

**Can we create a more strategic approach to
performance indicators and standards
in Australian higher education?**

Richard James

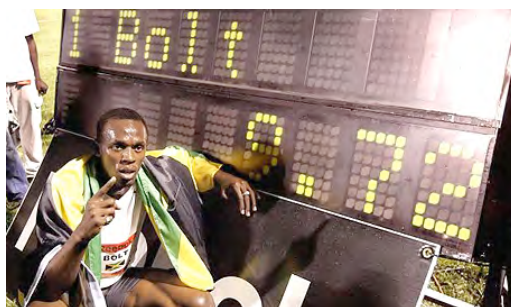


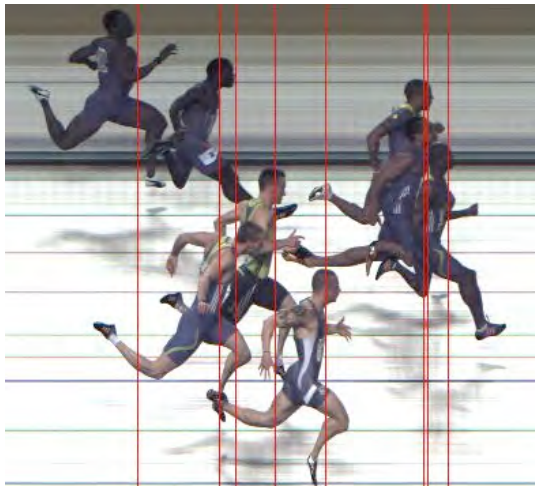
Investing in the Future seminar
4 August 2008

Three well known considerations ...

- The act of measurement does not in itself guarantee improvement, but it does much to signify what is valued and to affect behaviours.
- Many of the things we value most in higher education are exceedingly difficult to measure and quantify.
- Standards in higher education are highly elusive and difficult to pin down.







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Thursday, July 24, 2008

BUSIN

A community's cry: 'Save our Starbucks'

By Kareem Fahim

NEWARK, New Jersey: The green aprons, the blond wood, the safari-themed coffee art and the chalkboards. From Chula Vista, California, to Bangor, Maine, to Paris and Hong Kong, all Starbucks stores are more or less the same. And that is how the company wants it.

But every store, as it turns out, is not quite the same. When a Starbucks opened on Broad Street here almost eight years ago, it was not seen as a bland new spigot of a corporate coffee-pot, but as a gathering place whose very existence would have seemed impossible a decade before, a symbol of a knocked-down city's attempts to get up. A few miles away, in New York, new Starbucks branches were sometimes greeted with yawns, or even annoyance that the national chain was invading neighborhoods. In Newark, Sharpe James, then the mayor, showed up for the opening.

So when Starbucks announced last week that the Broad Street branch would be among the 600 stores that the coffee company is closing around the United States, the reaction here was especially emotional, a mixture of anger, disappointment and frustration.

"They're not going to close the one on Wall Street!" one man exclaimed. A flier was circulated: "Save our Starbucks," it said, directing supporters to a comments section of the corporate Web site. A deputy to Cory Booker, the mayor of Newark, called Starbucks and asked them to reconsider.

"It's the only nice place on this street," said Jorge Espana, a 70-year-old retiree who comes to Starbucks twice a week from the other side of town. He pointed down Broad Street, a busy

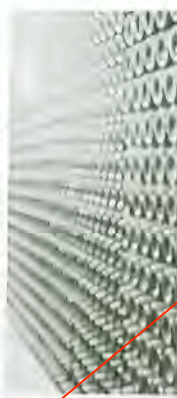
One regular, Nijim Muddaththir, runs a food cart a few blocks away. "All the guys from the mosque come here," Muddaththir said. "It's our meeting place." Robert Brozon had just missed his friends, a regular gathering of social workers. "I was shocked that with the revitalization, with the face-lift here, they would remove the Starbucks," he said. "I'm confused about what message they're trying to send."

Brozon was referring to the sense that the streets around the Starbucks seemed to be prospering. A beautification campaign has transformed Broad Street with new bus shelters and sidewalks. A luxury apartment building nearby is almost full, and construction will soon start on a new residential loft building a few blocks away. New restaurants and bars have opened, their owners hoping for business from the visitors to Newark's recently opened arena, the Presidential Center.

But at the same time, high-profile national retailers, including Old Navy and a FedEx/Kinko's, have quietly left the area. Booker and his aides, while expressing disappointment with the Starbucks decision, have tried to put the best face on it.

Stefan Pryor, Booker's deputy mayor for economic development, said the building's owner, Cogswell Realty Group, was exploring the possibility that another coffee shop might move into the space. And he said ambitious development plans for other parts of downtown Newark, closer to the stadium of the local minor-league baseball team, the Newark Bears, might mean that Starbucks will open elsewhere in the city.

This did not stop the Booker administration from trying to keep the Starbucks right where it was. Pryor said he learned of the decision



Italian spar

By Mathias Wilk
Reuters

PROSECCO, Italy: Gianluca Bias has great expectations for the white sparkling wine his family has been making since 1847 in the Valdobbiadene and Conegliano regions north of Venice.

A 22nd-generation producer, he is hoping that the growing international renown of Prosecco will help his win gain ground over Champagne.

One battleground will be emerging wine markets like China. Prosecco

"It's the only nice place on the street," said Jorge Espana, a 70-year-old retiree

Everyone can be a leader ...

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'one of the Asia-Pacific region's most influential universities'

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'amongst Australia's leading universities'

(from about 5 minutes spent searching the 'About' pages on a handful of Australian university websites)



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Performance measurement, reporting of measurement and standards are now critical issues for the sector

1. **The continuous improvement of teaching, learning and educational outcomes will depend significantly on our capacity to develop evidence-based approaches to planning and resource allocation.**
2. The OECD feasibility study *Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO) has the potential to have profound effects internationally, especially on the metrics for university rankings.
3. The success of mission-based compacts — should we head in this direction — will rely heavily on the government's and sector's confidence in the measurement of institutional performance against negotiated goals.



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The OECD feasibility study: **Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)**

'provide a proof of concept of the feasibility of measuring tertiary education quality across TEIs, countries, languages and cultures'

The feasibility study has four strands:

1. The assessment of generic skills
2. The assessment of discipline-specific skills
3. Measurement of the value-added or contribution of TEIs to students' outcomes
4. Contextual measures and indirect indicators of tertiary education quality



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How good are Australian higher education standards?



But there are signs of 'fragility' ...

- universities starved for resources;
- less than optimum staff/student ratios and the casualisation of undergraduate teaching;
- a trend towards 'fast tracking' completions;
- pedagogical pressures created by the number of international students;
- an apparent degree of student disengagement;
- problems of student income support and the patterns of excessive paid work; and
- a well-performing but uneven school system.



How well do we use performance measures in higher education at the moment?



Looking to the future: Achieving progress on standards, performance measurement and the use of indicators in a mission-based compacts environment



Heading into new territory ...

In describing the idea of compacts in March of this year, Senator Kim Carr said:

'Universities will have a reciprocal responsibility to explain their purposes, and to report publicly on how well they have performed against their own goals and expected performance standards.'

(my emphasis)



... where much is uncertain ...

The unit of analysis?

How will we judge the performance of the sector as a whole versus the performance of its component institutions?
How will institutional performance be compared?
Indeed, is there any need to compare institutional performance?

The indicators?

Will there be core, common performance indicators?
Is it possible to establish an indicator framework that does not have a gravitational pull towards institutional uniformity?

Use of the data?

Will competitive, performance incentive funding, such as LTPF, have any value in a mission-based compacts environment?



Four suggestions ...

1. develop a framework of agreed, sector-wide metrics, based on common definitions, for measuring performance in the three main areas of performance.
2. develop metrics that shift the emphasis to *outcomes/impact* measures of performance to complement input/process measures – a two-tiered approach to performance indicators.
3. establish *core performance measures* for all institutions, regardless of negotiated mission and additional indicators to be used as appropriate on the basis of institutional mission.
4. develop a *value-added* conception of institutional performance in the area of student learning outcomes and adopt both *absolute* and *value-added* measures as legitimate indicators of outcomes.



More broadly, the HE sector needs to explore the possibilities for ...

- developing a better articulation of the *minimum* academic standards for Australian degrees, as opposed to aspirational standards.
- strengthening cross-institutional benchmarking within kindred fields of study.
- developing more international reference points or benchmarks for Australian academic standards.



In summary, I am suggesting:

- An agreed national indicator framework.
- Standard system-wide definitions be developed for all PIs.
- Outcomes indicators to be distinguished from process indicators
- A priority be attached to outcomes indicators.
- Core PIs be identified that apply to all institutions regardless of negotiated compact.
- Additional, mission-specific PIs be identified that are appropriate for certain institutions on the basis of their distinctive missions and goals.



A first sketch ...

Two tiers of PIs

	Outcomes/Impact 'Performance indicators'	Inputs/Processes 'Markers'
Teaching and Learning	Graduate skills Completions Employability Equity	AUSSE CEQ etc.
Research and Research Training	(wait for ERA!)	Research income etc. etc.
KT, Community engagement — '3rd stream'	???	Range and volume of activities etc. etc.



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1. Undergraduate knowledge and skills
Absolute and Value-added
Generic and Discipline-Specific
2. Graduate knowledge and skills
3. Completions
4. Employability
5. Equity: Low SES, Indigenous people



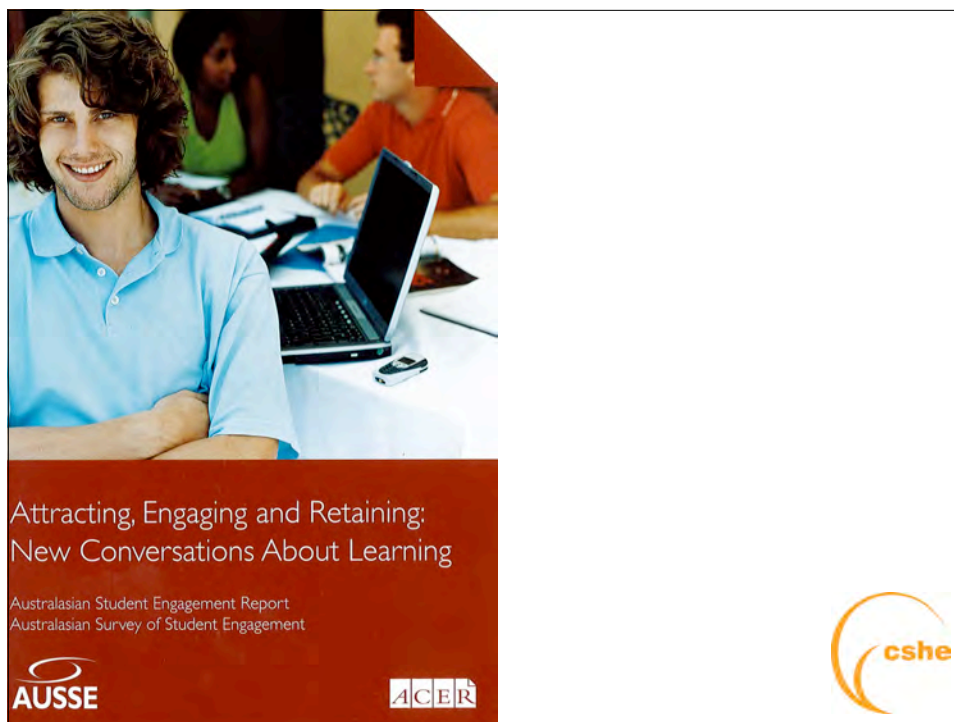
A case study: Measuring performance in teaching and learning



Three approaches compared

Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)	Graduate perceptions of teacher behaviours and their own beliefs about their learning	A process measure ... a highly indirect measure of learning. Evidence for the claimed associations is weak
The ACER's AUSSE	Students' self-reports of their study-related activities	A process measure, but an important one ... an indirect measure of learning. Stronger evidence for association with learning outcomes
Assessment of student learning	The direct assessment of what students/graduates know and can do.	A true outcomes measure ... a direct measure of learning. 'Science' of assessment in HE not well developed.





A CASE STUDY: Three approaches compared

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The complications ...

Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)	Graduate perceptions of teacher behaviours	Relatively easy to implement but data are heavily lagged.
The ACER's AUSSE	Students' self-reports of their activities	Relatively easy to implement, data far less lagged.
Assessment of student learning	The direct assessment of what students/graduates know and can do.	Challenges in implementation, 'ownership' of responsibility



Compared with the Olympics?

Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)	Graduate perceptions of teacher behaviours	Athletes are surveyed on their coaches' skills and the training 'climate' they've created - no need to run the races.
The ACER's AUSSE	Students' self-reports of their activities	Athletes report their training regimes and training data, from which performance is inferred - no need to run the races.
Assessment of student learning	The direct assessment and reporting of what students/graduates know and can do.	The races are run.

