 4). The debate about the role of higher education has been ongoing for many years and will continue, particularly with the growing interest in accountability and the limited amount of resources available to underwrite higher education around the country.

The Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) encourages new approaches to public accountability for higher education including measures of student learning to meet the critical challenges (BHEF, 2004). The BHEF released a report on accountability and student learning to demonstrate the issue's highest importance. The report's intent was to stimulate discussion about accountability for student learning in higher education. Their interest in the topic was due to several critical challenges:

- Maintaining high quality in and access to postsecondary education, despite funding declines;
- Meeting growing enrollment demand from increasingly diverse populations;
- Responding to corporate needs for sophisticated and skilled workers; and
- Addressing public skepticism about quality and costs (BHEF, 2004, p. 1).

Higher education is a major driver of economic development around the world (Folson, 2006; Hudson, 2006; Wright, 2012). Colleges and universities are taking leading roles in many state's economic development efforts through research, job training, business consulting, and participating in business recruitment (Community College Journal, 2010; Shaffer, 2010). Likewise, higher education has the capability to build sustainable communities through their teaching, research, and outreach activities (Cortese, 2003; Kirk, 2003). This role will increase as further changes in technology, globalization, and demographics impact the United States (Sampson, 2003). To succeed, communities will need to improve productivity and higher education has the capacity, knowledge, and research necessary to help achieve these goals (Sampson, 2004).

With twenty-five percent of freshman students not making it to their sophomore year and more than fifty percent of students leaving college without a degree and with large debts, it is no wonder there is a call for accountability (Hersh & Merrow, 2005). The demand for greater financial transparency in addition to demands related to admission policies, research, curriculum, student achievement, and other matters have never been greater (Leveille, 2006). There is less trust of the higher education system than has been the case historically, which may lead to apathy and decreased financial support (Leveille, 2006). Due to the critical influence higher education institutions have on the social, cultural, and economic development of a community and the

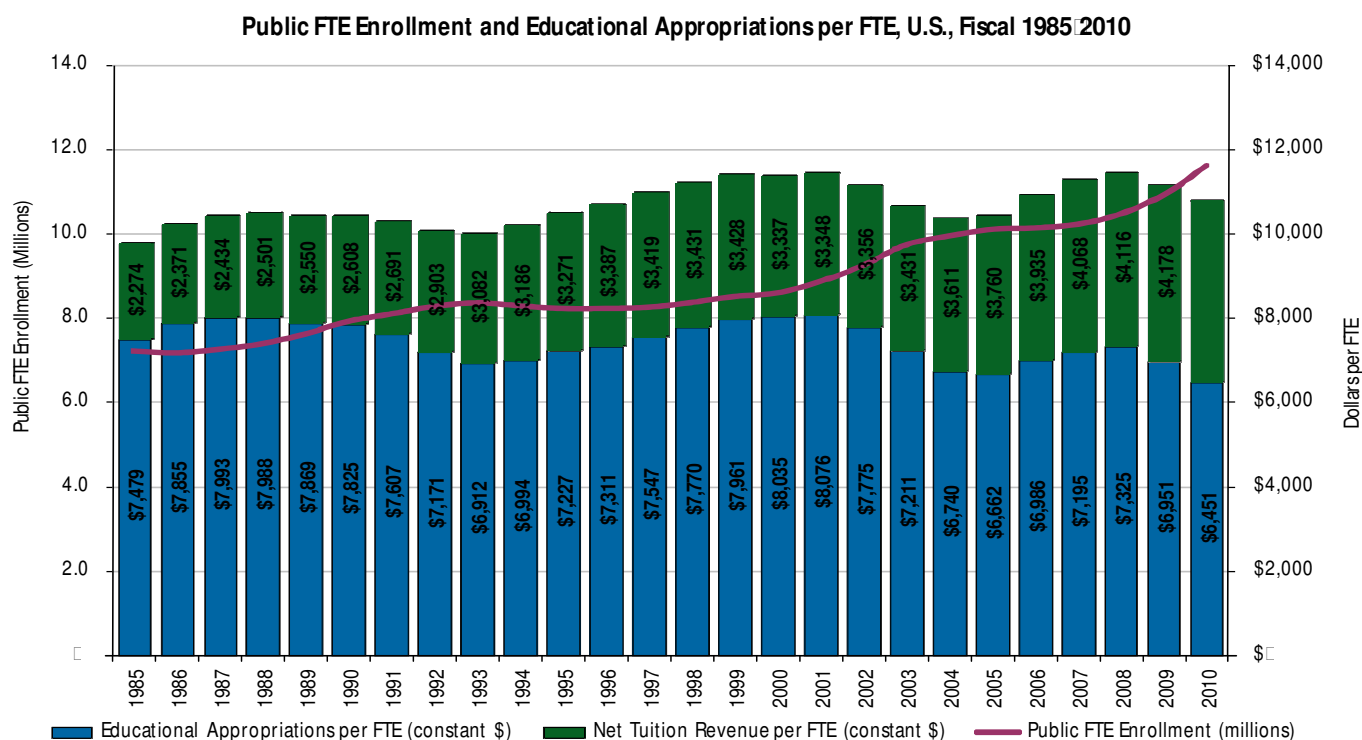
billions invested to underwrite higher education, there is little surprise the term accountability has become such a common word.

Funding continues to be an issue in American higher education. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, educational appropriations per full-time student were at an all-time high in 2001, with \$7,961 being dedicated per student (SHEEO, 2010). These appropriations had dropped to \$6,928 per students by 2009 (SHEEO, 2010).

Figure 1 further illustrates the point that as higher education enrollment continues to grow, state appropriations have decreased while student tuition has increased.

Figure 1

*Public FTE Enrollment and Educational Appropriations per FTE, U.S., Fiscal 1985-2010*



**Note:** Net tuition revenue used for capital debt service are included in the above figures.  
Constant 2010 dollars adjusted by SHEEO Higher Education Cost Adjustment (HECA).

**Source:** State Higher Education Executive Officers

With the decrease in funding over the last decade and the increase in college personnel, it seems any higher education growth is being funded on the backs of the revenue from tuition paid by students (Shirvani, 2012; Vedder, 2004). The source of reliable funding from state governments has continued to wane over the last decade (White, 2010). Funding could make higher education officials struggle to serve their students and fulfill education's role with decreased resources (Arnone, Hebel, & Schmidt, 2003; Zemsky, 2003). Although all colleges will be impacted by declining revenue, community colleges may be more affected since they are typically more reliant on and affected by state funding and its cuts (Evelyn, 2003; Hebel, 2003). For example, community colleges received 48.6% of their revenues from local, state, and federal government in 2008 as opposed to four-year colleges and universities who received only 25.3% of revenues from the government during the same fiscal year (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010). State budgets are forcing lawmakers and other education stakeholders to search for areas to cut (Kelderman, 2012)

Higher education institutions are in a unique position in terms of their revenue sources. When state revenues are down throughout the country, legislators often fund other initiatives and rely on revenues from students paying tuition (Kelderman, 2012). With state revenue decreasing due to the economic downturn, one wonders how higher education will continue to meet the growing demand for its services. If the last decade offers any glimpse into the future, dramatically increasing college tuition will likely be the main source of new funding. Richard Vedder in *Going Broke by Degree* shares alarming numbers regarding the dramatic rise in college tuition. Vedder stressed university tuition typically rises at a rate 2 to 3 percent greater than inflation each year. While the rising costs of medical care has brought out many critics,

Vedder (2004) states university tuition increased at a faster rate nearly quadrupling between the early 1980 and 2003.

With such staggering increases in tuition, its no wonder more students must take student loans to underwrite their education. Coupled with flat or decreasing state funding, the tremendous population growth in the United States, and the large number of low-income, first generation, underrepresented populations about to enroll in higher education, internal and external stakeholders believe it is time to further explore accountability in greater detail to ensure higher education's existence and its ability to fulfill its mission.

### **Nature of the Enterprise**

During the time period after World War II, the conversion of military industries to consumer goods created the need for new, skilled jobs (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). This economic transformation, along with the GI Bill, created the drive for more higher education options. In 1948, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of public, community-based colleges to serve local needs (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). In the 1960's, community colleges became a national network with the opening of 457 colleges. This represented more institutions than the number of community colleges in existence prior to that decade (Vaughan, 2006). The number of colleges and universities in the United States grew from 1,900 to more than 4,000 during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bogue & Hall, 2003). In addition to the birth of new colleges, access to higher education blossomed thanks to state and federal programs aimed at making college more affordable, court decisions allowing access regardless of race, gender or physical handicap, and the growth of graduate programs (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

For the most part, there is a consistent affirmation of the mission of public higher education—providing access to those who desire and can benefit from continuing higher education, excellence in all college and university activities, and service to the people of the state through instruction, research, and public service (Leveille, 2005). Simpson (2002), however, believes the role of American higher education in society is not well understood by many people. There is some debate as to whether higher education is primarily a public or private good (Katz, 1994). Alexander (2000) sums things up as stating, “education is largely an indivisible good, beneficial to society and the student simultaneously, and though each receives benefits, the value received by the other is not diminished” (p. 90). However, tension exists because higher education is tasked as both cultural curator and cultural critic, honoring society’s heritage while questioning that heritage (Bogue, 2006). This tension surrounding the mission of a private business does not exist, as the goal of making a profit is seen as universal in the private sector.

Higher education has a diverse mission as referenced by different types of institutions in operation throughout the United States. The Carnegie Foundation created the Carnegie Classification system in 1970 because of the complex missions and nature of thousands of higher education institutions and the hope of identifying similarities and differences amongst institutions (Carnegie Foundation, 2011). Six categories established by the Carnegie Foundation offer a glimpse into the diverse scope of the higher education enterprise. These six categories include: doctoral/research universities, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, associate (two-year) colleges, special focus colleges (theology, medicine, business, etc.), and tribal colleges. From its inception, the Carnegie Classification’s purpose has been to assist those conducting research on higher education; however, the great diversity of colleges and

universities in the United States demonstrates the complexity of the missions of higher education.

Some stakeholders, including but not limited to political, community or business leaders, believe higher education institutions have a role in serving the needs of the local community or state in which they serve (Martinez, Pasque, & Bowman, 2005). Since higher education institutions rely on external funds from the government and through private donations, they serve more than their own needs. Business and industry are asking if higher education is preparing students for jobs, while political leaders are asking whether schools fulfill their public purpose or efficiently use their resources. Political leaders from all levels of government have questioned college efficiency and student outcomes (Burd, 2002a). Former President George W. Bush and his administration discussed controversial proposals to hold colleges accountable for retention and graduation rates (Burd, 2002a).

The function of higher education by some may be seen as the transmission of cultural heritage or the socialization of the young (Peterson, 1970). This complexity of higher education grows when colleges hold a unique position in which their customers are students who are also their product. As such, the quality of outcome is dependent on both the student and college.

States are accumulating more information about higher education performance than ever before, but no state is gathering all the information that is potentially available (Carey & Aldeman, 2008). To give all students the best possible postsecondary education opportunities, states must create smart, effective higher education accountability systems, modeled from the best practices of their peers, and set bold, concrete goals for achievement (Carey & Aldeman, 2008). According to Lingenfelter, accountability programs should be established from the



perspective of improving performance and not from the mindset of penalizing performance (2003).

A 2007 survey of college trustees stated more than seventy-five percent of them believed colleges should be more accountable for student outcomes (Trustees Views, 2007). The simple answer is there is no commonly used metric to determine effectiveness — defined in terms of student learning — of higher education in the United States (Dwyer, Millett, & Payne, 2006). Most university trustees are from business backgrounds and want tangible ways to track goals, as well as performance of the institution and its personnel (Fain, 2007). However, trustees are often the voice of their respective institutions. As such, trustees often find themselves in the middle of the tension between accountability and autonomy (Burke, 2004).

### **Instruments of Accountability**

Virtually every state has gotten into the accountability movement to some degree. Many of these states produce reports exploring trends in higher education in their respective state. For instance, a study in the State of Minnesota was a response to legislation passed requiring the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to "develop and implement a process to measure and report on the effectiveness of postsecondary institutions in the state" (Minnesota Session Laws, 2005). This tool was designed to aid policymakers in developing a vision, priorities, and goals needed to move Minnesota forward in the information age.

While some quality assurance and accountability methods were developed within higher education, many were not. Over the last few decades, colleges have used practices from the private sector including total quality management (TQM), strategic planning, management by objectives, benchmarking and performance indicators (Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, & Hortman, 2008). Created by Dr. Edwards Deming, TQM primarily focuses on the needs, aspirations, and

satisfactions of those to be served, on the will to continuously improve educational and administrative services, on process analysis and performance measurement, and on civility, candor, and responsibility in human relationships (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

Another example of quality assurance assessed by external organizations is licensure. In several fields, including but not limited to medicine, law, and teacher education, individuals must obtain a license before they are allowed to practice that specific discipline. The main purpose of licensure is the reasonable assurance that a licensee has fulfilled the requirements established by experts in a particular field (Bogue & Hall, 2003). Although students must take some form of test or exam to be awarded a license to practice, the percent of students from individual institutions who pass or fail the licensure examination will force institutions to make changes to their curriculum if too many students fail the licensure examinations.

Placement and licensure rates are important to many colleges who serve on the front lines training students for immediate placement in the job market. As a part of many college accountability practices, employers and alumni are regularly surveyed to determine if colleges are providing students with the skills necessary to obtain gainful employment. Various survey instruments are sent to alumni and employers. These results are shared with college administrators and the governing boards who lead the institution. With public dollars being fought for so fiercely, some colleges have begun to use survey instruments to demonstrate their successes and accountability for their state appropriations.

Although academic program reviews have been around in some form for many years, the last thirty years have seen all fifty states conducting some type of state-level review with many having the authority to discontinue programs (Conrad & Wilson, 1985). Bogue and Hall (2003) state program reviews may be initiated and conducted by the college, by a state-level governing

agency, or by state government. The heightened call for program reviews may be attributed to the interest in improving program quality and the growing call for accountability from external constituencies. Another reason for the increased attention surrounding program review is to aid those making decisions regarding the reallocation of resources and even program discontinuance (Conrad & Wilson, 1985).

Benchmarking as a type of accountability policy grew out of Total Quality Management and the business culture (Achte-meier & Simpson, 2005). This method involves systematically making comparisons among institutions so to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement (Achte-meier & Simpson, 2005). Benchmarking cannot successfully be applied to higher education without understanding the cultural differences (Achte-meier & Simpson, 2005). Due to most legislators and governors historically coming into office with a business background, they typically become heavily involved in the development of benchmarking performance measures (Barak & Kniker, 2002).

In 1979, the State of Tennessee created a performance funding program for all public colleges and universities designed to allocate a small portion of state appropriations to colleges and universities based on certain performance indicators (Bogue & Brown, 1982; Bogue & Dandridge Johnson, 2010; Bogue & Hall, 2003). This program awarded funds as a result of performance and not simply student enrollment. If all or a portion of these standards were met, a percentage of their state appropriations was added to their existing appropriations (Bogue & Dandridge Johnson, 2010). In essence, if a college met standards they received additional funds. Performance funding also encouraged colleges to compete against themselves, not their peers at other institutions (Bogue & Hall, 2003). As such, colleges were rewarded based on their own successes or failures. Several of the performance funding standards currently being used include

student, alumni and employer surveys, program review, program accountability, retention, and job placement (Bogue & Hall, 2003).

The performance funding project in Tennessee has been heralded by many, although it has been revised through the years. Borden and Banta (1994) state this program is the most successful performance funding program in the country. This program provides the motivation to colleges both financially and through public accountability. In addition, the collection of data for the last twenty-five years allows all stakeholders the opportunity to assess previous performance and hopefully make strategic budgetary and policy decisions to improve access, learning, retention, and service to the students and the community. In addition to states creating programs to promote accountability, other entities have gotten involved in this movement. Accreditation has been used primarily by education but is also present with regards to hospitals and other healthcare organizations. For education, including K-12 through higher education institutions, six regional associations provide accrediting services for almost all colleges and universities (ACTA, 2007). Each of these associations is named for the region of the country in which it operates.

An American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) report describes regional accrediting agencies as having nearly unchecked powers with the ability to serve as gatekeepers for the federal student loan program (2007). A problem some see with the accreditation process is colleges and universities are rarely denied nor do they have revoked their accreditation status revoked possibly because of the reluctance of the regional associations' reluctance to cast off paying members to their respective organizations (ACTA, 2007). The ACTA admonishes accreditation as a system of peer review that could be described as symbolic back scratching (2007). While the ACTA criticized the accreditation process for lacking substance, some

colleges and universities would argue with that assessment. The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools took accreditation or issued punitive warnings to fifteen schools during its June meeting (SACS, 2011). The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has added “institutional effectiveness” to its criteria for accreditation (Creech, 2000). As a result, accreditation reviews no longer focus solely on resources but on results.

The two most beneficial purposes of accreditation, as discussed by Bogue and Hall (2003), are to ensure quality and to assist in the improvement of the institution or program. In addition, accreditation receives praise from many who believe it is a respected accountability policy (Wellman, 2001). Accreditation’s goal is to ensure schools provide basic levels of quality in their programming (Scott, 2009). Accreditation bodies see accountability as an assessment for improvement that is an internal matter searching for improvement (McCormick, 2009). In addition, when colleges are accredited their students are eligible to receive federal financial aid such as Pell grants or student loans (Scott, 2009; Crow, 2009; Neal, 2008).

Accrediting agencies have traditionally been the focus of determining effective or successful higher education institutions. However, even accrediting agencies are feeling the effects of the accountability movement. Some believe the accreditation process is no more than peers supporting each other, however, others believe the accreditation process should be more accountable to the stakeholders of higher education (Eaton, 2003; Massy, 2003). One of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, now requires its member institutions to create a quality enhancement plan (QEP) (CHEA, 2011; Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, & Hortman, 2008). This new step allows institutions to look at institutional performance, especially student learning and develop a plan

for improvement. While regional accrediting agencies are relatively autonomous from the federal government, some signs lead people to believe the goal of the federal government is to develop more of a European accrediting system where the national government has more control over higher education (Amaral, Rosa, & Tavares, 2009). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools recently mandated schools to develop and turn in a fifth-year interim report partly to address some of the Department of Education's concerns (Bardo, 2009).

One of the more visible ways colleges and universities are held accountable to elected officials is through the appropriations process (Forest & Kinser, 2002). Initial efforts to establish accountability policy for higher education involved creating budgeting and cost formulas while later steps involved requiring college master plans and faculty teaching loads (Mortimer, 1972). Some college presidents say accountability proponents demand more from higher education institutions while providing less resources for them (Burke, 2004).

By 1994, approximately one-third of the states had some form of performance indicator system in place (Ewell, 1994). Performance indicators are the tools to define and measure progress toward organizational goals (Ewell & Jones, 1994). Peter T. Ewell and Dennis Jones (1994), national experts on higher education accountability reporting, offer this definition: "Indicators can best be described as policy-relevant statistics produced regularly to support overall policy planning and monitoring at the national, state, or system level" (p.6-7). Many of the accountability reporting systems were mandated by state legislatures or statewide higher education coordinating boards (Gaither, 1995). In some instances, a formalized accountability exercise has been implemented, usually on the basis of performance indicators. When using performance indicators, Elton (2004) recommends keeping an open mind when reviewing results

because actual performance is governed by so many variables, including the students themselves many years after their enrollment is complete.

A State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) report indicated that the most common types of performance indicators included admission standards and measures, degrees awarded, external and sponsored research funds, faculty workload and productivity, follow-up satisfaction studies, graduate placement data, graduation rates, number and percentage of accredited programs, pass rates on licensure exams, remediation activities and effectiveness, total student credit hours, and transfer rates (Christal, 1998).

In good financial times, there is typically an increased cooperation and collaboration between and among institutions or systems of higher education but also among stakeholder interests (Leveille, 2006). The design, development, and implementation of a state's accountability system is a process requiring real communication including presentations, discussion, disagreement, negotiation, and compromise among a diverse group of stakeholders (Leveille, 2006). Simpson (2001) believes that "accountability measures unilaterally imposed by federal and state authorities have rarely proven successful" (p. 13). As such, developing a culture where trust, respect, and fairness flourish requires dedication, but need not be expensive. The motivation may be altruism or it may be common sense. Whatever the reason, the benefits are clear: improved teamwork among stakeholders, stronger loyalty and sense of self-worth, higher performance, and greater productivity.

Former Governor of Georgia Zell Miller (2000) believes higher education should change itself so to prevent the marketplace from doing it. Governor Miller went on to stress that higher education taking the lead to address accountability issues would allow well-intentioned boards to focus on large policy issues as opposed to micro-managing the daily activities of higher

education (2000). Since accountability has taken hold of higher education policy throughout the country, it is time to align teaching, learning, and assessment (Knight and Yorke, 2003).

### **Higher Education in Georgia**

Georgia high school graduates in 2008 attended college at the rate of 69.6%, higher than the national average of 63.8% (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). More than 500,000 students are enrolled collectively in the two college and university systems in Georgia during the fall of 2011 (USG, 2012; TCSG, 2012). Furthermore, more than \$6 billion dollars a year was spent on higher education during the 2008-2009 fiscal year (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). With these impressive numbers come high expectations from different stakeholders.

Public higher education began in the State of Georgia in 1784 when the General Assembly gave 40,000 acres of land for a college or seminary (Neal, 1981). The next year, Franklin College, now the University of Georgia, was established. Several years later, the state provided funds to establish other colleges. In 1929, Governor L.G. Hardman appointed a committee to recommend how to improve higher education in Georgia. In 1931, the Reorganization Act was signed which created the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (Neal, 1981). The University System of Georgia is a constitutional entity and its Board of Regents continues to have the authority to govern, control, and manage the University System (Georgia, 2009). The Board's powers include the authority for program approval or discontinuance, internal allocation of the budget, facilities construction, and decisions concerning adding new institutions, upgrading or downgrading the level of the institution, and closing or merging institutions (Neal, 1981). These powers are discussed in Article VIII. Section III. Paragraph I of the Constitution of the State of Georgia (Neal, 1981).



The University System is governed and managed by an 18 member group called the Board of Regents (USG, 2010). The regents are appointed by Georgia's Governor with one representative coming from each of the state's thirteen congressional districts and five from the state-at-large. The University System has a Chancellor who is elected by the Board of Regents as the organization's chief executive officer of the system. The University System is comprised of 35 institutions which includes four research universities, two regional universities, 13 state universities, eight state colleges, and eight two-year colleges (USG, 2010). These 35 institutions enrolled more than 318,000 students and employed more than 41,000 faculty and staff last fiscal year (USG, 2012). Macon College became Macon State College in the fall of 1997, when it was authorized by the Board of Regents to offer a limited number of baccalaureate degree programs to meet identified workforce needs in central Georgia (USG, 2010). Over the last two years, more two-year colleges have been granted authorization to begin awarding baccalaureate degrees to improve both access and attainment for Georgia students (USG, 2012). A list of colleges and universities in the University System of Georgia may be viewed in Table 1.

Another higher education system in the State of Georgia is the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). This system, formerly known as the Department of Technical and Adult Education, is tasked with providing technical education, adult learning and workforce training (TCSG, 2010). In 2011, the 25 colleges in the Technical College System of Georgia enrolled more than 189,000 students, accounted for more than 4.7 million hours of instruction, and had more than 35,000 students graduate (TCSG, 2012). Between 2009 and 2011, the TCSG consolidated fifteen colleges into seven technical colleges to provide a more efficient operation for the citizens of Georgia (TCSG, 2012). A list of all technical colleges in this system is included in Table 2.

Table 1

*University System of Georgia - Institutions*

Name	City, State	Type
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College	Tifton, GA	Four Year - State College
Albany State University	Albany, GA	Four Year - State University
Armstrong Atlantic State University	Savannah, GA	Four Year - State University
Atlanta Metropolitan State College	Atlanta, GA	Four Year - State College
Augusta State University	Augusta, GA	Four Year - State University
Bainbridge College	Bainbridge, GA	Two Year
Clayton State University	Morrow, GA	Four Year - State University
College of Coastal Georgia	Brunswick, GA	Four Year - State College
Columbus State University	Columbus, GA	Four Year - State University
Dalton State College	Dalton, GA	Four Year - State College
Darton State College	Albany, GA	Four Year - State College
East Georgia State College	Swainsboro, GA	Four Year - State College
Fort Valley State University	Fort Valley, GA	Four Year - State University
Gainesville State College	Gainesville, GA	Four Year - State College
Georgia College & State University	Milledgeville, GA	Four Year - State University
Georgia Gwinnett College	Lawrenceville, GA	Four Year - State College
Georgia Health Sciences University	Augusta, GA	Four Year - Research University
Georgia Highlands College	Rome, GA	Four Year - State College
Georgia Institute of Technology	Atlanta, GA	Four Year - Research University
Georgia Perimeter College	Decatur, GA	Four Year State College
Georgia Public Library Service	Atlanta, GA	Georgia Public Library Service
Georgia Southern University	Statesboro, GA	Four Year - Regional University
Georgia Southwestern State University	Americus, GA	Four Year - State University
Georgia State University	Atlanta, GA	Four Year - Research University
Gordon College	Barnesville, GA	Four Year - State College
Kennesaw State University	Kennesaw, GA	Four Year - State University
Macon State College	Macon, GA	Four Year - State College
Middle Georgia College	Cochran, GA	Four Year - State College
North Georgia College & State University	Dahlonega, GA	Four Year - State University
Savannah State University	Savannah, GA	Four Year - State University
Skidaway Institute of Oceanography	Savannah, GA	Research Institute
South Georgia College	Douglas, GA	Four Year - State College
Southern Polytechnic State University	Marietta, GA	Four Year - State University
University of Georgia	Athens, GA	Four Year - Research University
University of West Georgia	Carrollton, GA	Four Year - State University
Valdosta State University	Valdosta, GA	Four Year - Regional University
Waycross College	Waycross, GA	Two Year

Source: [www.usg.edu/inst](http://www.usg.edu/inst)

The TCSG partners with Georgia businesses to train or retrain their employees and works with individuals to provide GED, adult literacy, or English as a Second Language training (TCSG, 2010). In addition to providing college level instruction, the TCSG provided training to more than 19,000 people who completed their GED during 2010 (TCSG, 2012). Governor Sonny Perdue (2010) said, “Georgia’s technical colleges play a vital role not only in educating our citizens, but also in recruiting new industries” (TCSG, 2010). Under the accountability section on the TCSG website, the following guarantee exists for a period of two years after graduation.

One of our graduates educated under a standard program or his/her employer finds that the graduate is deficient in one or more competencies as defined in the standards, the technical college will retrain the employee at no instructional cost to the employee or the employer (TCSG, 2010).

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (BORUSG) first adopted an assessment policy in 1989 (Nettles, Cole, and Sharp, 1997). This policy called for each institution, regardless of the type of school, to develop an assessment program and report to the system. The BORUSG policy stated, “Each institution plan will describe the structure and process by which the results of assessment are used to achieve institutional improvement” (Nettles et al., 1997). Data was compiled in a statewide database that contained records from all four sectors of public institutions in Georgia: universities, regional universities, state universities, and associate-level colleges (Nettles et al., 1997). BORUSG policy also offered budgetary guidance stating, “Each institution shall link its major budget allocations and other major academic administrative decisions to its planning and assessment process” (USG, 2011). This

may have been the first step in the State of Georgia looking at assessment policy to improve higher education but it certainly was not the last.

Table 2

*Technical College System of Georgia - Institutions*

Name	City, State
Albany Technical College	Albany, GA
Altamaha Technical College	Jesup, GA
Athens Technical College	Athens, GA
Atlanta Technical College	Atlanta, GA
Augusta Technical College	Augusta, GA
Central Georgia Technical College	Macon, GA
Chattahoochee Technical College	Marietta, GA
Columbus Technical College	Columbus, GA
Georgia Northwestern Technical College	Rome, GA
Georgia Piedmont Technical College	Clarkston, GA
Gwinnett Technical College	Lawrenceville, GA
Lanier Technical College	Oakwood, GA
Middle Georgia Technical College	Warner Robins, GA
Moultrie Technical College	Moultrie, GA
North Georgia Technical College	Clarkesville, GA
Oconee Fall Line Technical College	Sandersville, GA
Ogeechee Technical College	Statesboro, GA
Okefenokee Technical College	Waycross, GA
Savannah Technical College	Savannah, GA
South Georgia Technical College	Americus, GA
Southeastern Technical College	Vidalia, GA
Southern Crescent Technical College	Griffin, GA
Southwest Georgia Technical College	Thomasville, GA
West Georgia Technical College	Waco, GA
Wiregrass Georgia Technical College	Valdosta, GA
Board of Regents College with Technical Division: Bainbridge College	Bainbridge, GA

Source: [www.tcsg.edu/college\\_campuses](http://www.tcsg.edu/college_campuses)

In 1999, The University System of Georgia required all institutions of higher education to participate in a benchmarking project led by external consultants (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005).

The research was conducted to determine how to improve benchmarking as an accountability policy. This study, conducted in 2001-2002 interviewed various stakeholders including university administration, faculty, staff, and the state governing board to discover what they knew and believed about benchmarking processes and its value (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005).

The three questions that guided their study were:

- How do the participants understand benchmarking?
- Do the participants understand each other when they plan or require benchmarking?
- How can benchmarking be improved as an accountability measure in higher education? (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005)

The study demonstrated a difference in how the individuals defined benchmarking, with the majority believing benchmarking was a comparison with other institutions. However, three of the interviewees believed benchmarking was defined as looking only at internal targets and not comparing with other institutions. Three others felt benchmarking was finding a weakness within the institution and identifying another institution with exemplary performance in that area and learning how to replicate their results (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005).

This study revealed some additional findings. For instance, all interviewees considered benchmarking to be useful and informative but not always helpful in planning and allocating resources. Several participants felt communicating with all constituencies before a project was undertaken would increase positive results (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005). In addition, interviewees from all of the constituent groups interviewed for this study felt communicating results, regardless of the outcome, was essential as well.

The researchers were able to develop a Benchmarking Change Model as a result of their findings (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005). According to the authors, their benchmarking model is a cyclical process that should begin with communicating the purpose and anticipated benefits to all stakeholders (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005). The next step stresses the important of focusing the efforts of perceived greatest needs. The final step in the model includes reviewing or “to calibrate” the incompatibilities in definitions of data and different time frames needed for data measurement (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005). This step includes identifying which processes are responsible for which outcomes (Achteimeier & Simpson, 2005). The results of this study were informative and demonstrated the need for future research.

The State of Georgia was one of only ten states nationally to be commended for using data to drive policy decisions and providing the data gathered to its stakeholders in a useful format (Education Sector, 2009). Education Sector analyzed states in twenty-one different categories of accountability such as affordability, degree production, and research. This assessment determined that Georgia had a well-developed reporting mechanism, made information accessible, and effectively monitored student progress and attainment. Amy Mast, director of the Alliance of Education Agency Heads in Georgia, believed the state’s success was a result of these groups working together “to prioritize the importance of measuring and reporting education data to show where we are improving and where we need to continue focusing our efforts in Georgia” (Education Sector, 2009). The AEAH in Georgia is comprised of the seven state education agencies, the Governor’s Office, and the business community.

Georgia received an overall “Best Practice” ranking from the *Ready to Assemble: Grading State Higher Education Accountability Systems* report from Education Sector. Only three states, Texas, Minnesota, and Georgia, earned the ‘best practice’ label for their user-

friendly websites (Education Sector, 2009). The State of Georgia also received praise for developing transparency measures that allow stakeholders to examine and evaluate data such as enrollment, degrees conferred, race, ethnicity, and gender, and costs (Gierer, 2009). Georgia was also praised for measuring student progression and educational attainment efforts. Overall, Georgia received four 'Best Practice' and twelve 'In Progress' in the report (Education Sector, 2009).

The State of Georgia and its higher education governing bodies have implemented several testing programs to demonstrate greater accountability. First, the University System Board of Regents established a policy in 1998 which requires students to pass the PRAXIS exam before going into a teacher education program (USG, 1999). The University System expanded this exam to include all rising juniors to pass reading and writing exams (Education Sector, 2009). Furthermore, the University System of Georgia in 2004 passed policy 2.8.1 establishing the Regents' Reading and Writing Skills Requirements and Exemptions for all students seeking a baccalaureate degree (USG, 2004). Regents' Reading Skills (RGTR 0198) and Regents' Writing Skills (RGTE 0199) courses are required requirements for graduation unless students score a 510 on the SAT or 23 on the ACT (USG, 2004).

By 2020, it is projected that over 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require some form of a college education (Whissemore, 2011). However, currently in Georgia just 42 percent of young adults have a college education: a certificate, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree or higher (USG, 2012). As such, in November 2011, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, the University System of Georgia and the Technical System of Georgia released a Complete College Georgia plan which announced a goal to improve students' ability to move between the two systems and earn degrees (USG, 2012). Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan, a joint

effort between the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia, defined a way to improve transferability and articulation between colleges in the Technical and University Systems and expanded the ability of colleges in both systems to award more associate's and bachelor's degrees to improve access and degree attainment (USG, 2012).

### **Variance in Accountability Perspectives**

While many state legislatures, governing bodies, accrediting associations, and other national organizations have discussed higher education accountability policies and programs, researchers have been slow to focus on perceptions of key stakeholders. This section provides a roadmap of previous studies in an effort to demonstrate existing research, discuss its findings, and explore the need for additional research.

A dissertation conducted by Kristi Roberson-Scott (2005) analyzed Tennessee legislators' perceptions of higher education accountability policies and programs. This project included fifteen interviews with state legislators or policymakers (Roberson-Scott, 2005). The study analyzed four research questions including the perceptions of the meaning and expectations for higher education accountability, the important evidences of accountability, to whom higher education is accountable, and finally the effectiveness of policies and programs (Roberson-Scott, 2005).

Roberson-Scott (2005) identified many important issues regarding the perceptions of Tennessee legislators. However, seven major themes were identified:

1. Duplicitous and disappointing leadership behavior of some higher education administrators can overshadow the potential impact of accountability data at the legislative level.



2. If higher education leaders are not present, prepared, informed and candid at the legislature it can produce negative perceptions among legislators.
3. The departures from sound leadership of educational executives in our state have diminished trust between legislative and higher education officials.
4. The state's current education governance structure does not always encourage collaborative educational partnerships. Collaborative partnerships are needed within higher education entities (institutions, governing and coordinating boards) and between legislative officials, the K-12 educational system and corporate employers with a common interest of demonstrating accountability and aligning efforts are needed.
5. Legislators deemed workforce readiness indicators as proper evidence of accountability and secondarily student learning outcomes.
6. Decentralized governance, complexity and diversity of institutional mission, students can present a major challenge when trying to prescribe meaningful uniform accountability standards.
7. Higher education has multiple stakeholders, to whom it is accountable (Roberson-Scott, 2005, p. 139).

While this study analyzed the perceptions of fifteen elected officials or state officials in Tennessee, Roberson-Scott recognized that the findings were limited. The researcher encouraged additional research in several areas including interviewing all Tennessee state legislators, designing a mixed-methods study to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, and to study legislators' perceptions in other states (Roberson-Scott, 2005). Furthermore, this study encouraged replicating the study to include other key stakeholders

including governing boards, coordinating boards, higher education leaders, and community representatives or to focus on specific accountability policies or programs (Roberson-Scott, 2005). Finally, a meta-analysis including all of the suggestions above was encouraged to determine trends across of a variety of stakeholders (Roberson-Scott, 2005). This researcher encouraged others to expand the body of knowledge regarding perceptions of elected officials throughout the country. While this dissertation focuses on elected officials, a similar study focused their interviews on higher education leaders.

A dissertation conducted by Sharon Tanner (2005) described Tennessee higher education leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs. This study involved fifteen interviews with higher education leaders from six public community colleges and universities within Tennessee (Tanner, 2005). The study researched five questions including the perceptions of the meaning of accountability, the effectiveness of current accountability policies and programs, the expectations leaders have of the policies, the evidences of accountability, and finally to whom higher education is accountable (Tanner, 2005).

Tanner identified seven major findings regarding higher education leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs. First, higher education leaders from Tennessee who participated in the study believed accountability was an integral part of the existing state of higher education (Tanner, 2005). Second, participants believed accountability expectations will only increase in the future from higher education stakeholders (Tanner, 2005). Next, higher education leaders interviewed felt existing accountability policies and programs are somewhat effective and need to be reviewed and modified (Tanner, 2005). Fourth, participants were looking forward to future accountability measures in hopes of increasing the utility of accountability (Tanner, 2005). The fifth major finding demonstrated the reservations

participants had regarding the difficulty satisfying stakeholders (Tanner, 2005). Measuring student learning outcomes was important to the participants but a concern because it is difficult to determine (Tanner, 2005). Finally, the seventh major theme identified was a general interest in meaningful accountability policies and programs that improved the college without using resources (Tanner, 2005).

While this study analyzed the perceptions of fifteen higher education leaders in Tennessee, Tanner encouraged future research to expand on her findings. The researcher believed additional research was warranted to ascertain whether the findings in this study were applicable to the higher education leaders interviewed in Tennessee or whether higher education leaders around the country disclosed similar results. Further investigation would allow researchers to decide if the findings can be generalized to other states. Tanner (2005) felt an emphasis on particular accountability policies or programs could lead to substantive changes to improve them. Including faculty members in the study was also encouraged since faculty members play such a critical role in the education process (Tanner, 2005). Additional research was encouraged to expand the body of knowledge related to higher education leaders' perceptions of accountability. While Tanner interviewed higher education leaders, another study focused their interviews on corporate leaders.

A dissertation conducted by Donna Tipton-Rogers (2004) researched Tennessee corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability in Tennessee higher education and of current accountability policies and programs. This qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with twelve corporate presidents, chief executive officers, or vice presidents of businesses throughout Tennessee (Tipton-Rogers, 2004). The study focused on four research questions related to perceptions of the meaning of accountability, what current accountability policies and programs

exist, the expectations of and evidences to prove accountability, and finally to whom higher education was accountable (Tipton-Rogers, 2004).

Through this study, Tipton-Rogers (2004) discovered many key topics of discussion regarding the perceptions of Tennessee corporate leaders. The following six themes were detailed:

1. The need for accountability was clear from a corporate perspective.
2. Higher education accountability means heaving a solid and strong relationship with clear dialog between institutions and the corporate community and demonstrating a willingness to be publicly accountable for actions, which builds public trust.
3. Most corporate leaders have little to no awareness of current higher education accountability policies and/or programs at the state and local levels.
4. Corporate leaders expect colleges and universities to account for their programs and actions through a clear demonstration of how and to what extent they serve their stakeholders.
5. Accountability expectations of corporate leaders focus on workforce readiness skills, meaningful partnership dialog, thoughtful stewardship of resources, and improved educational performance indicators.
6. Corporate leaders expect higher education to be accountable to multiple stakeholders, including corporate leaders, students, parents, taxpayers, and the general public (Tipton-Rogers, 2004, p. 83).

While this study analyzed the perceptions of twelve business leaders in Tennessee, Tipton-Rogers acknowledged that the findings were limited. The researcher encouraged additional research to determine if her findings were relevant to just business leaders in

Tennessee or if other states would reveal similar results, thus expanding the body of knowledge regarding perceptions of business leaders pertaining to higher education accountability policies and programs. Tipton-Rogers (2004) encouraged additional research to uncover ways to better inform the public of higher education actions and to gain the trust of stakeholders. This study shared information regarding a limited number of business leadership in one state. The three dissertations mentioned above uncovered new information but only in the State of Tennessee. All three encouraged additional research in other states.

The dissertation findings led Dr. Grady Bogue and a research team from the University of Tennessee to discern the extent to which there are significant differences among corporate, political, and academic leaders in five case study states regarding higher education accountability policy and to explore possible avenues for improving the design and impact of higher education accountability policy (Bogue, Hall, Lane, Nelms, Skolits, Devita, Fout, Vaughan, and Smith, 2009; Bogue, Hall, Lane, Nelms, Skolits, Devita, Fout, Vaughan, and Smith, 2010). This quantitative study involved a survey sent to more than 1,800 individuals in five states. The states studied included Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Oregon, and Michigan. An email survey was sent to the prospective participants asking them to participate in a 5-10 minutes survey. Of those individuals solicited to participate, 424 people completed the survey (Bogue et al., 2010).

The study found out how the respondents defined accountability, evaluated the effectiveness of some accountability instruments used in higher education, and perceived the importance of specific purposes of higher education (Bogue et al., 2010). Political, academic, and corporate leaders, overall, felt accountability was essential (Bogue et al., 2010). Likewise, each group of stakeholders participating in this study believed there were instruments and evidences available to show accountability. Similarly, political, academic, and corporate leaders

who responded to the survey felt there were many purposes and constituents for higher education (Bogue et al., 2010).

While there was some consent in responses of the 424 respondents, there was also dissent. Each group of stakeholders believed that accountability was essential to higher education, that there were instruments useful to demonstrating accountability, and there were multiple purposes and constituents for higher education (Bogue et al., 2010). Political leaders believed more strongly in achieving state goals than do either academic or business leaders (Bogue et al., 2010). Regarding the survey question pertaining to various instruments of accountability, academic leaders' responses were dramatically different than political or business leaders regarding the effectiveness of the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, performance indicator reports, and report cards (Bogue et al., 2010). Business and Political leaders were more inclined to believe independent financial and performance audits than audits provided by higher education institutions (Bogue et al., 2010). Significant differences were found regarding evidences of accountability pertaining to student learning outcomes. The following tables present the areas of consent or dissent between the three participant groups (political, academic, and corporate) in the 5-state quantitative study. The first question the study explored was participants' perspectives on the definition of accountability. In Table 3, all three groups believe institutional goal achievement is an acceptable definition of accountability. However, there were statistically significant differences in responses between the participants on the other three possible definitions of accountability.

Table 3

*Definitions of Accountability*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Institution Achieves Established Goals	3.58	3.47	3.47	Consent
Institution Demonstrates Fiscal & Management Integrity	3.73	3.63	3.50	Dissent
Institution is Responsible in Achieving State Goals	3.09	2.88	3.22	Dissent
Institution offers Public Evidence on Educational & Fiscal Performance	3.63	3.37	3.52	Dissent

Table 4 represents the participants' responses regarding the effectiveness of various instruments of accountability. There is consent on three of the five questions. All three groups of stakeholders felt institution accreditation, major field accreditation, and financial audit reports are instruments of accountability. However, the stakeholders disagreed on the value of the other two instruments of accountability, performance indicator reports or report cards, and college ranking and ratings.

Table 5 shows the results of the question searching for the purposes of higher education. All three groups of stakeholders believed higher education should contribute to economic and workforce development and engage in an unimpeded search for the truth. However, significant disagreement occurred when these stakeholders were asked about encouraging students to discover their talents or interests, about serving as a depository of culture history and heritage, and to serve as a forum for debate of public policy.

Table 4

*Instruments of Accountability*

Question	Academic	Business	Corporate	Analysis
Institution Accreditation	3.19	3.17	3.06	Consent
Major Field Accreditation	3.26	3.37	3.23	Consent
Financial Audit Reports	3.21	3.10	3.10	Consent
Performance Indicator Reports or Report Cards	2.74	3.10	2.91	Dissent
Rankings & Ratings such as U.S. News & World Report	1.70	2.63	2.52	Dissent

To whom is higher education accountable? The next question asked participants to indicate the level of responsibility higher education should hold to various stakeholders, and Table 6 shows the priority of accountability by stakeholders. Consent was reached on five of the nine stakeholders, alumni, business leaders, donors, local government and students. However, the participants in the study had dissent among the other four possible stakeholders to whom higher education is responsible to. Significant differences between the respondents occurred with regards to accountability to citizens and taxpayers, federal government, state government, and parents.



Table 5

*Evaluation of Higher Education Purposes*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
To contribute to economic & workforce development	3.52	3.60	3.67	Consent
To engage in unimpeded search for the truth	3.84	3.61	3.57	Consent
To encourage student discovery of talents, interests, values	3.53	3.36	3.44	Dissent
To serve as depository of cultural history and heritage	3.12	2.73	3.02	Dissent
To serve as a forum for debate of public policy	3.11	2.71	3.14	Dissent

Table 7 shows the effect of accountability policy according to the participants. All three groups of stakeholders believe a successful accountability policy can improve student academic performance, improve institutional fiscal and educational management, and improve transparency and candor on purpose and performance. However, dissent occurred when academic and political leaders had a significant difference with regards to the effect of accountability policy improving public and government confidence. Academic leaders were most skeptical to accountability policies actually improving confidence.

Table 6

*Priority of Accountability by Stakeholders*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Alumni	2.84	2.76	2.79	Consent
Business/Civic Leaders	3.03	3.07	2.90	Consent
Donors	2.99	2.94	3.01	Consent
Local Government	2.67	2.54	2.63	Consent
Students	3.92	3.86	3.93	Consent
Citizens/Taxpayers	3.50	3.20	3.54	Dissent
Federal Government	2.88	2.49	2.73	Dissent
State Government	3.27	2.71	3.28	Dissent
Parents	2.91	3.43	3.55	Dissent

Table 7

*Effect of Accountability Policy*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Improve student academic performance	3.11	3.21	3.16	Consent
Improve institutional fiscal and educational management	3.38	3.52	3.45	Consent
Improve transparency and candor on purposes and performance	3.38	3.37	3.44	Consent
Improve public & government confidence	3.25	3.31	3.48	Dissent

As shown in Table 8, when the participants were asked about the attitudes on accountability policy, dissent was found at some level on every question. Business and political leaders are more likely to believe data from external, independent sources as opposed to data sent from higher education institutions. Academic leaders felt the data they provide to stakeholders should be trusted like external data. Also, academic leaders felt public opinion polls were not very important which differed from the responses from political and business leaders.

Table 8

*Attitudes on Accountability Policy*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Accountability data submitted by higher education institutions can be trusted	2.89	2.76	2.62	Dissent
Accountability information is more valuable when developed by an independent evaluator than by higher education boards/institutions	2.42	3.25	3.20	Dissent
A periodic public poll (similar to gallop poll) should be commissioned to gauge public confidence in higher education	2.20	2.64	2.49	Dissent
Independent financial and performance audits are more valuable than accreditation reports	2.58	3.13	3.04	Dissent
Institutions will use cosmetic and adaptive responses to avoid disclosing unflattering information	2.74	2.95	2.95	Dissent
Isolated instances of integrity problems in higher education can overshadow goods reports on academic and fiscal stewardship	3.34	3.16	3.16	Dissent

There were differences among political, academic, and corporate leaders regarding what evidences of enrollment would be considered acceptable. Table 9 details all three enrollment indicators presented dissent amongst the stakeholders. The most pronounced area of dissent was the first example indicator, student enrollment trends by gender, ethnicity, etc. All three stakeholders disagreed with each other with academic leaders seeing this trend as more important than the other stakeholders. While there were dissenting responses on the other two indicators, overall all three stakeholder groups had higher average scores on their responses.

Table 9

*Evaluation of Accountability Evidence – Enrollment Indicators*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Student enrollments trends by gender, ethnicity, etc.	2.92	2.33	2.64	Dissent
Student entering academic ability (SAT/ACT score, etc.)	2.83	3.13	2.99	Dissent
Student retention/graduation rates	3.40	3.68	3.74	Dissent

When examining constituent satisfaction as an evaluation of accountability evidence, this study found the stakeholders split on their responses, and Table 10 shows these splits. No differences were found among the participants for enrolled students, employers, and civic or community constituent groups. However, significant differences were found for alumni, faculty and staff, and parent constituent groups regarding their satisfaction indicating evidence of accountability.

Table 10

*Evaluation of Accountability Evidence – Constituency Satisfaction*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Enrolled Student Satisfaction	3.46	3.49	3.38	Consent
Employer Satisfaction	3.53	3.58	2.98	Consent
Community/Civic Satisfaction	3.18	3.06	3.13	Consent
Alumni Satisfaction	3.18	2.95	2.98	Dissent
Faculty/Staff Satisfaction	3.32	3.13	3.08	Dissent
Parent Satisfaction	2.87	3.38	3.36	Dissent

Out of eleven possible responses concerning student learning outcomes, the participants only reached consent on two of the eleven. Table 11 outlines the differences in these responses. Knowledge in a special or major field and proficiency in a foreign language were considered acceptable evidence by the political, academic, and corporate leaders who participated in this study. The other nine outcomes found significant disagreement. Academic leaders placed a higher value on six of the remaining nine evidences than political or business leaders.

Table 11

*Evaluation of Accountability Evidence – Student Learning Outcomes*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Knowledge in a special or major field	3.74	3.67	3.70	Consent
Proficiency in foreign language	2.92	2.80	2.91	Consent
Knowledge and appreciation of other cultures	3.49	2.86	2.95	Dissent
Knowledge of democratic culture and heritage	3.33	2.89	3.17	Dissent
Knowledge of modes of thought associated with pursuit of truth in different fields	3.44	3.08	3.10	Dissent
Knowledge of systems of religious and ethical thought	2.91	2.66	2.70	Dissent
Proficiency in analytical and critical thinking	3.89	3.73	3.82	Dissent
Performance on exit examinations and/or professional licensure exams	3.47	3.36	3.27	Dissent
Proficiency in interpersonal skills	3.53	3.56	3.31	Dissent
Proficiency in oral and written communication	3.91	3.77	3.78	Dissent
Proficiency in artistic and aesthetic expression	2.86	2.59	2.62	Dissent

Table 12 represents the participants' responses regarding the evaluation of accountability evidence related to faculty indicators. There is consent on three of the five questions. All three groups of stakeholders felt faculty degree credentials, faculty publication record, and faculty salaries compared to their peers demonstrate accountability evidence. However, the stakeholders

disagreed on the value of the teaching performance record and the community or professional service records of faculty members.

Table 12

*Evaluation of Accountability Evidence – Faculty Indicators*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Faculty degree credentials	3.41	3.29	3.33	Consent
Faculty publication record	2.55	2.53	2.73	Consent
Faculty salary compared to peer institutions	2.80	2.69	2.68	Consent
Faculty teaching performance record	3.74	3.79	3.55	Dissent
Faculty community/professional service record	2.89	3.04	2.79	Dissent

When the participants were asked about fiscal indicators that would demonstrate accountability evidence, dissent was found at some level on every question. Table 13 shows the dissent among these participants with regards to fiscal indicators. Academic and political leaders felt stronger about higher education complying with state policies than business leaders. Business and political leaders participating in this study felt an indicator of accountability evidence was successful private contributions or external research funding whereas, academic leaders disagreed that would demonstrate evidence.

Table 13

*Evaluation of Accountability Evidence – Fiscal Indicators*

Question	Academic	Business	Political	Analysis
Fiscal audit results and compliance with state fiscal policy/regulations	3.53	3.31	3.61	Dissent
Trends in and market value of endowments	2.56	2.90	2.91	Dissent
Trends in private and voluntary contributions	2.80	3.00	3.07	Dissent
State funding compared to designated peer campuses	3.21	2.92	3.07	Dissent
Trends in external research funding	2.67	3.05	3.30	Dissent

A thesis conducted by Andrew Morse (2011) searched to identify the similarities and differences among corporate, political, and academic leaders in Tennessee on postsecondary education accountability policy and to investigate ways for improving accountability policy as evidenced by the various stakeholders (Morse, 2011). This study for a masters' thesis followed up the Bogue et al 5-state quantitative study of which Tennessee was one of the five states researched. Morse surveyed stakeholders from throughout Tennessee and received responses from 129 participants: 52 corporate, 40 political, and 37 academic leaders. While there were several differences in the findings of the Morse study, this study strongly corroborated the research by Bogue et al. (Morse, 2011). The following major findings emerged as a result of this study.

1. There tends to be wide agreement between the stakeholder groups on definitions of



accountability.

2. Institutional and field accreditation as well as financial audit reports were all viewed as appropriate instruments of accountability, and, while there were significant differences on performance indicator reports and ratings and rankings among the groups, these two were seen as less appropriate.
3. Stakeholders value the impact of higher education to contribute to workforce development, to build upon student discovery of talents, and to support the engagement in the search for truth.
4. Corporate, political, and academic leaders agree that accountability to citizens and taxpayers as well as the state government were priorities, but there are significant differences between stakeholders with regard to the responsibility to business, donors, and the federal government.
5. There was agreement among the participants that accountability should improve student academic performance, institutional management, government and public confidence, and transparency.
6. While academic leaders disagreed with business and political leaders, these groups reported that accountability information is more valuable when developed by an independent evaluator than by higher education boards and institutions. All three groups agreed that isolated instances of integrity problems can overshadow good reports by colleges and universities.
7. Academic and business leaders differed on the desirability of student entering academic ability indicated by standardized test scores as an enrollment indicator for accountability. These groups tended not to find demographic characteristics desirable

while also agreeing that student retention and graduation rates are important.

8. Academic, political, and business leaders found proficiency in analytical and critical reasoning, skill in oral and verbal communication, and knowledge within a major field as desirable student learning outcomes. Knowledge and appreciation of other cultures as well as various modes of thought associated with the pursuit of truth were found to be more desirable by academic leaders than political and business leaders.
9. Academic leaders found parent satisfaction as an indicator of accountability to be less desirable than business leaders. All three stakeholder groups agreed that employer and currently enrolled student satisfaction were desirable. There was some agreement between the groups on alumni and community satisfaction.
10. The stakeholders found faculty degree credentials and teaching performance records to be important indicators of accountability. Business and political leaders differed on the importance of faculty community and professional service records as an indicator of accountability. Publication record was perceived to be less desirable than other indicators.
11. With regard to fiscal indicators of accountability, compliance with regulations and audits were widely valued among the respondents. Differences were observed between academic and political leaders on state funding compared to peer institutions, and between academic and business leaders on the importance of external research funding trends.
12. There were no significant differences between the groups on the average grade they assigned to state and national higher education performance. The groups tended to rate both state and national performance with a “B” grade.

The three dissertations discussed above were limited to one group of stakeholders. Each researcher encouraged future research in different states or expanded populations to glean additional information. Similarly, the studies involving five different states and the quantitative study focused on the State of Tennessee provided an abundance of information but they were limited in its findings because they used surveys. While these studies reached hundreds of political, academic, and corporate leaders, it provided general responses with little depth. While each dissertation and the quantitative studies revealed new findings, none provided the breadth and depth of responses in the categories of political, academic, and corporate leaders.

### **Summary**

The evidence of an intense interest in higher education accountability is clear and compelling. However, the complexity of the issue is equally compelling. It is of vital importance to explore political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of current accountability policies and program as they relate to higher education and the future of Georgia. This proposed study will illuminate the impact of Georgia's accountability policies and programs based on these stakeholder's perceptions. This study is designed to explore the experiences, knowledge, and goals of higher education accountability and how they shape policy decisions. Participants will be given the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. The data will then be analyzed with the purpose of summarizing the cumulative findings of political, academic, and corporate leaders. In addition, overarching themes from all responses will be developed with the goal of creating recommendations for improvement of Georgia's accountability programs.

The literature has distinctly shown that differences exist among political, academic, and corporate leaders on matters related to accountability policy. Additional research of political,

academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions regarding the mission of higher education accountability policy is warranted. As such, this study seeks to add to the literature to ascertain why differences exist between these stakeholders in the State of Georgia.

Previous research has touched on these stakeholders but no dissertation has explored the political, academic, and corporate leaders in the same qualitative study. Accountability programs are here to stay. These programs are in virtually every state in the country, so it is important to undertake an in-depth exploration into the State of Georgia's accountability programs and some of the stakeholders involved in the governance of higher education. Therefore, this study is designed to probe political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability in Georgia. In addition, the intent is to discover the differences, if any, of these leaders to develop a summary of the data and develop recommendations to improve accountability policy.

Colleges and universities have been and will continue to be under pressure to be held accountable for their various constituencies. While each of these constituent groups is different and, in turn, has different demands of institutions, their call for accountability is important to them. As such, colleges and universities must continue to meet the demands of the stakeholders with a collaborative and open spirit and a renewed sense of vigor while fulfilling their mission in their search for the truth (Scott, 2006). All stakeholders should work together in their efforts to maximize resources, performance, and search for continuous improvement.

Not only do academic leaders feel the accountability pinch from elected officials and corporate leaders, many states have a governing board that oversees individual colleges and universities. As such, institutional autonomy may be lessened by other educators serving as liaisons with elected officials. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (April, 1971)

said the “techniques used to achieve public accountability of educational institutions must be balanced against the need of educational institutions for that degree of educational independence which is essential for their continued vitality” (p. 104).

Public trust is the single most important asset of higher education in this nation (Leveille, 2006). Without it, the link between the public and its higher education institutions will find decreased support from public financial support, philanthropic support will decline, policymakers will become more adversarial, and institutional autonomy will be replaced by increased governmental intervention (Leveille, 2006). If accountability processes are implemented and found to function well, there is a case that the institution and its staff can be trusted to do their jobs (Curzon-Hobson, 2002).

It is obvious that higher education stakeholders have yet to find the correct balance of institutional independence and a collaborative, team approach to satisfying everyone involved. We have yet to explore in detail the perceptions of various stakeholders in Georgia much less the entire United States. Research has shown differences exist within political, academic and corporate leaders. This research indicates that each group of stakeholders has a different understanding regarding the purpose of accountability (Tipton-Rogers, 2004; Roberson-Scott, 2005; Tanner, 2006). The current study sought to address this gap in the literature and was designed to obtain a better understanding of why differences exist among political, academic, and corporate leaders in the State of Georgia. Chapter Three describes the research methodology used in this study probing the perceptions of political, academic, and corporate leaders from Georgia regarding higher education accountability policies.

## Chapter 3

### Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability. The five research questions which guided the qualitative study are as follows:

1. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?
2. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition of accountability and the purpose of higher education accountability?
3. What evidences of higher education accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?
4. How can higher education accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?
5. What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

This chapter provides a detailed description of methods and procedures used to conduct this study. Included are the research design, site and population, and sources of the data, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. In addition, the trustworthiness of the study are addressed at the end of the chapter.

#### Research Design

A qualitative research design, specifically a case study, was most appropriate for this study. A case study design was selected because it allows for developing a descriptive, exploratory, and in-depth investigation of the central phenomenon, perceptions of accountability

(Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Georgia political, academic and corporate leaders served as the case for examining the phenomenon.

Qualitative approaches allow the researcher to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Creswell, 1994). It also allows for securing a diversity of responses, and has the flexibility to adapt to new developments or issues during the research process itself (Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1998). A case study design uses multiple methods for gathering data, in this case, interviews and field notes-to gather information about this topic (Yin, 1994). It is most appropriate for researching questions of “how” and “why” when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2004, p. 1), as in this study. This approach enables the researcher to understand how participants make sense of the phenomenon and how their beliefs influence their behavior (Maxwell, 1996). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding meanings that participants construct for their lives, experiences, and structures of the world (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). This current study seeks to explore the perceptions of higher education accountability policy in the State of Georgia, thus making the case study design appropriate for the researcher.

A quantitative study has been completed for the State of Georgia addressing this topic (Bogue et al., 2010). As such, a qualitative, case study approach was the most appropriate design to follow up on the quantitative study in order to obtain detailed, rich, thick descriptions of the subject because of its ability to approach the phenomenon in an in-depth fashion which was not possible from the earlier quantitative study. The quantitative study allowed researchers to include a large population of political, academic, and corporate leaders; the research did not

allow the study to garner detailed information pertaining to participants' perceptions of higher education accountability.

### **Research Site and Population**

The case for this study was the State of Georgia. The State of Georgia was selected as the site for the study based on its close proximity to the researcher. Georgia was also selected because it is considered an exemplar state with respect to policy and regulatory action on accountability, and the fact that the state's higher education system is well-known and respected.

The population for the study included political, academic, and corporate leaders in the State of Georgia who are elite in their area of expertise or have a specialized knowledge of this subject (Dexter, 1970). The goal was to interview a minimum of six individuals in each stakeholder category and continue until the point of saturation was reached. Including at least eighteen interviews was an appropriate way to extend the previous quantitative study in identifying the perceptions of respective leaders regarding higher education accountability policies. A convenience sample of participants was selected due to their geographic proximity to the researcher and other potential interview participants (Yin, 2009).

Participants were asked to identify additional political, academic, and corporate leaders to take part in this study. Patton (1990) calls this process chaining. Chaining is used when participants name other people who may have relevant information related to a particular subject. Six participants were secured through the use of chaining.

For political leaders, the researcher conducted an internet search of political leaders in Georgia. Brent Cranfield, Director of Committee Services for the Georgia House of Representatives, was a key informant who assisted in the initial identification of prospective political interview participants. The researcher approached the Governor, speakers of the



Georgia state senate and house, the chairs of the house and senate higher education committees, the chairs of the house and senate finance and appropriation committees, and the ranking committee members of the minority political party in both the house and senate from the State of Georgia's website. Some of the prospective participants declined to participate while others did not return telephone calls or emails. Seven political leaders were interviewed for this study.

For academic leaders, eight college and university presidents and chief academic officers were interviewed. The University System of Georgia website was used to identify academic leaders. Their website lists all public college presidents and chief academic officers, including contact information. The University System of Georgia classifies its institutions into five different categories: research university, regional university, state university, state college, and two year college. The researcher interviewed at least one academic leader in each category.

Eight interviews were conducted with corporate leaders from Georgia. The researcher solicited assistance from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce as a key source for corporate leaders; however, they declined to assist with this study. Kimberly W. Cross, former president of the University of Tennessee Alumni Association and current resident of Atlanta, Georgia, was helpful in identifying alumni and business leaders she knew that lived in Georgia. Some of the leads led to interviews or referrals of other corporate leaders who participated in the study. An internet search of the thirteen Fortune 500 companies headquartered in Georgia led to several interviews and other referrals.

### **Sources of Data**

The sources of data used in the study including in-depth interviews and field notes. The value of multiple sources lies in the ability to explore issues in depth and from different perspectives (Creswell, 1998; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The main source of data was in-depth, face-to-face interviews with political, academic, and corporate leaders about their perception of higher education accountability policy. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. All interviews were conducted using the same format and lasted between 26 to 84 minutes. The interview protocol was developed by the researcher and guided by existing literature on the topic. Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions using the research questions guiding this study (Appendix A). The use of a semi-structured interview process allowed for a balance of both consistency and flexibility (Merriam, 1998).

Open-ended questions were asked to permit the participants to answer in as much detail as possible, and in the way they feel most comfortable (Yin, 1994). Open-ended questions allow one to understand the perspective of each participant, because they improve the ability to compare responses, as well as organize and analyze data as a result of participants hearing the same questions (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994). Probes were used to provide clarification or greater understanding of the participant's responses as needed (Creswell, 2005). Interviews continued until saturation was achieved. Saturation happens when data acquired becomes repetitive and fails to offer additional information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This interview protocol was utilized to encourage a conversation rather than a structured interview (Yin, 2009, p. 106). This type of format allowed the researcher to interact with the interviewee as needed to move the interview forward and gather ideas related to the subject (Merriam, 1998).

Field tests of the interview protocol were conducted with one political, one academic, and one corporate leader from Tennessee to ensure the questions were clear and appropriate. The political leader who participated in the field test was a state representative, the academic leader was a vice president of academic affairs at a two-year college, and the corporate leader was a chief executive of several businesses in Tennessee. After each interview, the participants were

asked to provide feedback on each question, their interview, and opinions of the questions to ensure the protocol was effective in securing answers to the research questions. Their participation allowed the researcher to make minor revisions to the protocols and questions.

The researcher took field notes during and after each interview. These personal notes included observations of what was said and how it was said, and also captured non-verbal behaviors. Extensive field notes were written. After being typed into an electronic database, these notes were used during further analysis (Yin, 2009).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Because human participants were involved in this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was petitioned to secure permission to conduct the research (Appendix B). Full IRB review was granted and no participants were contacted until approval was granted.

Once potential candidates were identified, the researcher contacted them by letter and asked them to participate in the study. A copy of the initial letter inviting them to participate is attached as Appendix C. The letter of introduction described the purpose of the interview and explained that the interview would be confidential, voluntary, and that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. The letter explained the nature of the study, how the interview data would be reported, and the methods used to ensure confidentiality. The letter informed the potential participants that the researcher would contact them to schedule an interview if they agreed to participate. After the letter was sent to political, academic, and corporate leaders, the researcher contacted each person with a telephone call and asked for their participation (Appendix D). Prospective interview candidates were given the opportunity to participate or decline during the telephone conversation.

The researcher continued contacting participants in each category until enough participants had been reached. The researcher worked with each participant to schedule an interview time convenient to both parties. A confirmation letter along with the Informed Consent Form was sent upon scheduling the interview (Appendix E & F). A confirmation email or telephone call was sent the day before the interview to confirm the appointment (Appendix G).

Before each interview, the researcher reviewed the letter of introduction, discussed the intent, purpose, and protections for each participant, and obtained the informed consent form from each interviewee. This brief overview was used to establish rapport and clarify any questions the participants might have. After obtaining the interview consent form, the researcher followed the interview protocols and digitally recorded each interview unless the participant objected. No participants objected to recording the interviews. All participants and the names of their respective places of employment had pseudonyms assigned to them. This was necessary to protect the privacy of the individuals who participated in the study. Pseudonyms were used in all notes to ensure confidentiality.

Interviews occurred at locations decided upon by both the researcher and the participant and in settings familiar and convenient to the participant as recommended by Shank (2002). Seventeen interviews took place in the participant's office, two interviews in their homes, two interviews in restaurants, and two interviews were conducted on the telephone. When telephone interviews were used, the Informed Consent form was faxed to the participant prior to the interview. The same interview protocol was used in face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews. Each interview was recorded with a digital recorder then transcribed by the researcher for analysis. Recording the interviews increased the accuracy of data collection and allowed the researcher to actively listen during the interview (Patton, 1990). The recordings were compared with the

transcriptions for accuracy. An electronic copy of the transcribed interviews was sent to the participants to confirm the accuracy of their respective interviews if they wanted to review it. This process allowed the participants to member check their interview for accuracy.

All records including audiotapes of the interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office in the J.L. Goins Administration Building, Room 203H on the campus of Pellissippi State Community College. This information will be kept on file for one year following the successful defense of the dissertation, at which time all documents related to this study will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using open, axial coding to derive patterns of responses to the questions which is consistent with the constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998; Straus & Corbin, 1998). After the data were transcribed, participant profiles were created that included demographic information and data collected through field notes. Afterwards, several iterations of coding were used to garner understanding from the responses.

The first iteration involved open coding which included a thorough review of each transcript to get a sense of how the participant answered the questions. Key words and phrases were written down for each interview question. Different lists were created that coincided with responses. After the first review was complete, each transcript was analyzed a second time. During this step, key words and phrases identified in the initial review were developed into themes. Participant profiles and field notes were analyzed to determine if there were additional patterns. The first iteration of coding resulted in the creation of a thematic description of each participant's answers to the questions.

The second iteration of coding involved comparing the participants in terms of the themes. Responses to interview questions were compared to determine whether the patterns identified in one transcript were present in the next (Merriam, 1998). Records were kept of the patterns found when comparing the first transcript with the second. This method of comparison continued as the first two transcripts were compared with the third and so forth. A comprehensive list of themes derived from each interview question was prepared.

Within the third iteration of coding, themes drawn from the interview questions were grouped and applied to the research questions. Interview question 1 applied to research question 1, questions 2 and 3 applied to research question 2, question 4 applied to research question 3, question 5 applied to research question 4, and question 6 applied to research question 5. This process allowed for additional patterns and themes to be discovered in reference to the research questions. All transcripts and participant profiles were reviewed for a final time to account for any additional data. Findings were presented based on the research questions and compared to the existing literature.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

In qualitative research, establishing the trustworthiness of a study's findings is critical. The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize the findings to a larger group or prove a hypothesis. The goal is to analyze a phenomenon to ensure a comprehensive and credible study has been developed. To establish trustworthiness, member checks were used (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Member checks help to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy was used to guarantee the accuracy of the participants' interviews. Each participant received a copy of their interview transcript and was asked to affirm its accuracy. Peer debriefing is a critical approach to assuring trustworthiness.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability policies. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed with 23 participants: 7 political, 8 academic, and 8 corporate leaders. Consistent with the constant comparative method, the interview data were analyzed using open, axial coding to derive patterns of responses to the research questions (Creswell, 1998; Straus & Corbin, 1998). Following a description of the participants, the findings are presented in terms of the research questions guiding the study:

1. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?
2. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition of accountability and the purpose of higher education accountability?
3. What evidences of higher education accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?
4. How can higher education accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?
5. What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

### **Participants**

A brief description of all twenty-three participants, including a general description of the participant's place of employment and position, appears in Appendix H. However, to protect confidentiality, participant's names are not included; instead, each participant was assigned a number within their respective stakeholder category. For clarity purposes, participants are referred to as Political, Corporate, and Political Leader One, Two, Three, and so forth.

The seven state representatives and state senators who participated in this study have served on a variety of committees and in different leadership roles in their respective legislative bodies. The political leaders were diverse in their party affiliation, gender, and ethnicity.

Five of the eight academic leaders interviewed were college or university presidents while the other three were the chief academic officers at their respective institutions. One participant represented a research university, five participants served at regional universities or state colleges, and two participants worked at two-year institutions. The academic leaders were diverse in their gender and ethnicity.

The eight corporate leaders who participated in this study were diverse in gender but not in ethnicity. Four of the participants served as the chief executive of their respective business while the other four were senior leaders in their organizations. Three of the participants worked at Fortune 500 companies, while the rest owned or worked at regional, national, and international firms. Participants worked in various types of industries categorized by the U. S. Small Business Administration as financial services, manufacturing, housing and real estate, telecommunications and media, and health care.

**Research Question One: What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?**

**Political Leaders**

Two primary themes emerged in response to this question. First, all seven state senators and representatives felt that the mission and purpose of higher education involved giving students the knowledge and skills to support a trained workforce for business and industry in Georgia. Second, four of the seven political leaders felt the purpose of higher education was also to develop a strong, engaged, and democratic society.



Political Leader Five expressed concern that “people are going to college and don’t know why.” He believed the purpose of higher education was to give students the skills to get jobs and he was not of the opinion that everyone should enroll because “we’re building capacity now that we’re not using.” This state senator raised his voice very loudly during this part of the interview and was clearly agitated. His face became red as he pointed at the counter of the Starbucks where we were meeting and said, “I’ll bet half of the people behind the counter have college degrees and they don’t need an education to get me a cup of coffee.”

While all members of the legislative delegation that were interviewed felt strongly about higher education being important to jobs, four of the seven declared higher education was important to develop an engaged citizenry. Political Leader Four was adamant that society should “provide education for education’s sake because a more informed population is more engaged in their community.” Political Leader Seven conveyed her desire for higher education to “teach students to read, think, develop a strong work ethic, and be engaged in their community.”

### **Academic Leaders**

Two themes emerged from the five college presidents and three vice-presidents interviewed for this study. All eight academic leaders believed the mission and purpose of higher education was to create an educated and informed citizenry. Overall, these participants were of the opinion that an educated population translates into a better democratic society with more participation in activities that make communities strong such as increased employment, volunteerism, voting, and philanthropic support. Academic Leader Seven, president of a research university, shared,

Good global citizens are people that are good citizens locally, regionally, nationally and

internationally. This has to do with understanding other cultures and having a global awareness of what's going on in the world. We have a very strong service component. We think making sure that our students have rich experiences, understand citizenship, and are participating in the democratic process.

Academic Leader Two, a vice president for academic affairs at a large regional university, explained the purpose of higher education as "to expand students' horizons and understanding which hopefully translates into a more democratic society." Likewise, Academic Leader Three saw the mission of higher education as "a vehicle to enhance society and expand the greater good of all mankind."

While all of the academic leaders agreed that part of the mission of higher education is to help students become aware of their role in society, they also believed in preparing students to compete economically. Seven of the eight academic leaders discussed the economic mission of the higher education. As Academic Leader Two suggested one purpose of higher education is to help students "gain the requisite skills that are necessary to support the economy." Other academic leaders shared similar comments.

### **Corporate Leaders**

The eight corporate leaders who participated in this study were nearly unanimous in their responses to the question regarding the mission and purpose of higher education. All eight believed that higher education should provide students with the skills to get a job. Only one of the eight corporate leaders also identified encouraging students to become active and engaged citizens.

The first interview with Corporate Leader One was representative for every interview within this participant group. Corporate Leader One, an owner of an international manufacturing

company, felt higher education “prepares people for a career and makes them employable in whatever field that they choose to pursue.” Corporate Leader Eight added a global perspective to this basic mission. He argued that the purpose of higher education is “to prepare people to become productive members of society by getting a job, earning a paycheck, and paying taxes so we can continue to be the best and most prosperous country in the world” (Corporate Leader Eight).

Corporate Leader Eight, a military veteran and current executive with a Fortune 500 financial institution, echoed sentiments similar to those of the political and academic leaders discussed earlier in the chapter.

It’s helping prepare people to become productive members of society. It’s important to help them get the skills to get a job and earn a paycheck but also to have an educated society so we can continue to be the best and most prosperous country in the world. People with an education are more active in the democratic process by volunteering, active in politics, engaged in their communities, being a good citizen and an education can encourage that engagement.

## **Summary**

Two primary themes emerged as a result of this question. First, comparing responses across groups, twenty-two of the twenty-three participants responded that higher education plays a role in workforce development. Political and corporate leaders were unanimous in this response, as were seven of the eight academic leaders. Secondly, thirteen of the twenty-three participants also supported the role of higher education as a way to cultivate an engaged citizenry. Academic professionals were unanimous in this finding while four of seven political leaders and one of eight corporate leaders shared this perception.

**Research Question Two: What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition and purpose of accountability?**

In order to answer this research question, each participant was asked two questions. The first question related to how participants would define the word accountability and the second was how participants would describe the purpose of higher education accountability policies.

**Political Leaders****How would you define the word accountability?**

One overarching response emerged from this question. Five of the seven political leaders defined accountability as related to outcomes. Political Leader Two defined accountability as, "The ability to demonstrate the outcomes of an effort and how you arrived there." Political Leader Four felt "setting metrics, evaluating how well those metrics performed, and making adjustments as needed is needed so to continue to meet goals." Political Leader Six also focused on outcomes in his definition. This person conveyed that "Accountability is looking at the mission of the organization and determining whether it is achieving its mission or not."

**What is the purpose of higher education accountability?**

Five of the seven state legislators mentioned that demonstrating the return on investment to stakeholders was the purpose of higher education accountability. Political Leader One stated that higher education "can demonstrate a good return on our investment by graduating a higher percentage of students," and Political Leader Three argued that "colleges are being wasteful and we're not getting a good return on the money spent." He was adamant that colleges should demonstrate accountability to their constituents but that accountability requirements should be the responsibility of everyone, including him as an elected official. Political Leader Five purported that he was a strong advocate of having higher education operate more like a business. He equated the continued escalation of costs associated with tuition to a corporation that would

soon go out of business if it were run like an educational institution. He believed higher education could change lives and communities, but he was not sure if “it’s worth the cost, price, or investment associated with it right now.”

## **Academic Leaders**

### **How would you define the word accountability?**

Academic leaders had little trouble defining the word accountability. Two primary responses emerged to this question. Seven of the eight defined accountability in terms of accepting responsibility for your actions. Academic Leader Three added “If you are given a task to do, then you should be responsible for doing it” and a community college president shared,

It’s a public accountability, a public responsibility, publicly accepting responsibility which I see as one of the ways in which transparency happens. It’s not enough to sort of internalize and say, oh yeah, I’m responsible for that – it’s sharing that in a broader context (Academic Leader One).

Two of the eight participants brought up the notion that the word accountability has become such a popular and polarizing term in our society. Academic Leader One acknowledged the term accountability is occasionally used in a good light “but we mostly think about it as taking responsibility when things don’t work.” She added that “I think there can and should be a positive aspect to it, but when we talk about it, we usually mean something negative.”

### **What is the purpose of higher education accountability?**

Two major responses emerged when academic leaders were asked about the purpose of higher education accountability. Five of the eight academic leaders spoke about the need to be responsive to higher education stakeholders and accept responsibility for their important role in the state of Georgia. Academic Leader Six shared that the purpose of higher education

accountability was, “To demonstrate that sense of responsibility to all of your stakeholders which are comprised of the legislature, taxpayers, parents, students, alumni, and the communities you serve.” The academic leaders not only believed the calls for accountability were important from the major funding entities but also to demonstrate to their students the importance of being personally accountable for their own actions.

It’s important for students to see institutions and the people at the institutions being accountable and being held accountable because that’s what they’re going to be involved in their lives as engaged citizens, as people who are part of the workforce, and people who are contributing to economic development of the state (Academic Leader One).

Academic leaders felt that publicly sharing goals creates an atmosphere of accountability. As Academic Leader Eight said, sharing goals “makes sure that everybody in the institution pursues those goals and is contributing to the pursuit of those goals, acknowledges those goals, and understands their responsibility for achieving them.”

Three of the eight academic leaders indicated that the purpose of higher education accountability was to demonstrate a return on investment. Academic Leader Two conveyed that as a president he needed “To make decisions that will bring maximum benefit to the state” and calls for higher education accountability allowed him to demonstrate that his college did that. The president of a research university welcomed the spotlight on higher education accountability because he believed not only in his institution, but all of higher education. Since the state provides hundreds of millions of dollars to underwrite the activities of both secondary and higher education, Academic Leader Seven believed the call for accountability was not only justified, but warranted.

I think the state can and should hold us responsible and accountable for achieving our mission, providing an educated workforce and contributing to the economic development. Education is one of the few things that governments do that is actually an investment. When they build roads and bridges and highways, those start to decay the day after they are done. Through education it's really one of the few things that governments do that actually is an investment in the future. (Academic Leader Seven).

## **Corporate Leaders**

### **How would you define the word accountability?**

Corporate leaders had little trouble defining the word accountability. The words responsible or responsibility were used in five of the eight interviews as all or part of the definition of the word accountability. Corporate Leader Seven cited accountability as “making people responsible for their actions.” She added, “There should be consequences for right and wrong behavior.” Corporate Leader Eight felt it was a necessity for all parties to initially agree upon the goals before determining accountability, but agreed that “accountability is being responsible for achieving the results that were set out at the beginning.”

While five of the eight participants actually used the word responsibility as all or part of the definition of accountability, three of the eight corporate leaders described the word responsibility but did not actually use it. Corporate Leader Five defined accountability as “Delivering what you say you're going to deliver.” This corporate executive in a financial services company said in addition to delivering services, to be accountable, people must provide evidence of one's actions. Corporate Leader Two felt people must provide “Evidence or supporting documentation to prove you're doing what you are supposed to be doing.” Corporate

Leader Three added that accountability is “knowing what you are supposed to do, doing it, and acknowledging good and bad actions.”

### **What is the purpose of higher education accountability?**

While the definition of accountability produced similar answers from the eight corporate leaders, this question did not. Little consensus was reached although three of the eight corporate leaders used the term return on investment. They proclaimed that higher education must demonstrate that it is a good return on investment to their stakeholders in order to continue to receive additional funding. As such, higher education accountability forces education leaders to prove their worth. Corporate Leader Four elaborated on this idea.

The more education your population has, the less burden they are on the government and the greater contribution people make to their state, their community and their family. So the accountability comes from all areas but the return on investment is huge when it comes to funding from the government because it takes citizens off of their payroll and makes them contributing members of society which then funds the state through additional tax revenue.

### **Summary**

Two questions were used during each interview to answer the research question regarding the purpose and definition of accountability. The first question asked for a definition of accountability. Two primary responses emerged. Eleven of the twenty-three participants used the words responsible or responsibility as all or a part of the definition of accountability. Five participants mentioned outcomes as the definition of accountability. The second question asked about the purpose of higher education accountability. Eleven of twenty-three participants discussed demonstrating a return on investment to stakeholders.



**Research Question Three: What evidences of accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?**

**Political Leaders**

The four major forms of higher education accountability evidence that emerged during the seven interviews with state senators and representatives were graduation rates, placement rates, student retention, and the career advancement of graduates. Graduation rates were mentioned by all seven political leaders. Retention rates were mentioned in six of the seven interviews. Placement rates of graduates and career advancement of those graduates were mentioned in three of the seven interviews with legislatures.

Every interviewee mentioned graduation rates. Political Leader Four expressed it pointedly, “Graduation rates are the key metric to start with.” Political Leader Three added, “You need to look at graduation rates because the finished product is that students graduate with something usable every day in business.” Political Leader Seven shared “Each higher education institution has a different mission but graduation rates are an important evidence to all of them.”

The second most mentioned evidence, retention rates, was discussed by six of the seven participants. Political Leader Three argued that retention rates were extremely important because, “The backdoor loss of students from year to year is expensive and reflects on higher education.” Political Leader One shared that retention rates and other metrics could be compared “to see which schools are doing better and who is over performing or underperforming and learn from the ones who are doing right.” Political Leader Five detailed a conversation with a college president which conveyed his strong opinions about retention rates. “I had a president tell me that they needed money for a building, and I said if you weren’t losing so many students you’d have the money for that building.”

Placement rates of graduates were mentioned in three of seven interviews. Political Leader One felt “the quality of the students they graduate can be determined by placement rates,” and Political Leader Six added that, “Job procurement by graduates shows a lot about what a college program is supposed to be doing.” Finally, Political Leader Seven said that the legislature looked at whether graduates got placed into jobs when they finish as a key evidence of success.

The final piece of evidence discussed by three of seven political leaders was the career advancement of college graduates. Political Leader Two stated, “It is not easy to keep up with alumni but how students advance in their jobs down the road is revealing and demonstrates the relevance of the programs and college to the community.” Political Leader Four shared “I think how alumni look at the value of their degree and how effective they are in progressing in their careers five to seven years down the road is important.”

### **Academic Leaders**

Academic leaders were asked what evidences of higher education accountability they would accept as being valid and appropriate. There were two overarching responses. Graduation rates were mentioned by six of the eight academic leaders as an evidence of higher education accountability. Academic Leader Three said, “You want to see all your numbers improve but ultimately people want to see your graduation rates.” Academic Leader Two said, “A lot of people want to see graduation rates but you just can’t look at the numbers without taking into context the type of school and be comparing apples to oranges.”

Retention rates were mentioned by four of the eight academic participants as an evidence of higher education accountability. Academic Leader Seven stated, “The standard metric that we use is freshman to sophomore retention rates.” Academic Leader Six echoed this response, “One

of the metrics we are very proud of is our freshman retention rate that is quite high and close to 80% retention of freshman to their sophomore year.”

### **Corporate Leaders**

Three categories emerged during the eight interviews with corporate leaders. Five of the eight corporate leaders referenced the performance of graduates as evidence of higher education’s success. Corporate Leader Two felt “exploring employee performance reviews of alumni would let colleges know how that person is doing.” Corporate Leader Five conveyed his belief that “job measurement and performance are key. I like longer term measurement of performance so maybe ten years after graduation, higher education needs to look at average earnings, hierarchy in corporations, and other things that can be measured.”

Corporate Leader Four affirmed this source of evidence and added his sense that it was being demonstrated.

Do they (college graduates) bring more with them from an experience, from an education or from a maturity basis with them to the work force? That’s the only the evidence that I see and the answer is generally yes, in most all instances, it’s a resounding yes. They do bring more with them and I don’t know if accountability is the right word, but I can see that they perform better and bring more to my business.

The second type of evidence that emerged in the responses of three of the eight participants was the graduation rates. Corporate Leader Four discussed the importance of graduation and the role of higher education in facilitating that.

I do think that it’s important for institutions to assist students. This is a part of accountability to get student’s to complete their degree. Sure, there could be mitigating

circumstances that makes a person leave the institution but colleges have to work with them because the completion of that degree is important.

The third source of evidence mentioned in three of the eight interviews with corporate leaders was placement rates. Corporate Leader One felt the main evidence of accountability “would be the successful placement rate of graduates into employment.” Corporate Leader Eight affirmed placement rates as a source of evidence, but stressed that placement rates should count “gainful employment...not counting those that graduate and go to work at McDonald’s, but placement in jobs applicable to their degree.”

While every corporate participant believed strongly in the importance of higher education and the critical role of accountability in higher education, detailed knowledge of accountability was not discussed beyond the terms performance, graduation rates or placement rates.

### **Summary**

Four main types of evidences were mentioned in the twenty-three interviews. Graduation rates were mentioned most often, by sixteen of the twenty-three participants. Retention rates followed, having been mentioned by ten of the twenty-three participants as an acceptable type of evidence. Eight of the participants discussed the career advancement or performance of alumni as a valid type of accountability evidence. Placement rates were mentioned by six participants.

### **Research Question Four: How can accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?**

#### **Political Leaders**

Every elected official interviewed expressed concerns and provided suggestions for improving the way higher education communicates to its stakeholders. Three major responses emerged during the seven interviews with members of the legislature. One response was for independent third parties to provide higher education data. Political Leader Five said “I don’t

want higher education providing me anything. I want a third party to crunch the numbers because higher education is going to cook the results.”

The second response from this question found that three of the seven members of the legislature recommended that similar schools be compared with each other as a way to improve the communication process between stakeholders. Political Leader Three said, “All of the evidence should be based off of the same factors by not trying to compare apples to oranges because it’s important to compare similar institutions.” Political Leader One stressed that comparing similar colleges will allow colleges to “learn from the ones that are doing right and know what works.”

Improving the style and type of communication was discussed by three of the seven political leaders interviewed. Political Leader Two shared that, “Higher education isn’t very smart to communicate by sharing 120 page reports that are not going to be read by the typical legislator.” These three political leaders shared that clear, repetitive, and straightforward information was needed so higher education data can be considered credible. Political Leader Four suggested:

If you’re a hammer everything looks like a nail. If there’s bad information or misinformation or half information then the legislative solution is to pass a law which is often the wrong solution but in the absence of good information it may be what we do so it’s incumbent on those who rely on our largesse to engage us and make certain that we don’t feel compelled to overreact or over legislate.

### **Academic Leaders**

Relationship building, consistency of messaging, and proper peer classifications were the three major themes that emerged through the eight interviews with academic leaders. Seven of

the eight participants believed building relationships with stakeholders was imperative to establishing credibility. Public forums, individual meetings, campus tours, and community involvement were all mentioned as critical steps needed to develop relationships with education stakeholders to gain trust. Academic Leader One observed that once she developed a relationship with someone “it is easier to show that higher education is a good investment and not a cost, and there’s a clear return on that investment.” Academic Leader Eight an educator at a community college surmised:

The people who hold the purse strings often don’t understand what we do because they went to Georgia Tech or the University of Georgia. We are different and have different students with different goals. We have to do a better job of educating our legislature about who we are and what we do.

Academic Leader Four’s relationship and personal conversations with several stakeholders allowed him to cite specific examples of jobs that were not even invented ten years ago that his alumni are now doing as a result of their education at his university. He further stated those conversations have allowed his university to secure private dollars for new technology to train the workforce of tomorrow. He shared that detailed information was easier to comprehend through conversations, not an annual report.

Different approaches were mentioned by participants but they universally spoke about relationship building. As a president of a research university, Academic Leader Seven argued that if he and his faculty did not actively develop relationships with elected officials that people with little knowledge in particular areas would make decisions while lacking of all the necessary information.

The second major response that emerged with five of the eight academic leaders was the need to develop a coordinated, consistent communication strategy that reached all stakeholders. One leader shared, “Historically higher education in general hasn’t done a very good job at that” (Academic Leader One). Academic Leader Six shared the need to provide “Consistent communication so that you’re not saying one thing to the alumni while saying another to the Chamber of Commerce, your foundation board, or your faculty.” Academic Leader Seven argued that “You can have the best programs in the world and if nobody knows about it then they are not going to believe you are accountable” so a communication strategy is imperative.

Three academic leaders conveyed that the communication methods of their institution to be compared within their own respective peer groups. The University System of Georgia has developed reports that “Compares size and scope, enrollment, FTE, graduation rate, retention rate with the same colleges in their particular sector” (Academic Leader Three). Academic Leader Three said, “The only way to successfully demonstrate success is by comparing apples to apples.” However, Academic Leader Two argued that the information must provide some context.

Letting the public know (peer group data) is obviously a good thing, but you’ve got to provide enough context so that they actually understand what it is they are seeing because in the words of Mark Twain? There are lies, damned lies, and there are statistics.

### **Corporate Leaders**

Statistics and data, relationship building, and the use of independent, third parties as a means of communicating higher education evidences were three major themes that emerged during the interviews with corporate leaders. Six of the eight spoke about the importance of

sharing statistics and data as valid evidence. Corporate Leader Two stressed the importance of “demonstrating the measurable results through statistics, not just a list of success stories.”

Relationship building with key stakeholders was mentioned in four of the eight interviews. If education is to improve its relationships with the community, “Higher education leaders need to have a continual dialog with business leaders” (Corporate Leader Six).

Corporate Leader Three added, “Higher education leaders serving in the community allows the community to get to know them, trust them and believe they are properly educating students.” A business owner stressed that education leaders who develop relationships with employers will allow the stakeholders to trust them. Corporate Leader One added, “Education leaders have to prove to business leaders that they’re educational product is valuable to those business leaders and to do that we must know them.

Four of the eight corporate leaders saw independent, third parties as a critical component to making education evidence more credible for stakeholders. “To have a very high level of accountability, I think that you have to have an independent audit” (Corporate Leader Seven). Another business executive shared a similar call for independent audits and standardized comparisons for educational institutions.

I don’t know the cook that is in the kitchen or if there is a conflict of interest because you can skew numbers with lots of different metrics. It would be great to have an audit that gives you measurable statistics just like a balance sheet of a company. Apple has to stick to the same accounting standards as Google, General Electric, Procter and Gamble, and Coca Cola and I don’t know why institutions wouldn’t be held to a similar accountability so that we can compare apples to apples (Corporate Leader Five).



Corporate Leader Eight elaborated on why independent auditors are deemed to be critical to higher education.

I'm not sure just having a university tell us how good they are is the best because they have a vested interest in being perceived as successful. If we want to have greater accountability, we need a third party and to have a common set of metrics that they are expected to achieve. I don't think you can expect all universities to tell you the truth. They're run by humans so the data could be skewed so a third party might be the best way to determine the success of colleges.

### **Summary**

Three major themes arose during the twenty-three interviews. Fourteen participants shared that higher education must improve the quality, type, and methods for communicating information to stakeholders. Eleven of the participants discussed the critical role relationship building would be for accountability evidence to be more readily believed by stakeholders. Six participants conveyed that evidence must compare similar colleges to each other instead of putting all higher education data together and comparing different institutions together.

### **Research Question Five: What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?**

#### **Political Leaders**

Two major themes emerged from the seven interviews with political leaders in Georgia. The first major theme involved the critical need for stakeholders to determine the mission, purpose, goals, and expectations of higher education. Six of the seven elected officials mentioned this as a necessary factor in improving the accountability and performance of higher education. Political Leader Five shared, "We've got to decide who the conveners are going to

be. Someone's got to be assigned as the point person to higher education accountability. Whoever's paying for education should be involved in setting those expectations."

Political Leader Five shared:

Someone needs to define what the expectations are because if we don't know then we can't judge them. Higher education needs to know what they should be held accountable for but they don't know because we haven't done a great job of telling them.

Political Leader Seven shared that society has "got to go through the hard process to determine the mission and goals and articulate that mission where it might not be possible to measure all of the results." She added that it is impossible to quantify everything and stakeholders will have to realize that if true accountability is going to be accurately discussed.

The second theme that emerged in response to this question involved the significant role that communication plays in dealing with stakeholders. Three of the seven participants mentioned improved communication as being necessary to improve accountability. Some officials felt the data needed to be shared in a more clear and concise manner from higher education leaders. Political Leader Two suggested, "The easiest mistake to make is to fail to utilize sophisticated communication in a strategic way. You've got to extract statistical data and package it in a way that its essence doesn't get lost in a cloud of numbers." Political Leader Three conveyed that higher education needed to be more forthcoming. He added his concern that schools "may try to hide the data because they're ashamed of it or afraid there will be a big uproar." This representative went on to say, "There may be a resource that we can give them if they tell us their problems."

## Academic Leaders

One major theme emerged as a response to this question: the need to work with and communicate to stakeholders to improve higher education accountability. It was mentioned by all eight academic leaders. Academic Leader Six felt working with stakeholders was critical to improvement because “We cannot be in a silo and be effective and responsive.” Academic Leader Three spoke to the importance of all higher education stakeholders coming together to focus on improvement.

There is a need for all education stakeholders to be on the same page now more than ever because what is happening is more than just a state or national problem...what we do has global implications. Our nation, just as we came together with the federal government taking the lead during the 1950’s after the Sputnik situation with Russia, we need to do something similar now.

Academic Leader Two provided a quote that described the unique nature of higher education.

We need to acknowledge that education results are going to be somewhat chaotic and ever changing. There is not one metric because trying to have one is actually counterproductive because the strength of higher education in America is that we have not adopted a one size fits all model. As such, we’ve got to work together with elected officials to explain this.

Effective communication was considered an important piece of higher education accountability. The president of a large university shared his perception of the importance of communicating directly to higher education stakeholders.

If people don't know what you are doing in detail they're not going to think you are accountable so we have to educate our stakeholders. You could be the most effective educational institution in the world but if nobody knows about it they won't think you are accountable (Academic Leader Seven).

Academic Leader One espoused the critical need for collaboration and understanding when working with stakeholders to improve higher education accountability.

I think there's a lot that can be done with better communication. Higher education has a history of talking to ourselves instead of deliberately communicating with our audiences. I don't think we have figured out how to have a good conversation with stakeholders about our mission, how we are transparent, and how we demonstrate accountability.

### **Corporate Leaders**

Two themes emerged during the eight interviews with corporate leaders in relation to steps higher education can take to improve performance accountability. Seven of eight corporate leaders discussed the critical need to improve communication as the primary ways to improve performance accountability. The more detailed information that higher education leaders provide to their stakeholders, the better the results will be according to Corporate Leader Six. She added, "If the public knows what they are getting they will be less traumatized by the cost of higher education." Corporate Leader Seven stressed that higher education has to own their message and not rely on the media to get their message out. This corporate executive argued that a simple way to improve educational performance and accountability is to "meet with your stakeholders and tell them what you are doing."

One recommendation to improve the responsiveness and communication process between stakeholders was "to not just offer classes during the week in the morning but at night and on

weekends so working people can continue their education” (Corporate Leader Two). Corporate Leader Three questioned:

What type of programs should each institution offer? I mean if they have a huge master’s program in pig farming but we are a peanut state does that make sense? That’s a waste of public resources. Don’t waste our time, energy and money on something we don’t need. Figure out what we need and offer that.

Corporate Leader Eight believed improved communication would not just improve performance but the perception of higher education amongst its stakeholders.

I don’t think getting a degree says a lot. Our performance against other countries...can we compare the number of patents, new businesses, research, PhD’s, and engineering degrees. How are we doing globally? So they’ve graduated. What are they contributing? It may be hard to measure and communicate, but it’s important.

Another participant shared their concern for student debt and their perception that higher education is pushing majors and degrees that have little economic value. “To me it’s not that different than conflicted stock brokers pumping bad stocks. It’s like we can sell this thing as long we put lipstick on this pig and move it” (Corporate Leader Five).

The second theme that emerged was the need to focus on the governance of higher education. Three corporate leaders felt there needed to be more oversight into higher education. While there were differing opinions whether the legislature, higher education themselves, the federal government, or an independent body had that authority, these participants felt there was a definite need for additional oversight. Corporate Leader Five speculated

Maybe we need a state regulatory body. Let’s talk about Wall Street. The SEC has a set of standards and everybody has to follow those regulations and accounting standards.

I just wonder why there wouldn't be a state accountability board. It would be nice to compare apples to apples for everybody so maybe there needs to be a national or state accountability board. The states have weights and measurements to make sure that your gas station pumps out the right amount of gas and you're not getting ripped off. I don't know why government doesn't have something a little bit like that for education.

### **Summary**

One major theme emerged from the interviews with political, academic, and corporate leaders. Eighteen of the twenty-three stakeholders who participated in this study believed improved communication was the most important thing higher education could do to improve performance accountability.

This chapter provided a presentation of the findings of the study organized in terms of the research questions which framed the study. The following chapter contains a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and final conclusions. In addition, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are also presented in the chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability. The five research questions which guided the qualitative study were:

1. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?
2. What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition of accountability and the purpose of higher education accountability?
3. What evidences of higher education accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?
4. How can higher education accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?
5. What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

A qualitative research design, specifically case study, was used to gain in-depth information from the perspective of political, academic, and corporate leaders in the state of Georgia. Twenty-three participants from the three stakeholder categories participated in this study; seven political leaders, eight academic leaders, and eight corporate leaders. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. All participants were asked the same open-ended questions. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings followed by study conclusions, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of the Findings**

1. Nearly every participant believed the mission and purpose higher education involved providing students with the skills and abilities needed to obtain gainful employment, and thereby make a positive impact on the economic development of the state of Georgia.
2. Approximately half of participants believed higher education should cultivate an engaged citizenry.
3. No consensus was reached regarding the definition of accountability or the purpose of higher education accountability. However, nearly half of the participants used the words responsible or responsibility as all or a part of the definition of accountability and almost half felt the purpose of higher education accountability was to demonstrate a return on investment to stakeholders.
4. Only one evidence, graduation rates, was identified as an acceptable and valid reflection of accountability by more than half of the participants.
5. The majority of the participants stated the best way to share accountability evidence to stakeholders was to improve the quality, type, and methods for communicating that information.
6. The majority of participants stated the most important step higher education could take to improve performance accountability was to work to improve communication with stakeholders.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study supported much of the existing literature pertaining to perceptions of political, academic, and corporate leaders regarding higher education accountability. However, there were some unique elements within these findings and others that



are worthy of discussion. The finding that the participants thought the purpose of higher education was to train students for jobs was not new or surprising. Twenty-two of the twenty-three participants discussed the role of higher education in providing the skills needed to obtain gainful employment in Georgia. This finding echoes prior research where stakeholders shared that preparing students for jobs was a primary purpose of higher education (Bogue et al. 2009; Morse, 2011; Roberson-Scott, 2005; Ruppert, 2001; Tipton-Rogers, 2004). Due to high unemployment in the United States and the global competition to attract jobs, it was no surprise to hear such a focus on job creation as it pertains to the role of higher education.

While virtually all participants indicated that higher education should train students to become engaged in the economy through job attainment, thirteen of the twenty-three participants felt higher education should play a role in developing citizens who are engaged in the democratic process through community involvement. Creating an environment to encourage students to become active citizens was a consistent message from academic and political leaders but much less so with regards to corporate leaders. This finding is consistent with previous research where stakeholder's responded that higher education's purpose should be to sustain and strengthen a democracy (Bogue et al, 2009). Surprisingly, a discussion surrounding other possible purposes of higher education or the complex mission of higher education did not occur. Numerous studies have found higher education to have an extremely diverse mission. Some literature has indicated that the purpose of colleges and universities includes areas such as academic programming, technical training, research, social awareness, adult basic education, workforce training, economic development, continuing education, and even English as a Second Language (Bogue et al, 2009; Leveille, 2005; Martinez, Pasque, & Bowman, 2005; Sampson, 2003). However, in this study, participants only focused on the mission and purpose being to prepare students for

jobs, and to a lesser degree develop engaged citizens, which I found somewhat narrow in scope since the purpose of higher education can change depending on the person. While corporate leaders want graduates prepared for jobs, a single mother may take a college math class for the purposes of helping her children with their homework. Obviously, she views college as a specific means to an end and is not interested in graduation rates, placement rates, or anything else.

Almost half of the participants felt the purpose of higher education accountability was to demonstrate a return on investment to stakeholders. In all three stakeholder groups, a minimum of three participants discussed the purpose of accountability as being able to demonstrate a return on investment. Five of the seven political leaders mentioned this which reinforced a previous study where policymakers were frustrated because investments were not producing better results which led to greater calls for external accountability initiatives (SHEEO, 2005). Multiple other studies discussed stakeholders expecting a return on their investment that is quantifiable and measurable (Baum & Ma, 2007; Dickens, Sawhill, & Tebbs, 2006; Trostel, 2010). Unfortunately, when probed for a deeper description of what they meant by return on investment, blank stares or an inability to provide concrete answers about what would in fact demonstrate a return on investment ensued from both political and corporate leaders. On the other hand, academic leaders felt showing graduation, retention and placement rates were in fact a demonstration of the public's investment. While nearly half of participants used the phrase return on investment, I was disappointed to not find the "silver bullet" that could finally satisfy the calls to attest that the dollars directed towards higher education is a worthy investment.

Similar to previous research, this study found that not one commonly used metric can be used individually to determine effectiveness (Christal, 1998; Dwyer, Millett, & Payne, 2006). A

majority of participants responded that graduation rates were the most common evidence followed by retention rates. The findings in this study echoed previous research where graduation and retention rates were the most common response about acceptable accountability evidence (Bogue et al. 2009; Morse, 2011; Roberson-Scott, 2005; Tanner, 2005; Tipton-Rogers, 2004). A lack of knowledge regarding different types of evidence or detailed information regarding evidences in general was discovered, particularly with corporate leaders. Similar to the Tipton-Rogers (2004) study, most corporate leaders in the current study had little to no awareness of accountability policies or evidences other than graduation and retention rates. Whether stakeholders are too busy to investigate other types of accountability evidence, just do not understand the accountability process, or just do not care remains to be seen. It seems as if the majority of stakeholders obtain information regarding higher education accountability information from the news or casual conversations which is why their knowledge may be limited to a few popular buzz words. Many stakeholders seem to only care if students are ready to obtain employment upon graduating from college as opposed to any other accountability outcomes, such as if the student actually learned anything, or becoming a better person during their learning experiences.

Student satisfaction and accountability to those education stakeholders were never mentioned. Since students are obviously essential to the educational process as both consumers and products of an education, it was surprising to not hear participants speak to the satisfaction or concerns of the customers of higher education. This is in contrast to previous research that found students to be whom higher education is most accountable (Bogue et al, 2009). Likewise, student learning was seen as imperative to higher education accountability by stakeholders in previous studies (Bogue et al., 2009; Kuh, 2001; Morse, 2011; Porter, 2012; Roberson-Scott,

2005; Tanner, 2005) but completely missing from the findings of this study. Tanner (2005) interviewed higher education leaders who felt it was important to demonstrate student learning although the leaders acknowledged that was often a challenge. The concern in my study was that none of the stakeholder groups discussed student learning. Was this because they do not consider student learning to be important or do not care as long as they obtain jobs upon graduation? Student learning is not one of the buzz words used in the media with regards to higher education these days like graduation rates, job placement, or student debt. I believe the stakeholders who participated in this study care about student learning but do not hold it at the same level of evidence as graduation rates.

Accreditation was discussed by only one participant as an evidence of accountability. Since accreditation is one of the most visible tools used in higher education today to demonstrate accountability, its omission in this study was surprising. This lack of mention by the participants is in sharp contrast to the findings of previous research in which accreditation was found to be one of the most visible and effective types of accountability evidence (ACTA, 2007; Bogue et al, 2009; Wellman, 2001). In the Bogue et al study, political, academic, and corporate leaders agreed that accreditation was an effective demonstration of institutional and academic program accountability. Since educators nationally issue press release after press release once their institution or their specific academic programs receive their reaffirmation through a regional accrediting body, it was unusual that only one educator mentioned accreditation as an acceptable and valid evidence of accountability. If senior leaders of institutions do not publicly acknowledge accreditation when responding to the question in this study, why should they dedicate limited human and financial resources to go through this process every five to ten years? Political and corporate leaders do not spend as much time involved in the operations of

colleges and universities so their lack of mentioning accreditation is somewhat understandable. However, the lack of response from educators was troubling.

Communication played a more pivotal role in the study than I anticipated. The majority of participants shared that higher education must improve the quality, type, and methods for communicating information to stakeholders and believed improved communication was the most important step higher education could take to improve performance accountability. Eleven participants discussed the critical role of relationship building for accountability evidence to be more readily believed by stakeholders. There was a general consensus that accountability information should be accessible, clear, concise, easy to read, and understandable to all higher education stakeholders. This finding reflected those of previous research (Tipton-Rogers, 2004; Roberson-Scott, 2005) that higher education officials should be prepared, informed and candid when providing clear data demonstrating their results. The political and corporate leaders felt academic leaders should use common sense when developing communication materials and be prepared to answer questions when asked. I found some of the conversations with participants very refreshing and rewarding. Political and corporate leaders want straight talk, not a dissertation. As such, educators are obligated to strive to communicate effectively with our stakeholders.

Previous studies exposed some level of distrust between stakeholders and higher education institutions and their leaders (Bogue et al. 2009; Morse, 2011; Roberson-Scott, 2005; Tanner, 2005; Tipton-Rogers, 2004). Similarly, some participants expressed a level of distrust in this study, but not at the level anticipated. Naturally, academic leaders who participated in this study believed the data they provide corporate and political leaders should be trusted. However, some participants, outside of higher education, felt independent, third parties would provide

better data. This concurred with previous findings from both quantitative and qualitative studies that showed political and corporate leaders trust external evaluators more than data provided by higher education (Bogue et al. 2009; Morse, 2011; Roberson-Scott, 2005; Tanner, 2005; Tipton-Rogers, 2004). As such, the need for improved dialogue amongst stakeholders is apparent. Greater transparency is needed. Improved relationships between key stakeholders are justified. Participants discussed a desire to learn more about the needs of higher education. Likewise, college officials want to know exactly what they can do to answer questions or address concerns. Improved communication can restore faith in constituents who question higher education spending and outcomes, can create new partnerships with employers and other stakeholders, and can develop a unified message regarding the importance of higher education and its commitment to providing society with a qualified, engaged workforce.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study, a few conclusions can be drawn. Political, academic, and corporate leaders agree in most areas related to higher education accountability. The common ground among stakeholders is encouraging. Whether it is the purpose of higher education, the definition of accountability, or acceptable forms of evidence, higher education stakeholders agree more often than they disagree. Stakeholders believe that the mission and purpose of higher education is to give students the skills to obtain employment. However, corporate leaders do not appear to believe the purpose of higher education is to create engaged citizens like political and academic leaders seem to. All of the stakeholders agreed colleges and universities must enact accountability measures and be prepared to demonstrate those measures. To accomplish this, communication must improve since stakeholders feel this will result in a better understanding of higher education accountability expectations and outcomes.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings suggest there is work to be done if higher education is to serve its students while at the same time satisfying the calls for improved accountability by education stakeholders. The demands for accountability will increase as resources continue to be limited. While stakeholders agree in many areas, greater dialogue and improved communication amongst stakeholders is necessary. A means to accomplish this could be the creation of a diverse state committee or entity focused on accountability including expectations, outcomes, and ways to more effectively disseminate information. These groups could consist of a myriad of stakeholders interested in improving higher education and its outcomes. Each state would need to determine the exact makeup of the stakeholders and its goals.

Whether states establish committees or not, higher education officials should realize they must strive to improve the communication process with stakeholders. Academic leaders depend on political and corporate leaders for funding, governance, and to hire college graduates. As academic leaders, it is incumbent on us to develop meaningful relationships and effectively communicate with all of our stakeholders. Political, academic, corporate leaders and other education stakeholders must work together. Open and honest dialogue must occur with all stakeholders to enhance the understanding of accountability. Improved communication could result in a deeper understanding of accountability and ultimately more resources leveraged towards higher education. As it stands now, stakeholders seem to acknowledge that they understand accountability and each other's needs in broad parameters but their relationship is far from ideal. Acknowledging there is work to be done and committing to an environment of open dialogue is important to the future of higher education.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, a number of research studies would add to our knowledge of higher education accountability.

1. This study should be replicated with a larger number of political, academic, and corporate leaders in Georgia to see if the results differ. Additional participants would increase the breadth of view that was not achieved in this study. This study should be replicated in other states as well, to ascertain if other state's political, academic, and corporate leaders have similar perceptions of accountability.
2. A study should be undertaken to examine states that have already implemented the national completion agenda concept which shifts outcomes from the number of students enrolled to specific outcomes such as graduation and placement rates to see if similar findings emerge or if states that have restructured their accountability efforts face different sets of challenges or feel more comfortable with higher education accountability.
3. Research should be undertaken to examine the perspectives of members of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), and National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to gain a national perspective regarding higher education accountability. Since stakeholders who participated in this study consistently spoke of a national need to develop common language regarding the mission and purpose of higher education, acceptable evidences, common criteria, and improved communication amongst stakeholders, a need exists to research national leadership perceptions.



4. Further research should be conducted in the state of Tennessee to determine if the implementation of the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 has made a difference in the perceptions of stakeholders pertaining to higher education accountability.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

Project:

Perceptions of Political, Academic, and Corporate Leaders:  
Higher Education Accountability in Georgia

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Les Fout

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

This is a qualitative research study that will fulfill degree requirements for the Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. The purpose of this study is to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability policies in a way that permits a deeper probe of the basis of these perceptions. Data will be collected from interviews with elected officials, college presidents, and business leaders. Data will also be collected from reviewing state laws, governing board policies and procedures, and through electronic media. All data will be stored in a locked drawer inside the researcher's department head's office. Data will be coded so that no identifying information will be available to anyone other than the researcher. The interview should last approximately one hour.

Things to Remember:

- Have interviewee sign the Informed Consent form.
- Assure the interviewee of confidentiality.
- Obtain permission to audiotape the interview.
- Thank the participant.

Interview Questions:

What is the primary mission and purpose of higher education?

What is your definition of higher education accountability? Its purpose?

What evidence or measures of accountability would you accept as valid reflections of accountability?

How can accountability evidence be communicated to education stakeholders so that it will be considered credible and valid?

What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

## Appendix B

### FORM B APPLICATION

All applicants are encouraged to read the Form B guidelines. If you have any questions as you develop your Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or Research Compliance Services at the Office of Research.

### FORM B

**IRB#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Received in OR** \_\_\_\_\_

## THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

### Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

#### I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

**1. Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:**

*Complete name and address including telephone number and e-mail address*

Leslie (Les) Gene Fout  
 8467 Norway St.  
 Knoxville, TN 37931  
 (865) 742-1081  
 lesfout@gmail.com

**Faculty Advisor:**

*Complete name and address including telephone number and e-mail address*

Dr. E. Grady Bogue  
 319A Jane and David Bailey Education Complex  
 1122 Volunteer Boulevard  
 Knoxville, TN 37996-3400  
 (865) 974-6140  
 bogue@utk.edu

**Department:**

Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

325 Jane and David Bailey Education Complex  
 1122 Volunteer Boulevard  
 Knoxville, TN 37996-3430  
 (865) 974-2214

2. **Project Classification:** *Enter one of the following terms as appropriate:*  
**Dissertation, Thesis, Class Project, Research Project, or Other** (Please specify)

Dissertation

3. **Title of Project:** Perceptions of Political, Academic, and Corporate Leaders:  
 Higher Education Accountability in Georgia

4. **Starting Date:** *Specify the intended starting date or insert "Upon IRB Approval":*

Upon IRB Approval

5. **Estimated Completion Date:**

May to August of 2012

6. **External Funding** *(if any):* N/A

**Grant/Contract Submission Deadline:** N/A

**Funding Agency:** N/A

**Sponsor ID Number** *(if known):* N/A

**UT Proposal Number** *(if known):* N/A

## II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of accountability policies and programs. The specific goals of the study are reflected in the following research questions.

- What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the mission and purpose of higher education?
- What are Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of the definition and purpose of accountability?
- What evidences of accountability are considered acceptable and valid reflections of accountability by Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders?
- How can accountability evidence be communicated to Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders so that they are considered credible?
- What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

Prior research shows a disconnect between political, academic, and corporate leaders in many areas related to higher education. No research has been conducted with these key stakeholders in the State of Georgia.

The goals of this research are:

- To gain qualitative insights into the perceptions of key stakeholders pertaining to accountability policies in Georgia;
- To extend the research related to higher education accountability.
- To provide political, academic, corporate leaders in addition to governing boards and state education agencies with information that may improve communication.

### **III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

1. The case study participants will include at least five people in each of the three categories: political, academic, and corporate. The participants will include elected officials, college presidents, and business leaders from the State of Georgia.

2. The researcher will research lists of elected officials, college presidents, and chamber lists to find participants. The researcher will also obtain names from colleagues in Georgia and an employee who works for the Georgia state legislature.

3. Once prospective participants have been identified, the researcher will contact each by letter and telephone.

### **IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

In-depth interviews, field notes, and data analysis will be utilized for data collection in this qualitative case study. In-depth, one-on-one interviews will be conducted in person at locations suitable to the participants. A minimum of fifteen interviews will be conducted (5 interviews per category). In the event that the interviews cannot be conducted in person, telephone or email interviews will be conducted. The interviews will last approximately one hour.

There will be five main interview questions:

What is the primary mission and purpose of higher education?

What is the definition of accountability policies? Its purpose?

What evidence measures of accountability will you accept as valid reflections of accountability?

How can accountability evidence be communicated to education stakeholders so that it will be considered credible and valid?

What steps can higher education take to improve performance accountability?

Probes will be used when additional information or clarifications are needed. All interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed if the participant approves. The researcher will collect field notes to provide information about the participant's body language, pauses and other behaviors that will not be captured on the audiotape. The participants will be assured of their voluntary participation and their confidentiality. Participants will sign an Informed Consent Form prior to

the interviews. All data from the interviews and the audiotapes will be stored in a locked office (Claxton 319A) and only the researcher, Les Fout, and Dr. Grady Bogue will have access to the data. All data will be destroyed one year after the study is complete.

Risks to study participants are minimal. However, participants will be told at the beginning of the interview that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Qualitative research procedures will be used for data analysis. Data will be analyzed using an inductive process comprised of reading interview transcripts and field notes multiple times, distinguishing themes across interviews, coding data, and making comparisons with respect to themes.

## **V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES**

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. Participants will be political, academic, and corporate leaders. Participants and their place of employment will be confidential and only the researcher, Les Fout, and Dr. Grady Bogue will have access to the data. Participants will be promised confidentiality and will sign Informed Consent Forms assuring them of their privacy. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

## **VI. BENEFITS**

The benefits for the proposed study are numerous. Better communication among key higher education stakeholders could immediately improve the current tension prevalent amongst many stakeholders. Since accountability has become such a dominant issue in higher education, identifying common areas of agreement or dissent could yield a baseline of knowledge where stakeholders agree on common themes. Once consent has been identified, political, academic, and corporate leaders could continue dialogue so to add to their common areas of agreement and work together on improving higher education. Identifying areas of consent and dissent will allow these stakeholders to understand the perceptions of other leaders, thus creating the opportunity for improved dialogue and growth. Understanding other people and their perceptions also allows us to understand their thoughts of us. The goal is improved communication and dialogue with a common goal of working together to improve higher education.

## **VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS**

Before the interview, participants will be asked to sign informed consent forms. The researcher will present and read an informed consent form to each participant. Participants must sign a copy of the informed consent form. A copy of the form will be left with each participant. A informed consent form is attached.

## **VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

The researcher is currently completing his required coursework for the Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration. The researcher has taken two qualitative research methods courses, in addition to two applied research methods courses. The researcher has also

participated in a quantitative study regarding political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions regarding higher education accountability.

## **IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH**

Interviews will be conducted at a location in Georgia convenient for each participant. In most cases, interviews will be conducted at the participants' place of employment. Data will be stored in the Bailey Education Complex, 319A.

## **X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)**

*The following information must be entered verbatim into this section:*

**By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee.**

**The principal investigator(s) further agree that:**

- 1. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.**
- 2. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.**
- 3. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.**
- 4. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.**

## **XI. SIGNATURES**

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

**Principal Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL**

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

Expedited Review -- Category(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**

Full IRB Review Chair, DRC: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Head: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) :

---

Approved:  
 Research Compliance Services  
 Office of Research  
 1534 White Avenue

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer or by phone at (865) 974-3466.



## Appendix C

### Sample of institution's invitational letter

Dear JOHN DOE (name of POLITICAL, ACADEMIC, or CORPORATE LEADER),

I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at the University of Tennessee and I am conducting a doctoral dissertation study examining accountability policy. My study specifically examines Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability policies.

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in this study. There has been limited research that examines perceptions of key higher education stakeholders regarding accountability policies.

You are invited to participate in an in-depth, open-ended interview. The interview should last approximately one hour. With permission, the interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription, I will send you a copy of the transcript if you would like. This will give you an opportunity to confirm that your transcript is accurate. Your anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms.

The risk of participation is minimal. Participants will include elected officials, college presidents, and business leaders from the State of Georgia.

I will contact you by phone within a week to see if you are able to participate in the study. If you can participate, we would discuss times that are convenient for us to meet at your office or another location that works for you.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you next week.

Sincerely,

Les Fout  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

## Appendix D

### Telephone Script Explaining Research Project to Prospective Participants

Hello, my name is Les Fout, and I am director of major gift development at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN. I am also a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, conducting research for my dissertation on higher education accountability policies. I sent you information regarding my study last week.

The purpose of my call is to ask you to participate in my study. This will require a face-to-face interview at your office or another location. I expect the interview to take no more than one hour. I will send you the interview questions in advance to give you some time to formulate your responses and to save your valuable time. With your permission, I will record the interview. I will provide a transcript of the interview for your review if you would like.

I will protect your identity throughout the study. Neither your name nor your (institution, position, business)'s name will appear in the dissertation or other documents. Finally, I will share the results of the study with you if you would like.

Would you like to know a little more about my study? *If respondent says "no," thank her or him for the time and end the call. If respondent says "yes," continue with the following:*

My study began with a research project while taking courses at the University of Tennessee. Several professors and graduate students sent out an email survey to thousands of political, academic, and corporate leaders in six states around the country. Georgia was one of those states. We received some very interesting results however, it was impossible for us to learn detailed information via an email survey. As such, I intend to interview at least 18 political, academic, and corporate leaders in Georgia to learn detailed information about their thoughts on higher education accountability policies.

Can we schedule the date, time, and location for the interview? *(Schedule it).*

I will send you the interview questions (protocol) along with the Informed Consent Form. This form protects your rights as a participant in the study and is required by the University of Tennessee. Please read the form, sign it and return one copy in the addressed, stamped envelope I will provide. Please call if you have any questions about the Informed Consent Form.

I'll also send you an email reminder a few days before the interview. May I have your email address?

Thank you so much for your participation. I look forward to working with you. *End call.*

**Appendix E****Note Sent by U.S. Mail with Two Copies of Informed Consent Form  
and Interview Protocol**

Dear (Participant's Name):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study to examine higher education accountability policies.

Attached is the Interview Protocol, which contains the questions I will ask in our interview on \_\_\_\_\_(day, date)\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_(time)\_\_\_(a.m./p.m.).

I have sent two copies of the Informed Consent Form, required by the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Please sign both forms and return one signed copy to me prior to our scheduled interview. You may retain the other signed copy for your records.

Again, thank you for participating in my study, and I encourage you to contact me by phone, (865) 742-1081 (cell), or email [lesfout@gmail.com](mailto:lesfout@gmail.com) if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Les Fout  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

## Appendix F

### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

**Principal Investigator:** Les Fout (lesfout@gmail.com/(865) 742-1081)  
**Title of Research:** Perceptions of Political, Academic, and Corporate Leaders:  
Higher Education Accountability in Georgia

#### INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to examine Georgia political, academic, and corporate leaders' perceptions of higher education accountability policies.

#### INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview. Interviews will last approximately one hour. With your permission, interviews will be audiotaped. Your interview will be transcribed and a copy of the transcription along with major themes that emerged will be shared with you for your review.

#### RISKS

Risks to participants are minimal.

#### BENEFITS

By participating in this research study, you will be contributing to the body of knowledge regarding higher education accountability policies.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the researcher and his advisor. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants or institutions to the study.

#### COMPENSATION

None

\_\_\_\_\_Participant's initials

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Les Fout, at 8467 Norway St., Knoxville, TN 37931 and (865) 742-1081. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

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**CONSENT**

By completing this interview, I acknowledge that I have read the above information, I have received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Research Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Email Reminder for Interview

Dear:

I just wanted to send a reminder of our interview scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_ *day* \_\_\_\_\_ .  
The interview will take approximately one hour. Please contact me immediately if there is a problem since I will be traveling to Georgia to see you.

Again, thank you for participating in my study, and I encourage you to contact me by phone, (865) 742-1081 (cell), or email [lesfout@gmail.com](mailto:lesfout@gmail.com) if you have questions or concerns. Otherwise, I will look forward to talking to you soon.

Sincerely,

Les Fout  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

## Appendix H

### List of Interview Participants

#### Political Leaders

**Political Leader One** – State Senator

**Political Leader Two** – State Senator

**Political Leader Three** – State Representative

**Political Leader Four** – State Representative

**Political Leader Five** – State Senator

**Political Leader Six** – State Representative

**Political Leader Seven** – State Representative

**Political Leader Eight** – State Senator

#### Academic Leaders

**Academic Leader One** – President of four-year university

**Academic Leader Two** – Vice President of Academic Affairs of four-year university

**Academic Leader Three** – President of two-year college

**Academic Leader Four** – President of four-year university

**Academic Leader Five** – Vice President of Academic Affairs of four-year university

**Academic Leader Six** – President of four-year university

**Academic Leader Seven** – President of four-year university

**Academic Leader Eight** – President of two-year college

**Corporate Leaders**

**Corporate Leader One** – President of international clothing manufacturer

**Corporate Leader Two** – President of regional chamber of commerce

**Corporate Leader Three** – Vice President of large regional healthcare provider

**Corporate Leader Four** – President of international toy developer/distributor

**Corporate Leader Five** – Chief Investment Officer of international investment firm

**Corporate Leader Six** – Vice President of international printing distributor

**Corporate Leader Seven** – Vice President of Fortune 500 media conglomerate

**Corporate Leader Eight** – Vice President of Fortune 500 financial institution



## Vita

Leslie “Les” Gene Fout grew up in Kilgore, Texas. After high school, Les graduated with an A.A. from Kilgore Junior College and a B.A. in Public Administration from Stephen F. Austin State University. Upon graduation, Les accepted a position with Kilgore College in Admissions and Recruitment. While working full-time, Les traveled to Commerce, Texas on weekends to obtain a M.S. in Higher Education Administration from Texas A&M University at Commerce.

After five years working at Kilgore College as both a staff and adjunct faculty member, Les moved to the United Way in Houston, Texas, which began his career in fundraising. After three years, Les accepted a position with the United Way in Charlotte, North Carolina. While he enjoyed these positions, Les discovered he missed higher education.

Les moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 2003 to accept the Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Relations position with Pellissippi State Community College. Shortly into his tenure, Les was promoted to the Director of Major Gift Development. After ten years, he still serves the two year college in securing major gifts and now also leads the Grant Development Department.

Les has become active in the Council for Resource Development (CRD) which is the essential education and networking choice for community college development officers. He has twice served on the CRD board of directors and chaired numerous training and recognition programs for the organization. Les is an active member of the Knoxville community serving on numerous non-profit boards and his church’s youth programs. He lives in Knoxville with his wife and two daughters.