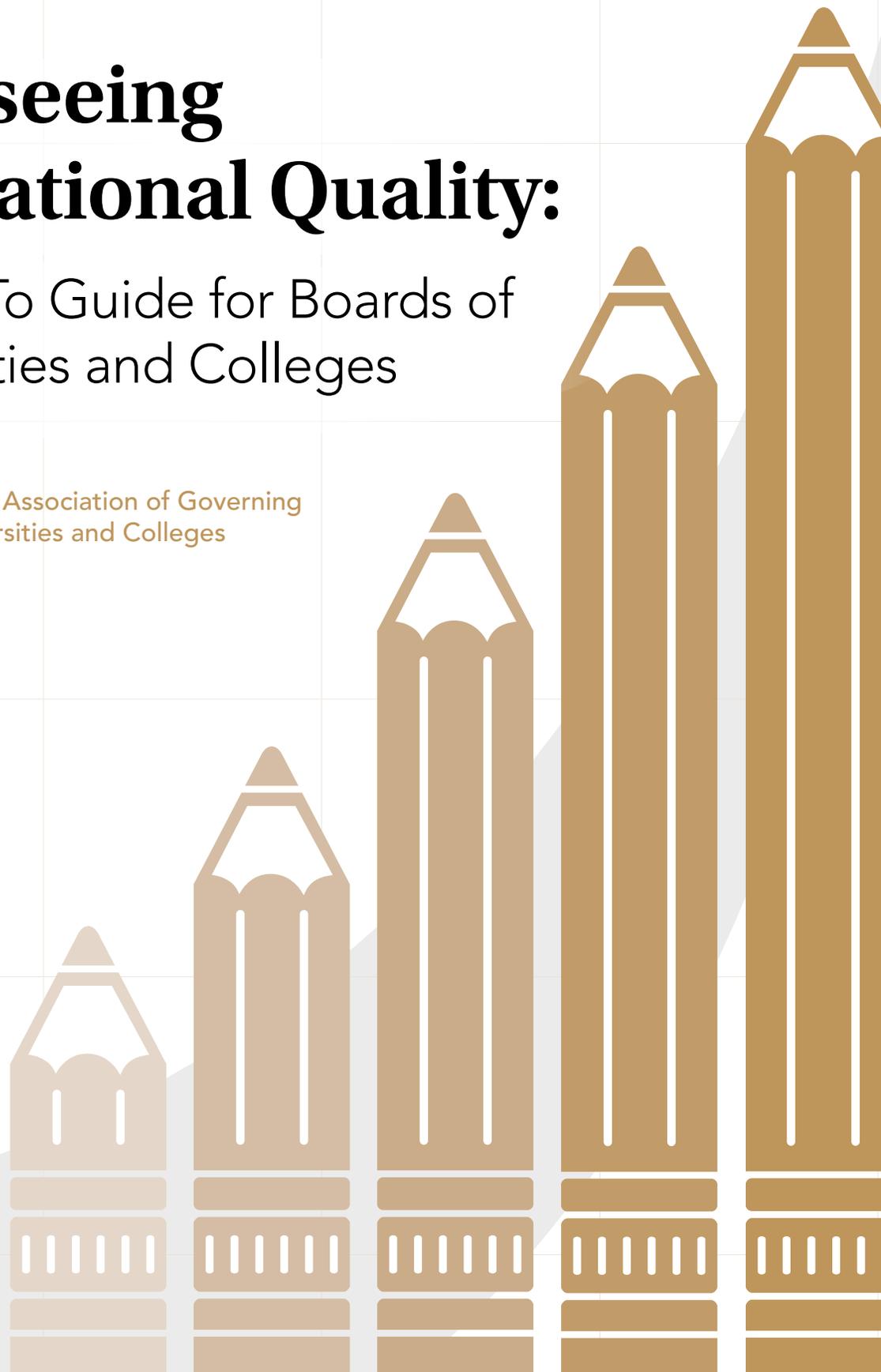


Overseeing Educational Quality:

A How-To Guide for Boards of
Universities and Colleges

A Report by the Association of Governing
Boards of Universities and Colleges



Overseeing Educational Quality:

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About AGB

Since 1921, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has had one mission: to strengthen and protect this country's unique form of institutional governance through its research, services, and advocacy. Serving more than 1,250 member boards, 1,900 institutions, and 36,000 individuals, AGB is the only national organization providing university and college presidents, board chairs, trustees, and board professionals of both public and private institutions and institutionally related foundations with resources that enhance their effectiveness.



About The Teagle Foundation

The Teagle Foundation intends to be an influential national voice and a catalyst for change in higher education to improve undergraduate student learning in the arts and sciences. The Foundation provides leadership by mobilizing the intellectual and financial resources that are necessary if today's students are to have access to a challenging and transformative liberal education. The benefits of such learning last for a lifetime and are best achieved when colleges set clear goals for liberal learning and systematically evaluate progress toward them.

The Teagle Foundation



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AGB is grateful to The Teagle Foundation for its support of this work on board oversight of educational quality to enhance the value of education for all students.

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Introduction

Agendas for meetings of governing boards of colleges and universities are typically packed with information and action items. Too often, boards spend too little time discussing student learning, student outcomes, and student success—which of course are some of the most critical functions of a university. A 2010 AGB publication, “How Boards Oversee Educational Quality: A Report on a Survey on Boards and the Assessment of Student Learning,” reported that nearly two-thirds of boards (62 percent) believe they do not spend enough time talking about student learning. Given that student learning is the *raison d’être* for higher education, that low percentage is troubling.

Perhaps even more troubling was the finding that more than 20 percent of all respondents said that monitoring student learning outcomes is not a board responsibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. Governing boards are stewards of the whole of the institution, not just its financial components or strategic plan. Indeed, the central educational mission of colleges and universities makes oversight of educational quality a primary obligation of boards. AGB’s “Statement on Board Accountability” reminds us that a central responsibility of an institution’s governing board is to define and uphold that institution’s educational mission. A university’s board, the statement asserts, “determines generally the types of academic programs the institution shall offer to students and is ultimately accountable for the quality of the learning experience.”

In his seminal AGB book, *Making the Grade: How Boards Can Ensure Academic Quality*, Peter T. Ewell eloquently asserted that oversight of educational quality “is as much a part of our role as board members as ensuring that the institution has sufficient resources and is spending them wisely.” Fiscal strength and educational quality are of course not mutually exclusive. Oversight of educational quality is inextricably linked to the board’s oversight of the significant fiscal investments that an institution makes—for, ultimately, why is the institution making those investments? Obviously, too, board decisions related to educational quality can play a significant role in the institution’s strategic direction.

The central mission of any college or university is to educate. “Educational quality” can be defined as the extent to which a university fulfills that mission well. The board can oversee educational quality by coming to understand how faculty and the institution as a whole assess student learning across the curriculum and what the results mean. This is a complex but highly rewarding undertaking. One president reports that learning to oversee educational quality has caused his trustees to “fall in love with the college all over again.”

Institutional investments in exemplary educational quality help define and sustain another cornerstone of an institution’s viability—its reputation. Moreover, educational quality helps attract a steady stream of students, as well as financial support for institutional operations, programs, and research. For all of these reasons, oversight of educational quality is fundamentally a part of a board’s fiduciary responsibility to ensure the institution’s future.

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Writing in 2014 in *Trusteeship* magazine, Ewell argued that several interrelated factors have created new and heightened responsibilities for board members of colleges and universities around issues of educational quality. Ewell cited “a growing atmosphere of accountability in higher education, with an emphasis on student learning outcomes,” as well as increased competition in higher education in general. Moreover, he noted “the constrained fiscal conditions under which most colleges and universities operate today—a context that puts a premium on sound and evidence-based academic management practices as much as it does on fiscal discipline.” [emphasis added] The bottom line? The technological, pedagogical, and economic challenges that all of higher education faces today, along with increasing public skepticism about the value and cost of education, make board accountability for educational quality imperative. Similarly, the rise in public and legislative interest in institutional quality, accountability, and integrity also underscores the importance of oversight of educational quality.

Many board members may feel that they do not have adequate expertise to oversee educational quality—and that may in fact be true. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon every board member to learn a basic framework and vocabulary for overseeing educational quality and for boards to develop a common understanding that can help them make informed decisions in this vital area. Toward

this end, AGB has been engaged over the past several years in a project supported by the Teagle Foundation to develop a set of tools and resources that can help college and university boards work more effectively with campus leaders and faculty to monitor the assessment and improvement of student learning and educational quality. Working closely with AGB, an advisory committee and teams from eight diverse institutions have developed a suite of resources to improve board engagement with these issues. These resources include dashboards, metrics, guiding statements for the work of board academic committees, board surveys about educational quality, and other helpful tools.

This work has helped to clarify some basic understanding for board members around educational quality. Reflecting that work, this guide captures some of those findings. This short resource is not an exhaustive study, but rather is designed as a tool to spark, inform, and nurture productive board conversations about oversight of educational quality. Drawing on many of the findings from the AGB Teagle Project on Board Oversight of Educational Quality (hereafter the AGB Teagle project), this publication offers snapshots of some of the tools and strategies that institutions have employed to help their boards engage more definitively in matters of educational quality. Its intent is to frame fundamental principles, share a sense of basic tools, and outline a vocabulary to help boards address these important issues.



The Board's Role in the Oversight of Educational Quality

Because their expertise is often in business, not academics, board members may be apprehensive about overseeing educational quality. They may be confused about the board's role in educational quality versus that of the administration and, particularly, the faculty. Among these university stakeholders, who "owns" educational quality?

The provost or vice president for academic affairs serves a pivotal role as chief interpreter for boards and committees and has an important role in supporting board oversight for educational quality. AGB's "Statement on Board Responsibility for the Oversight of Educational Quality" offers some further clarification. "While academic administrators and faculty members are responsible for setting learning goals, developing and offering academic courses and programs, and assessing the quality of those courses and programs, boards cannot delegate away their governance responsibilities for educational quality," the statement says. "The board's responsibility in this area is to recognize and support faculty's leadership in continuously improving academic programs and outcomes, while also holding them—through institutional administrators—accountable for educational quality."

The AGB statement suggests seven specific steps that boards should follow to ensure educational quality at their institutions:

1. ***Develop board capacity for ensuring educational quality.*** A board should deepen its own understanding of educational quality through regular, intentional discussions with key administrators, faculty, and other experts, and by making sure it regularly receives and reviews data on student learning outcomes.
2. ***Ensure that policies and practices promote educational quality.*** A board is responsible for making sure that institutional practices for defining and assessing educational quality are current, well communicated, and used for continuous improvement of students' educational experience.
3. ***Ensure that learning is assessed, data are used, and improvements tracked.*** This may be one of the single most challenging responsibilities. A board must understand what the institution's educational goals are and how the institution assesses student learning. Moreover, a board needs to assess how well the goals align with the institutional mission and how well the institution performs against those goals. Further, a board should educate itself about the challenges associated with measuring learning.
4. ***Approve and monitor necessary financial resources.*** The board should advocate for sufficient resources in support of educational priorities, monitor the cost effectiveness of these financial commitments, and ensure that these investments are consistent with the institution's mission, plans, and overall financial trends.

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5. **Develop an understanding of academic programs.** A board must understand the broad structure for the institution's educational offerings, how they fit within the institution's mission and history, and how its performance compares to that of peer institutions.
6. **Focus on the total educational experience.** Given that considerable learning takes place outside the classroom, a board must understand how such activities as internships and research contribute to student success.
7. **Understand accreditation.** Boards need to have a working knowledge of the accreditation process, which measures the institution's commitment to academic quality and fiscal integrity.

Board members may wonder whether ensuring educational quality is solely a responsibility of the faculty. Certainly the institution's professoriate has a central role in upholding educational quality, but ultimately the board is responsible for the soundness and integrity of the institution's programs—a responsibility that very much encompasses educational quality. In exercising that responsibility, however, boards must not become overly involved in what is taught or how it is taught. Rather, boards should remain focused on issues and questions at a strategic level. At the same time, boards must regularly review evidence of educational quality, and should expect the institution to uphold a culture based on such evidence.

Educational Quality in Business Terms



Board members sometimes find the vocabulary of educational quality to be a bit confusing. Educational quality in universities is complex and nuanced. To help non-educators navigate this territory, Peter Ewell offers a framework to think about university education in business terms:

When a university talks about...

—*It is essentially asking...*

Assessment of learning outcomes

—*How good is our product?*

Assessment of learning experiences, retention, and student flow

—*How good are we at making our product?*

Surveys of student experience

—*Are our customers satisfied?*

Program review

—*Do we have the right product mix?*

Accreditation

—*Does our institution make the grade in terms of quality?*

Adapted from Making the Grade: How Boards Can Ensure Academic Quality, by Peter T. Ewell. AGB Press, 2nd edition, 2012.



What Boards Can Know

Boards receive critical information about educational quality from a variety of sources. The process of institutional accreditation provides an independent, third-party assessment of how well an institution is making the grade in terms of quality. University self-assessments in preparation for accreditation reviews provide copious relevant data, as do reviews of individual academic programs. Accreditation reviews examine dozens of internal resources and activities that represent widely accepted indicators of good education, such as those associated with the curriculum and instructional resources.

Accreditation data are only part of the story, however. Boards also need more frequent, succinct, high-level evidence of how the institution is delivering educational quality. The most direct existing quantitative indicators of student learning outcomes are the examinations to qualify for admittance to a profession such as law, nursing, and teaching. Those tests represent the best judgment of people in the field regarding what new practitioners should know and be able to do. Most programs do not have licensure examinations, but acceptance into graduate programs can provide similar, though more subjective, information. Placement rates and satisfaction surveys of graduates and their employers provide useful information that can also help guide program improvements.

In addition, several highly regarded standardized instruments are now available to address some aspects of student learning. (See *Student Learning Assessment*, page 6.) In AGB's 2010 "How Boards Oversee Education Quality" report, 69 percent of respondents reported that the full board or a committee received such information to monitor student learning outcomes.

Many institutions use a dashboard to track key indicators of institutional health and strategic

progress. (See *Use the Right Tools*, page 12.) Some indicators of educational quality may already be on the dashboard, such as the pass rate on professional licensure examinations. Higher retention and graduation rates suggest that the institution is meeting a variety of students' needs and expectations, including educational quality. Based on research showing impact on student learning, some institutions track student engagement levels through surveys and monitor the use of widely recognized, high-impact teaching practices.

Indicators of Robust Oversight of Educational Quality and Student Success



- Educational quality is one of the board's top priorities. More broadly, educational quality is inculcated institutionally as a key strategy.
- Within the board, a high-performing committee or task force "owns" educational quality. Policies and practices for overseeing educational quality are in place. The full board regularly discusses and understands the institution's academic program portfolio. The full board has a working knowledge of the principles of accreditation, student learning outcomes, and related educational concepts and practices.
- The board regularly sees, understands, and assesses evidence of educational quality. The board's monitoring of educational quality practices and evidence is systematic. Information pertaining to educational quality is transparent and visible.
- Evidence of educational quality is a basis for continuous institutional improvement and for decisions about resource allocation.

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The Basics: Learning, Outcomes, and Assessment

What do our students learn? Do our students get what they pay for? Are our graduates ready to succeed? How do we know? Asking these questions is essential for every college and university. Answering them is truly challenging.

The core of a college or university’s mission—educating students—is complicated in many ways. Determining and measuring how well students learn is its own field of inquiry and research. There are many different theories and methodologies and relatively few definitive answers. Indeed, our understanding of this realm is still evolving. Boards need not immerse themselves in all the particulars of assessment, but because they have oversight responsibility for educational quality, they need a certain level of understanding of student learning. They also need at least a working knowledge of how their institution measures educational outcomes and quality. Leadership from the board’s academic affairs committee can help ensure that the full board gains the understanding it needs to fulfill this vital role and that board members are adequately knowledgeable about these processes. This brief guide cannot provide all of the points that boards need to know, but it can frame this landscape and provide a basic vocabulary with which boards should be familiar.

Institutional Learning Objectives

A good place to start is with the university’s broad objectives for student learning. The board should make sure that the institution does, in fact, have such objectives and that all board members understand them. The board should review the objectives periodically to ensure that they align with the institution’s mission, the types of students admitted, and decisions about finances. In addition, they should be assured that the learning objectives are meaningfully supported by the academic curriculum.

Student Learning Assessment

The measurement of educational quality in colleges and universities is based on multiple sources of evidence. Direct evidence of student learning includes grades on papers, presentations, and other work and shows what students actually know or can do. Indirect evidence, typically drawn from surveys of students, employers, and other stakeholders, speaks to attitudes, perceptions, and the practical impact of learning. Universities must also weigh educational processes and experiences, such as retention and graduation rates, and educational outcomes, such as content knowledge, writing ability, and critical thinking skills. Portfolios of student work and achievements in capstone courses provide additional evidence. Other factors are learning inputs, such as student SAT or ACT scores, and faculty credentials.

The varieties of assessment evidence indicate different things about educational quality and are useful in a myriad of ways. Institutions of higher learning assess student learning outcomes using many methodologies and instruments. Boards need to know which their university uses and why—what are the pros and cons of the chosen approaches in contrast to other measures?



While student grades summarize outcomes for single students, assessment summarizes outcomes for many students and provides a picture of how well the institution is achieving its educational mission and goals. Colleges and universities assess institutional student learning outcomes using a variety of means. Surveys and questionnaires are typical approaches, as are interviews and focus groups. A commonly used questionnaire, for example, is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced “Nessie”). For interviews and focus groups, many institutions follow the protocol in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education. Institutions also develop their own surveys, interview questions, and focus group protocols.

In recent years, considerable work has been done at the national level to develop more robust and nuanced tests of student learning outcomes. Such measures as the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), and the ETS Proficiency Profile (formerly MAAP) measure what a student knows when first enrolling in an institution and what he or she knows upon leaving, and then examine the learning gains that accrued while the student was in college. Additionally, tests and inventories might measure student content knowledge in specific fields.

Through an ongoing program entitled Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE), the Association of American Colleges & Universities has been developing guides to assess student intellectual and practical abilities and such skills as integrating and applying knowledge they gain from across the curriculum and outside the classroom. Assessments might also be conducted at the institutional or departmental level.

Key Questions for Boards



- Do members of the board and its academic affairs committee understand their oversight responsibility for educational quality? Does the board spend the right amount of time discussing educational quality?
- Does the board know and understand the institution’s goals for learning outcomes? Does the board regularly review a realistic, relevant set of key performance indicators of educational quality?
- Does the board have a basic understanding of assessment, program review, and accreditation? Does the board have a basic understanding of the role of surveys, tests, portfolios, and other tools that help assess educational quality?
- Do the faculty understand and accept the board’s oversight responsibility for educational quality? Are faculty and board members comfortable with their respective roles and responsibilities?
- How does the board use the results of information about educational quality?

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Each institution chooses its own mix of assessment instruments and approaches. Boards should not involve themselves in deciding which methodologies are appropriate, but rather should ask higher-order questions. What conclusions can we draw from the evidence presented to us? Is this the right evidence? How do we know? Is this evidence relevant? Is it representative? Is it valid? Is it consistent with other findings? What actions, if any, should we take based on the evidence we have?

It is important for boards to know who on campus sees what evidence, and what they do with it. For example, how does evidence of student learning impact decisions about allocations of resources, classroom space, or faculty expertise? How does such evidence affect decisions about curricula and academic programs? Do administrators and faculty use the evidence they have to effect continuous improvement in teaching and learning? Is the evidence used to inform faculty development?

Accreditation

As board members know, colleges and universities undergo a process of peer-based accreditation every five to eight years. This important exercise reviews all aspects of a university's operations, including student learning assessment and educational quality. Accreditation of specialized programs also examines educational quality. Institutions typically gather volumes of information in the course of their accreditation reviews. This information can be helpful for boards in the oversight of educational quality, but should not be seen as a substitute for the more focused, detailed, and frequent evidence, outlined above, that boards need to have in hand in order to oversee educational quality.

Putting Theory into Practice

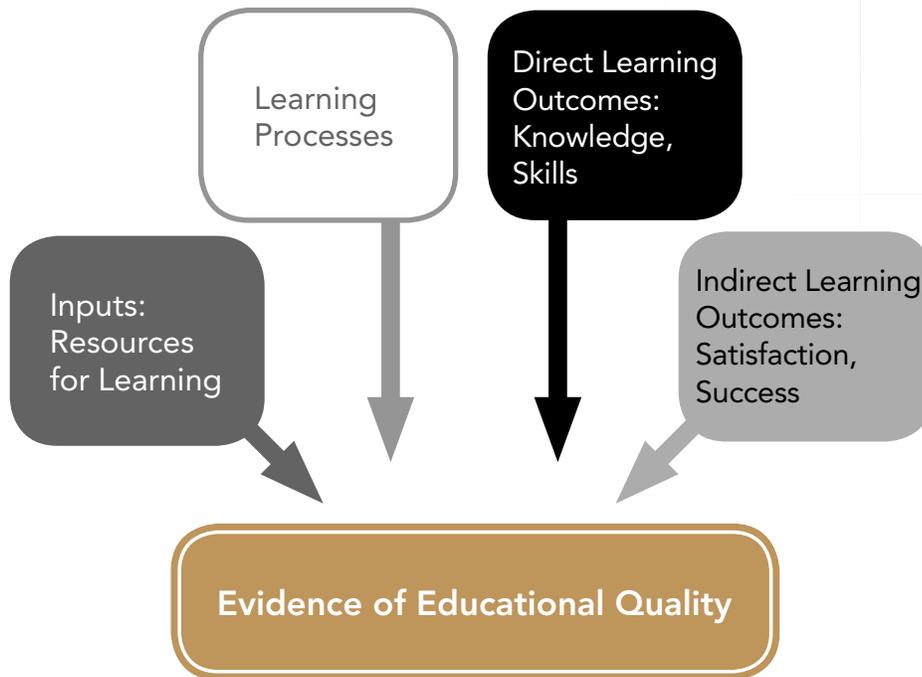
A variety of practical steps can help a board hone the way it oversees educational quality. First, start with where your institution stands at the current time. Ensure that the board, the chief academic officer, and the faculty understand the board's responsibility for educational quality oversight and its appropriate role. Strengthen mutual understanding between the board and academic leaders throughout the process. Make sure the institution has goals for educational quality in place, and that the board understands those goals. Develop board knowledge of how the institution's goals for educational quality are assessed. Further, develop board knowledge about how assessment of educational outcomes informs institutional strategy and decision making. If the board is not satisfied that it has the knowledge, tools, processes, and committee structures in place to address these basics, an audit of current practices, perhaps using outside counsel and drawing on data from both within and outside the institution, can help the board see where and how it needs to develop better strategies.



Develop board knowledge of how the institution's goals for educational quality are assessed. Further, develop board knowledge about how assessment of educational outcomes informs institutional strategy and decision making.



Educational Quality: Sources of Evidence



Sample Board Indicators of Educational Quality

Inputs	Educational Process	Student Learning Outcomes
Student characteristics	Retention and graduation rates	Direct Measures:
Faculty characteristics	Student/faculty ratio	Professional examinations pass rate
	Student satisfaction	Multiple measures of cultures, critical thinking, communication, other learning outcomes
	Teaching effectiveness	
	% budget to instruction, academic support	Satisfactory/exemplary student outcomes in Gen Ed & major
	Academic program review	
		Indirect Measures:
		Graduate satisfaction, employer satisfaction
		Graduate placement rate
		Academic program improvements

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Ask the Right Questions

The movement toward strong board oversight of educational quality begins when boards ask the right questions. Again, start with a frank analysis of current practices: Assess how the board fulfills its fiduciary responsibility and oversees the quality of education. Is that oversight rigorous and constructive?

A series of relevant questions may be instructive.

- ▶ *How much time does the board spend on educational quality? Is that the right amount of time? Does the board make time to educate itself about the nuances of educational quality?* Institutions that participated in the AGB Teagle project invested time in educating board members on academic issues, educational quality, student learning goals, and outcomes assessment. Administrators explained how and why they do program review, for instance, and the particulars of high-impact educational practices and the research supporting them. They spent time briefing board members on the language and practices of assessment, as well as the current issues surrounding its application.
- ▶ *Through what committee processes does the board engage in issues of educational quality? Are those processes adequate enough to engage the full board in this important responsibility? Does the current committee structure adequately address educational quality? In that regard, does the charge given*

the academic affairs committee adequately move the board to fulfill its responsibility for educational quality? Throughout the AGB Teagle project, institutions that made the most progress had a strong partnership between the chief academic officer and the chair of the academic affairs committee, who collaborated to ensure that the board had the right data, structure, and agendas, and discussed the most critical issues related to educational quality.

- ▶ *What information does the board receive and monitor regarding educational quality? Does the board have a meaningful dashboard of indicators of educational quality? (See Dashboards, page 12.) Does that dashboard include all the right factors? What does the board do with that information? Is the information sufficiently robust to inform board deliberations? How does that evidence inform board policy making?* One of the challenges of dashboards is striking the right balance between the number of indicators tracked and their effectiveness in focusing the board at the right strategic level of detail. At some institutions, boards have too much information. To get the best work from the board, present strategic performance measures in ways that help the board focus on the right numbers and connect the data that are being presented to board responsibilities and institutional strategy.



► *Does the board have adequate understanding of how the institution assesses student learning, and what it does with that information? How well does the board understand the goals and practice of assessment, accreditation, and program review?* Toward those ends, the Rhodes College board—which has a relatively deep understanding of educational quality as a result of previous reports, experiences, and discussions—is undertaking an initiative to follow specific success markers through four stages of the student lifecycle and track participation in the following high-impact educational practices: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. In addition, Rhodes uses such national assessment instruments as NSSE and the CLA, along with local measurements such as rubrics for program-level assessment, in its assessment of educational quality. This example may or may not be an appropriate model for another institution, but it underscores how important it is that each institution develop and tailor its own strategies.

► *What is the board's relationship with the institution's faculty? Are the respective responsibilities of the board and the faculty defined clearly, and do both parties understand them? Does the board have regular opportunities to discuss educational quality with faculty representatives?* Metropolitan State University of Denver, for example, has a faculty member on its board, regularly hears reports from the faculty senate chair, and encourages faculty to attend board and committee meetings. Additionally, the academic and student affairs committee, as part of an effort to engage more fully with educational quality, regularly hears about related issues from faculty members, and board meetings are scheduled to facilitate their participation. Similarly, Valparaiso University values discussions between faculty members and board members about topics related to educational quality, such as academic innovation and MOOCs (massive open online courses).

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Use the Right Tools

Assuming the institution regularly compiles data about student learning outcomes to present to the board, dashboards and other tools can be developed to help the board make sense of the data.

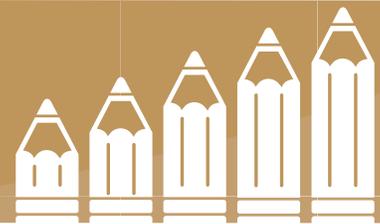
Dashboards

Through their experience, institutions that have participated in the AGB Teagle project offer some insights.

- ▶ **Drake University.** In the past, Drake presented academic dashboard data—such as retention rates, graduation rates, and professional-examination pass rates—to the board, but senior administrators became concerned that the metrics could interfere with the board’s meaningful engagement with educational quality. Now, information presented to the board includes a hybrid of previous metrics, along with some additional information and discussion that focus on a specific aspect of educational quality, such as graduation and retention rates, time to degree completion, and results of various national and institutional surveys of student success and engagement.
- ▶ **Metropolitan State University of Denver.** In addition to retention and graduation information, the board receives the results of academic program reviews and one-year follow-up reports.
- ▶ **Morgan State University.** At the board’s request, the administration at Morgan State designed a dashboard to track progress on educational quality that includes indirect measures such as enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, as well as information about student performance in writing and oral communication.
- ▶ **Rhodes College.** The college developed a dashboard of high-impact educational practices that research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement.
- ▶ **Rochester Institute of Technology.** RIT has developed a dashboard that examines student persistence and graduation rates, NSSE results, and other data relevant to educational quality.
- ▶ **St. Olaf College.** St. Olaf’s matrix of indicators of educational quality includes retention rates, graduation rates, and benchmarks of both students’ broad general knowledge and specialized knowledge in specific fields. Some of the indicators are derived from direct assessment of student work in courses and on nationally administered tests, such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment. Others are indirect, consisting of items or item clusters from national surveys such as NSSE.
- ▶ **Valparaiso University.** Valparaiso reports to the board on a variety of indicators, including results of academic program reviews and the percentage of operating budget devoted to instruction and academic support relative to peer institutions.

Leveraging the Academic Affairs Committee

Institutions in the AGB Teagle project rely on work conducted by the board’s academic affairs committee or equivalent to drive fulfillment of the board’s responsibility for educational quality. The sidebar *Charge to the Education Committee*, on page 13, summarizes the mission of one such committee.



Charge to the Education Committee

In this excerpt of the powers and duties of its education committee, the board at the Rochester Institute of Technology outlines some of its expectations:

The Education Committee acts in a consultative and advisory capacity to assure that the Institute's portfolio of academic programs reflect the Institute's mission, strategic priorities, and educational quality expectations. To this end, the Education Committee shall work closely with the administration and faculty to receive appropriate and timely information that enables the committee to provide the necessary advice and support to ensure:

- a. Academic programs are aligned with strategic priorities of the Institute as reflected in the Institute's Strategic Plan;
- b. Academic program planning and implementation appropriately respond to student interests, support the needs of a diverse student population, and are sensitive to the ever-changing requirements of the global marketplace and society;
- c. Internal and external assessment of academic program quality and expected student learning outcomes are ongoing and systematically scheduled, reviewed, and acted upon;
- d. Research, scholarship and the general intellectual climate of the Institute are strong and active;
- e. Effective policies and procedures exist related to academic programs, including faculty recruitment, appointment, evaluation, development, compensation, tenure, and promotion; and
- f. The Committee shall report its activities periodically to the Board of Trustees, through the Committee Chair, and make recommendations to the Board with regard to policy, quality, and resources needed to support the Institute's academic goals and educational programs.

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Several of the participants in the AGB Teagle project have developed comprehensive agendas and calendars, sometimes year-long and sometimes spanning several years, which help ensure that the board regularly addresses a wide range of factors pertaining to educational quality. Such planning often has the dual effect of moving board business forward while also educating the board about some of the nuances of educational quality.

Additional Tools

Working collaboratively, participants in the AGB Teagle project developed two instruments that might be useful for other trustees and institutions. The Board Survey can help a board benchmark its own savvy and engagement with student learning and educational quality, and can help pinpoint areas for board development. The Board Student Assessment Questionnaire explores a set of assessment materials and strategies that boards may find useful to help frame their discussions. Individually, several of the institutions in the AGB Teagle project developed other resources that may help boards. Drake University, for example, developed curricula for a workshop to help board members understand innovative pedagogies. Rochester Institute of Technology developed a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Progress survey as well as an alumni survey with questions about student learning outcomes.

All of these materials are available on AGB's website at www.agb.org/StudentLearning under "Additional Tools and Resources."

Exercising the Board's Responsibilities

In the AGB publication *Strategic Leadership in Academic Affairs: Clarifying the Board's Responsibilities*, Richard Morrill observes that "as the board monitors the academic program it also evaluates the institution's performance." In that sense, the board's role in exercising responsibility for educational quality represents one of the fundamental avenues through which a board contributes to the life and well-being of the institution it serves. This is an important mandate, and one that must be taken seriously and exercised well.

As in all aspects of the board's business, care must be taken to ensure that boards exercise their fiduciary responsibility for the institution without becoming overly involved in day-to-day operations. In *Making the Grade*, Peter Ewell offers several guidelines for ensuring the right mix of oversight versus management with regard to educational quality:

- ▶ Running the curriculum is the faculty's responsibility; the board's role is to remind them of that responsibility;
- ▶ Stay focused on strategic issues;
- ▶ Expect and demand a culture of evidence;
- ▶ Recognize that evidence about academic quality raises issues but rarely gives final answers; and
- ▶ Make reviewing evidence of academic quality and improvement a regular and expected board level activity.



Conclusion

In closing, the board's work in ensuring educational quality and student success is critical. Writing about the work of the academic affairs committee in the AGB publication *The Academic Affairs Committee*, Susan Whealler Johnston put this point in context:

There are no more important responsibilities for a governing board of a college, university, or university system than monitoring and affirming the quality of teaching and learning, the core mission of every higher education institution. Everything else a board does supports education: securing finances for buildings that house the classes, labs, and performance spaces; raising money and overseeing the endowment to provide scholarships; ensuring adequate salaries, workspace, and policies for faculty who shape the curriculum, lead the classes, and assess student performance; securing presidential leadership to provide institutional direction and planning; and monitoring the budget that undergirds the enterprise. Indeed there would be no need for these other fiduciary responsibilities of boards were it not for the educational mission.

There are no more important responsibilities for a governing board of a college, university, or university system than monitoring and affirming the quality of teaching and learning, the core mission of every higher education institution.

Oversight of educational quality is an important component of a higher education board's fiduciary responsibility. That oversight is no less important than a board's oversight of the institution's fiscal health, which of course is vital to that institution's educational quality and success. Accordingly, boards contribute significantly to an institution's well-being and to its future through productive oversight of educational quality and student success.

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AGB Consulting: Expertise for Educational Quality and Student Success

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- ▶ Sort the respective responsibilities for EQSS of the board, the faculty, and the administration;
- ▶ Define and understand board-level evidence of EQSS;
- ▶ Focus on student learning outcomes;
- ▶ Determine how to use evidence of EQSS to inform decisions on strategy, resource allocation, institutional effectiveness, and other key matters; and
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