

What does academic research have to say about college accountability?

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Some Design Principles

- Campbell's Law (1976)
 - "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."
 - This means that you cannot use a measure for *both* accountability *and* diagnosis
- Kerr (1975) – "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B"
- For college accountability, *what is B?*
- Must define the problem
 - In other words, why isn't the market already working well?
 - Need to diagnose well to come up with the right solution

Lessons from accountability in other settings

- Job Training – JTPA (Heckman, Heinrich and Smith 2002)
 - Short-term employment impacts had zero correlation with long-term employment and earnings
- Health care
 - Risk adjustment
 - Surgeon report cards - take on less risky cases to preserve rating (Leventis 1997)
- K-12 education
 - Large increases in high-stakes scores; small/mixed impacts on low-stakes scores (Dee and Jaco 2009; many others)
 - Lots of strategic behavior – although systems have gotten smarter
 - Long-run benefits, but only for kids in lowest rated schools (Deming, Cohodes, Jennings and Jencks 2014)

Linking funding to outcomes

- Directly conflicts with an open access mission.
 - Students who start farther back are less likely to “pay off” for the school.
 - Need to adjust for differences *prior to enrollment* in the likelihood of success. Otherwise schools will just skim the cream off the top.
- Some possible strategic responses
 - Too much focus on employer-sponsored programs (job is guaranteed)
 - Under-investment in basic skills (costs more resources to make students employable)
 - “come back when you know exactly what you want to do”
- Need to get the “risk adjustment” right.
 - Could use prior earnings, or perhaps placement test scores.
 - Look to past experience in other settings – we’ve been here before!