



VSA Updates

QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE VOLUNTARY SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY
AND THE COLLEGE PORTRAITS OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

2012 Is the Year: SLO Pilot Evaluation In Progress

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2012 is a big year in the VSA's student learning outcomes pilot project. It's the end of the pilot. Now it's time to evaluate what's working and to refine further the way we capture learning gains while keeping data comparable and straightforward.

Unambiguous information that is easily accessible to the public has never been more critical. "States are increasingly looking at performance measures," said Michael Tanner, Vice President of Academic Affairs at APLU. "Families want to know what their students are going to get for their money."

Here at the VSA we are hearing increasingly powerful stories from institutions that are using their College Portrait to carry their message to legislators, accrediting bodies, and governance organizations. Communications departments leverage their College Portraits to demonstrate institutional transparency by providing critical information consumers can see and understand. Several institutions have successfully used their College Portrait as part of accreditation self-



makes an institution's voluntary, publicly posted accountability information clear and available. So how can we be even more effective at telling this story?

Evaluation Toward Future Directions

This year, the VSA is gathering feedback from institutions on their SLO experiences and considering future directions. Our major information-gathering efforts include:



User Survey: VSA Progress on Student Learning Outcomes

The VSA has invited participants to report their SLO testing experiences via an online survey, and so far we've had a high response rate with very helpful feedback. Input from every participating institution is valuable. If you have not yet given us your feedback, please do or forward the link below to the appropriate person at your institution: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/55MRC3K>. The survey will remain open through the summer (see story on page 6).



NILOA
The National
Institute for Learning

Outcomes Assessment will gather feedback from important stakeholder groups as part of the VSA evaluation. Topics will include participation choice, quality, satisfaction, effectiveness, and future improvements. Reports are due in the first half of 2012.



Student Advisory Council

A council of high school students, guidance counselors, teachers, and recent graduates who have not yet started college assist us by providing feedback on the College Portraits web site from the student and counselor viewpoint.



Focus Groups at APLU and AASCU meetings

This summer and fall, APLU and AASCU meetings will include focus groups asking presidents, provosts and other senior campus leaders to provide constructive feedback and guidance for the future.



2009 and 2010 Workshops

In the six workshops VSA conducted around the country in 2009 and 2010, there was a great deal of discussion about SLO test administration and using test results for institutional

SLO Pilot Evaluation in Progress *(contd. from page 1)*

improvement. These presentations (next page) are available on the VSA website, and a summary document of “lessons learned” will be posted this fall.

There is a great deal to consider as we pursue the best ways to

champion the value of higher education. Our goal is to display the data you post to make the best case we can where key stakeholders can see it.

The VSA staff appreciates your insights and input on how to better

support the work of campus research and assessment staff while meeting the demands for public accountability and transparency. We will continue to post new research results and resources as we get them to the VSA website all year.

VSA and USA Today Enter Partnership

The VSA and *USA Today's* College Readership Program have entered a partnership this summer. College Portraits has already been featured at the top of the *Inside USA Today* Summer Edition e-news publication for K-12 teachers and school administrators: <http://www.usatoday.com/educate/iusat/et-mail/2011/8-Aug/8-1-11.html>. This is a positive and concrete step toward our

goal of increased outreach to students, families, high school counselors and teachers.

Under this Memorandum of Understanding, *USA Today* and the VSA will:

- Exchange web links on each of our websites
- Provide publicity in newsletters targeted at teachers, high school students and college students

• Offer more visibility at conferences and meetings

So when you see the College Portrait/VSA logo on *USA Today's* Education website, don't be surprised!

To learn more about the *USA Today* Collegiate Readership Program, visit: <http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/collegiate-readership-program-overview>.

Estimator Survey Reveals Feature Awareness

The VSA has been surveying a lot of people this summer. We wanted your input on the VSA College Affordability Estimator, the cost calculator available at no extra charge to VSA participants. With the October federal deadline looming large for all higher education institutions to make a cost calculator available, VSA asked how many of your institutions had chosen and implemented a calculator and which products they were considering.

About half of all respondents to date had already chosen a net price calculator to use (*see charts page 3*). A full 40% percent have selected the VSA Estimator, while only 20% are using the DOE template and 14% a custom calculator their institution developed. Commercial calculators are not getting much traction at all, which is not surprising given the economic climate and the cost of commercial calculators.

When asked whether respondents were aware the VSA

Estimator had certain features, many responded that they knew it is HEOA compliant and available at no additional cost to VSA participants. The features that were least well known were the Estimator's

- calculation flexibility
- the ability to customize EFC ranges
- choice of three academic years on which to base aid estimates
- range of aid estimates as well as the median amount
- estimate of federal subsidized loans and work-study available.

Executive Director Speaks At Thai University Seminar

VSA Executive Director Christine Keller was invited by the Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand (KNIT) to be the featured speaker at a conference in Bangkok on September 2. KNIT is an autonomous institute under the Commission of Higher Education, charged with the oversight of 170 universities in

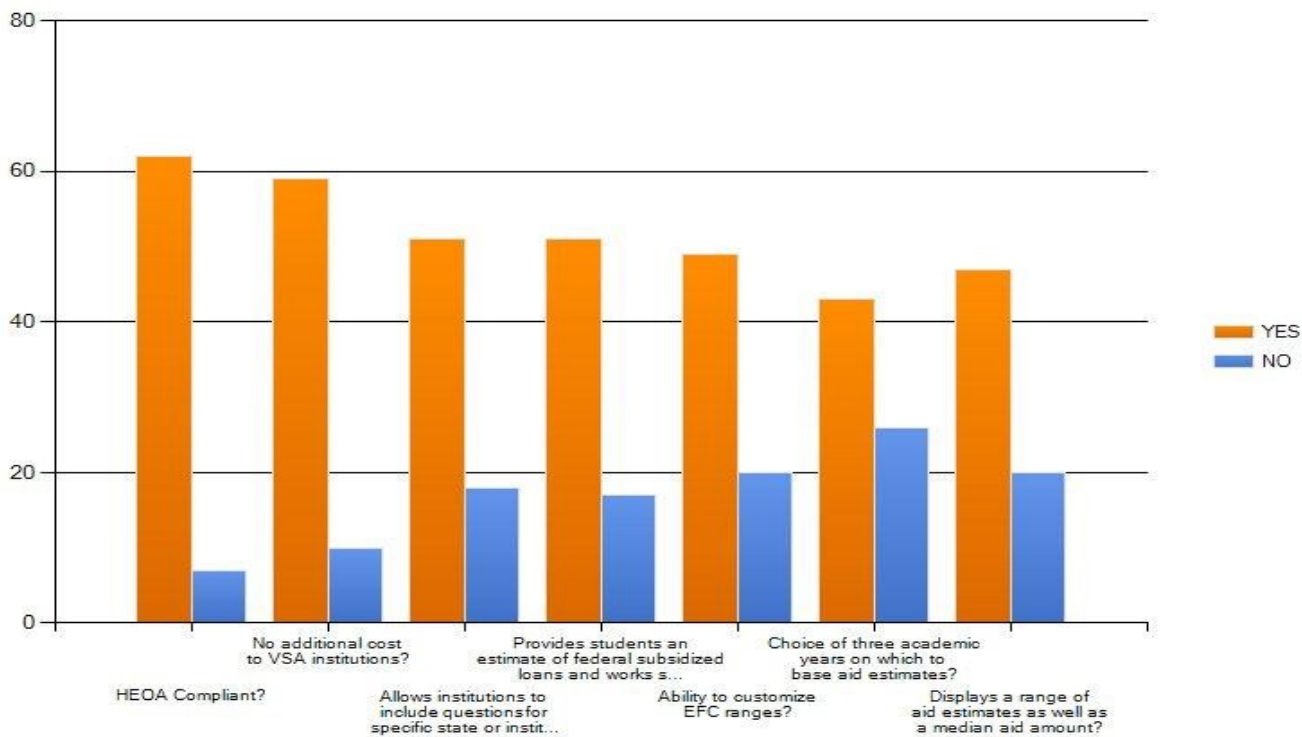
Thailand. Participants were university council chairs, university council members, presidents, deans, scholars, academics, policy makers, researchers, and students.

KNIT has initiated and commissioned a consumer information system to help students and families make better choices, and to improve accountability and

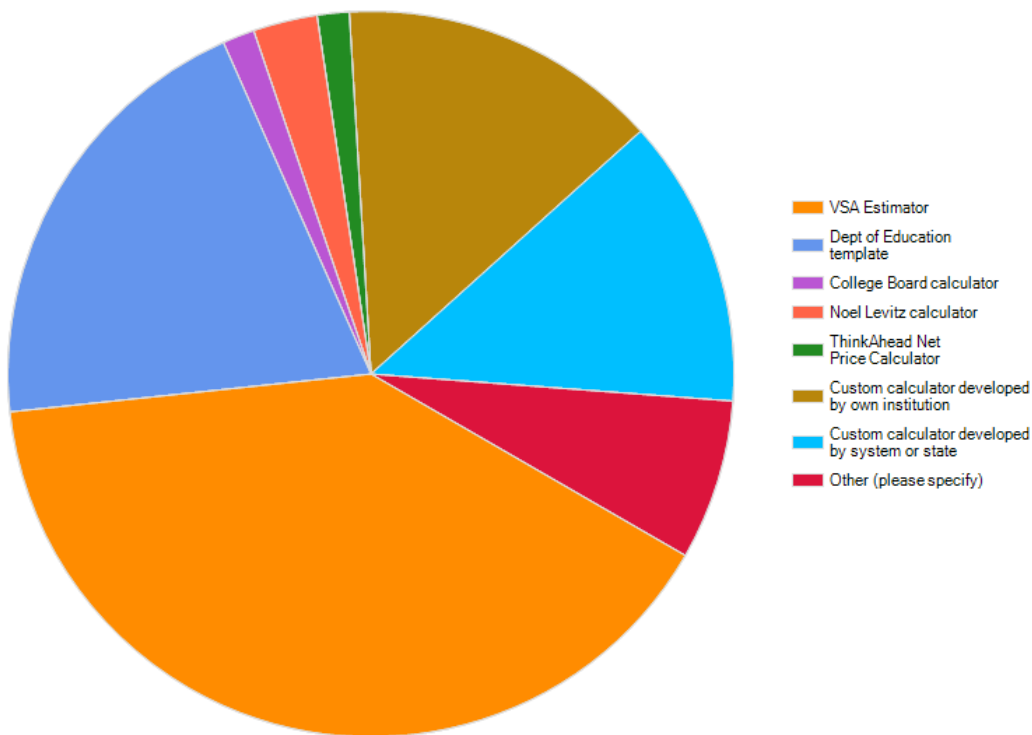
transparency. It is entitled “Thai University Information Network” (TUIN). Eight universities are in the pilot project. Christine noted, “As TUIN and the VSA have similar goals it was valuable to exchange ideas and gain a more international perspective on accountability.”

The VSA surveyed participants about the College Affordability Estimator available to participants (brief on page 2).

Are you aware that the VSA Estimator has the following features?



What Net-Price calculator did your institution select?





VSA Welcomes New Participants

Welcome to three new participating institutions: Indiana University Northwest, University of South Carolina Beaufort, and Florida A&M University! Even with the difficult economic climate, institutions are recognizing how vital the VSA mission is to demonstrate accountability and transparency in higher education to legislators, governing bodies and accreditors.

VSA Site Has A New Look

The VSA site (www.voluntarysystem.org) is moving to a new template at the end of October, with streamlined navigation and a simpler interface. We hope you find it easy to use. We update it regularly so there are fresh presentations, papers, webinars and news. Documents pertaining to configuring your College Portrait are all in the Admin Module on the site now; the VSA site is oriented toward research and professional development. Take a look and let us know what you think!

VSA and NAICU College Search Tools Profiled

The National College Access Network (NCAN) hosted a webinar for their members highlighting the College Portraits and NAICU's college search tool. Called *Just the Facts: Two College Search Tools Profiled*, college outreach agencies around the country heard Wendell Hall speak about the College Portrait. We understand the webinar was recorded and is now available to NCAN members on their website.

UAL Birmingham White Paper Features VSA As Positive Catalyst

Matthew Fifolt of UAL Birmingham has published *Catalyst for Change: How Student Affairs and Institutional Research Found a Shared Mission Through Collaboration* in the Spring issue of *Developments*, a quarterly publication of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). He discusses how participation in the VSA served as a catalyst that triggered discussions between Student Affairs and IR on gathering curricular and co-curricular assessments, with positive results for collaboration.

Hail and Farewell: VSA Board Members

It is with regret we say good-bye to Keith Yehle, long-term member of the VSA Oversight Board. Keith has taken an exciting new position in the Government Relations Department at Sandia National Laboratories.

We welcome Matt Hammons, director of federal relations at the University of Nebraska, and Carlos Vargas-Aburto, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. We look forward to working with these esteemed colleagues!

Executive Director Testifies—Again—on Quality in Higher Education

Christine Keller was requested to return to testify before the **National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI)** in June, after her initial testimony in February. NACIQI advises the Secretary of Education on matters of accreditation and the eligibility and certification process for institutions of higher education.

NACIQI is gathering information for the re-authorization of the Higher Education Act. See Christine's latest comments on the VSA website: <http://www.voluntarysystem.org/>

I am moving on to new opportunities at Oracle Corporation this month. I would like to thank everyone I've worked with over the past two-plus years who've helped to grow this important initiative. It's been a pleasure to work with you all.

—Project Coordinator and Newsletter Editor Elspeth Payne

Tips & Tricks



Improve Your Web Traffic Using the College Portrait

When senior campus leaders sign the VSA participation agreement, they agree that their institution will put the College Portrait logo on their institution's home page "or another appropriate page (e.g., admissions page) that is regularly visited by prospective students and not more than one or two clicks off the institution's home page. An active link will be maintained from the logo directly to its College Portrait". (To view the entire Participation Agreement, visit the VSA web site at

<http://www.voluntarysystem.org/participants/signup.cfm>.



Putting a link to the College Portrait someplace accessible to prospective students helps make it accessible, easily comparable information available to them. If you position the VSA logo "above the fold", so it's on the first screen they

see when they open a page, students are far more likely to click on it. If they have to scroll down the page and see a linked logo at the bottom, users are far less likely to click on it. Since our goal is to answer prospective students' basic questions quickly and easily, we all want them to click on that link!



The College Portraits logo can look very nice right next to the Facebook and Twitter icons on your homepage.

Texas Southern University does a very nice job with this, using the whole College Portraits logo in a small but recognizable format: <http://tsu.edu/>.

Missouri Southern State University does this, too, using the VSA blue and white check mark: <http://www.mssu.edu>.

College Portrait Website Offers New Features for Users

The College Portrait development team works all year to produce a new feature release in October. The new feature we're particularly excited about this year is the ability to see side-by-side college comparisons of two institutions at once. We're in the final phases of formatting the comparison page now.

In the next version of the College Portraits, we will include a listing of all public colleges and universities, though participating institutions with published College Portraits will be visually much more appealing. Participants who have not published their College Portrait will also be highlighted, but less obviously so. We feel it will serve students and families better if they can see a list of all public institutions, though participating institutions will be able to present their information in our easily accessible, comparable, comprehensible format.



If you're not hearing from us, check your spam filter! We send out group emails to all our users and many institutional email servers automatically filter them. We send out regular email blasts about our webinars, and a quarterly newsletter.

The VSA site is getting a facelift, too. Its focus is professional news and development for those interested in accountability and transparency in higher ed. Please send us your feedback when we move to the new site this winter. We hope you will find it more easily navigable and more ADA-friendly. Reshaping the VSA site has really made us aware of how often we are updating and adding information to it! If you're not checking the site, you're missing announcements of new papers, webinars and VSA news.

The 2011-12 data entry cycle will open December 5. The current data entry cycle closes December 1.



Future Plans Bar Graph Fix—you asked and we listened. For data that had a high percentage number, the number was often not appearing next to the bar—it was running off its page. This has been fixed. If your institution was affected, you may need to revalidate and republish your College Portrait for the correction to take effect.

Time to Submit Your National Student Clearinghouse Cohort Query



Two student cohorts are submitted through Student-Tracker using the Cohort Query option between October 1 and December 31, 2011.

Cohort 1: Fall 2005 first-time, full-time students (follow

IPEDS guidelines)

Cohort 2: Fall 2005 new, full-time transfer students (degree-seeking if available)

The Cohort Query search date is "20050915"

More details on the Student-

Tracker Cohort Query can be found in the [Cohort Query Guide](#)

For specific questions about the query contact student-tracker@studentclearinghouse.org.

Tell Us! Student Learning Outcomes Survey Still Open



We said we'd collect your responses on our Progress in Student Learning Outcomes all summer, and summer's not over yet! You can still give us your feedback on the VSA student learning outcomes initiative and how it is going on your campus. We're very interested to

know what instruments or frameworks you are using, and how valuable these various approaches are for you. If you tell us your institution hasn't posted student learning outcomes results yet, we ask about the barriers that might have kept you from administering one of the

three VSA SLO tests.

More than two hundred institutions are represented in our survey results so far. Haven't completed the survey yet? You still can!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/55MRC3K>

Visits to the University of Southern Indiana's College Portrait recently jumped 287.27%



"...I told my director about the recent jump in (College Portrait) visits and she told me that she added a link to our "Prospective Students" dropdown on our homepage just 6-8 weeks ago...we think that is the cause of the jump!"

VSA Webinars A Popular Success

VSA is sponsoring a series of free webinars on topics including communicating student learning outcomes, aligning assessment and teaching, examining various student learning gains, and the process of evaluating the VSA's student learning outcomes pilot project. Speakers such as Marc Chun, John Pryor, Jillian Kinzie and Christine Keller feature tools and research we think will interest VSA participants. VSA has had a strong participant response—nearly 200 people registered for the June webinar alone.

Scheduled mid-week and in hours chosen to be fairly available to people in all US time zones, the webinars run one hour, or forty-five minutes of presentation and fifteen minutes for questions. Telephone and Internet connections open as much as twenty minutes early, so attendees who

have not used WebEx conferencing software can download the necessary software and ensure connectivity. Because these webinars are not using VOIP at present, a telephone line is necessary to hear the webinars, as well as an internet connection to view the presentations.

All VSA webinars are recorded, and the recordings are posted to the VSA website about two weeks after each event (<http://www.voluntarysystem.org/index.cfm?page=LearningOutcomes>). This web page also features descriptions of upcoming webinars, and links for registration. While not required, registration does assist the conferencing company to plan suitable resources for the number of attendees expected.



"I like the College Portraits and show it to my students because it's simple, clear, and straightforward."

Eric Neel, Counselor, Cloverdale High School, CA

Upcoming Webinars

September 22 *Using Multiple Student Learning Outcomes: Examining Cognitive, Diversity, and Civic Gains*

John Pryor, Director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)

October *Use of the Success and Progress Rate at UW Stevens Point and Across the UW System*

Todd Bailey, Senior Institutional Planner, Office of Policy Analysis and Research
Shari Ellertson, Director of Policy Analysis and Planning

November 8 *The VSA and Student Learning Outcomes: Evaluation and Next Steps*

Christine Keller, Executive Director, VSA and Director, Research and Policy Analysis

February 8m 2012 *NSSE Update and VSA Displays*

Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director, IU Center for Postsecondary Research, NSSE Institute

Association Meetings

APLU and AASCU, the VSA's sponsoring associations, have their annual meetings this fall. AASCU's is in Boston, MA, Oct. 24-26, and APLU's is in San Francisco, CA, Nov. 13-15. VSA staff will be presenting and hosting focus groups at APLU's meeting.

How are you using the College Portrait? What feature is most exciting to you? Did you use it during an accreditation review? Have you sent College Portrait information to your legislature? Send us your tips, tricks, successes, and your ideas for this newsletter, and we might feature YOU in the next VSA Update!

Send your ideas and experiences to Elspeth at epayne@aplu.org

College Portraits: No Rankings, No Spin. Just the Facts!

www.collegeportraits.org
www.voluntarysystem.org

The **Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)** is an initiative by public four-year universities to supply basic, comparable information on the undergraduate student experience to important constituencies, primarily students and their families, but also campus administrators, campus leaders, faculty, the public at large, and also legislators and public policy makers, through a common web report – the **College Portrait** (www.collegeportraits.org). It is subdivided into three main sections: Student & Family Information, Student Experiences & Perceptions, and Student Learning Outcomes. The College Portrait seeks to produce comparisons, not rankings, to assist prospective college students to choose a “right fit” university.

The **College Portraits** website is a reliable and free source of clear, comparable information about public colleges and universities. The user-friendly format helps students and families compare costs, locations, academic programs, graduation rates, campus activities, safety, and a lot more. This year colleges and universities are adding a **College Affordability Estimator** to help students better estimate their out-of-pocket cost to attend the school of their choice.

The **VSA** is sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

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