

Transcript: What Does This Mean for Our Status?: Accreditation as a Catalyst & Lever for College Completion

Dhanfu Elston: [00:00:55] Welcome everyone to the new CCA live webinar: What does this mean for our success? We'll give you a couple of housekeeping items and just a couple of minutes. Want to give everyone maybe another 30 seconds or so to log in? So, we'll get started in just about 30 seconds.

Welcome friends and colleagues. We are excited to have you today at the new CCA live webinar series, for this particular session, we are going to be talking about what does this mean for our success, accreditation as a catalyst, and lever for college completion? My name is Dhanfu Elston and I serve as chief of staff, senior vice president, a complete college America.

And so, as we welcome you to CCA live, each of these sessions really features, experts or a series of experts who will provide you with valuable insights and information as we continue to navigate these, unprecedented and tumultuous times in higher education, but also the opportunities that are ahead of us as we think about the future of what this larger ecosystem of our work looks like.

Just to kind of give you a few quick updates. There are a few things that I want to make sure that you are aware of as far as, some general kind of housekeeping items on all of your mics are currently muted. We encourage you all to use the question and answer box at the very bottom of your screen in zoom.

So, if you hovered that over that Q&A icon, you can include any questions that you have, and we'll get to as many of those questions as possible. We also encourage you to use the chat for just any general comments. Additionally, the recording of this session will be about on the CCA live website.

The CCA live series, includes a variety of different sessions, workshops, conversations with CCA team members around the broader completion agenda. We know and acknowledge that you are consumed with requests for webinars and virtual meetings, and we're grateful that you are willing to spend this afternoon with us.

We've always viewed CCA as a megaphone to highlight some of these issues that we're seeing and encountering, especially in the onset of COVID-19. For those of you that may not be as familiar with CCA, we are an Alliance, an Alliance of States that really includes practitioners, faculty members, system leaders, governors, legislators, all committed to our larger effort around college completion and student success.

And this has been a very concerning time for us because the past 10 years of our existence has been about how do we add a complimentary role to access to higher education and ensure that students are completing. And of course, that can't be done without partnerships with individuals and organizations like the accreditation agencies and organizations that you'll get a chance to hear from today.

So, we're excited to dig about what this means, what this moment means for us, especially as we've spent so much work and so much time trending upward around college completion. And in this COVID moment in this moment of racial, you know, equity and thinking about social justice around in our institutions and what role they play. We want to make sure that this college completion agenda doesn't fall off a cliff.

So, today we are very pleased to be joined by three amazing panelists, each of whom represent our larger kind of set of accreditation organizations. You know, we have Karen Solomon who is vice president of accreditation relations and director of standard pathways for the Higher Learning Commission.

We have Matt Powell. Who is the senior vice president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. And we also have Larry Earvin, who is the chief of staff at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. And we know that we could spend a lot of time going through all of their amazing backgrounds.

But I know that you are here to really get into a conversation around the big issues and the overarching issues that the accreditation agencies have been wrestling with thinking about and what opportunities these exists. So, with that we're going to go ahead and allow each of our panelists to do a little, a bit of framing around how they've been viewing this moment.

Specifically, around the impact of what we consider to be dual pandemics of COVID-19 and our goals for more equitable outcomes within that larger context of college completion. So, I'm going to turn the floor over to Karen and then we'll hear from Matt and then we'll hear from Mary and then we'll go ahead and open up to a larger dialogue.

So, welcome my friends the floor is yours.

Karen Solomon: [00:06:57] Thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation to join this group today, I think it's going to be an interesting hour. The commission has been working on issues of student success for many, many years, but we've had grants from the Lumina foundation for the past four years. Last year, we published a series of papers that really started to push on the issue of student success.

Moving from the traditional view into a more flexible framework, thinking about students in a very different way, and how they engage with colleges and universities as they move through their educational journey.

And with that, if we had three major areas of learner dynamics. One being learner intent – what does is the learner intending to do when they join an institution or another educational provider or things like that? It may be that they're there to complete a degree. It may be that they're there to gain, employment in a different position or advance or things like that. And we call that, those students, those that are there for those employment opportunities still successes, but if they leave before they've completed their degree or their certificate, in many ways they're deemed not a success. Some students

may join your institutions for just a few semesters because they want to gain some credit before going on to another institution and transferring in a different way. But if they've achieved what they've wanted to that's success. We need to figure out how to capture learner intent. And that's a focus of conversation going on in our office and also with our institutions and other national leaders in higher education. How do we start to capture that and understand what learner intent is?

Also, looking at learner outcomes. We're thinking about how those outcomes are established for learners and what their outcomes may be. Instead of just forcing outcomes onto them, having students and learners beyond just these students enrolled in the colleges and universities, but learners out in broader society gathering knowledge and how it, how do they weave that together?

And lastly, thinking about a learner profile, not just a transcript, but how you take that knowledge and build it into it a different type of profile. Some national organizations are working on something of a student record of sort that a student is, it's portable with the student instead of being housed at one institution or another.

We're right now in the midst of billing, our next strategic plan, and thinking about outcomes and student success and things like that. But as we started to work through the issues and student success, and we started thinking about our plan, we also started focusing on equity more than we ever had in the past.

And we've done several things in the past year. We just created a survey, completed a survey on student access and success, and what institutions are doing about it, we're in the midst of analyzing that at this point in time. We've also opened up discussions about what disaggregated student populations should look like as institutions are evaluating their efforts in student completion. And also evaluating and building right now a student right-to-know guide. So, that there is one point of information for students to understand what their rights are at institutions and thinking about different populations, traditional age students, veterans working adults, and things like that. As we start to think about how to, to engage with our institutions and have more of a focus as an agency on students and their needs, that's typically been housed over with the institutions themselves.

We have had an impact, the coronavirus has had an impact on our office. We've adapted some temporary policies so that we could provide more flexibility. We gave distance education waivers and approvals to institutions that are just moving into distance education and asking them to update us on what they're doing and what their efforts are and how they're providing quality education.

We're also making changes regarding the educational offerings that institutions may be doing. We're tracking that, we tracked all of our institutions in the spring, and we're doing that again for the fall term in terms of how they're operating, changing terms or semesters or things like that. And we also changed the way we evaluate the criteria for accreditation with this and move to virtual visits, virtual evaluations, and then verification visits starting this spring and moving into the fall.

So, what we're doing at this point is really trying to maximize our institutions, giving them flexibility to do what they need and creating that awareness that we're here to support them and help them, and constantly going out and surveying the institutions, trying to help assist them in any way possible.

We're working right now at rolling out a strong series of webinars for our institutions on accreditation issues, and also a series of webinars on distance education best practices and ways that our institutions faculty can improve their work in that virtual environment.

I'll stop right here and pass it off to Mac.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:12:10] Thank you Dr. Solomon. Mac the floor is yours.

Mac Powell: [00:12:14] Great. So, Northwest commission is comprised of about 163 institutions in the seven states of the northwest and Alaska. And maybe backing up a little bit, we recognize that there is a changing set of demographics that's affecting our region.

And we noted as we began a process of standard review and revision that we had a lot of states that had completion issues. We're going to talk a little bit later about the bill and Melinda Gates foundation work, but if you go to the next slide, what we realized is we thought about how we were going to address student success that we had to put equity at the forefront of it.

We define student success in terms of learning and in terms of achievement. And what we did was we aligned our metrics with those of the bill and Melinda Gates foundation, the postsecondary data partnership, and some other partners that we've had that are national partners and trying to identify exactly how we can compare apples to apples, that we can begin to really address the gaps that we have at our institutions.

And as we develop these new standards, what we realized was that institutions in many cases we're collecting data. They have disaggregated data, but they weren't publishing it. So, when our new standards which we rolled out in January, we've asked all of our institutions to measure their data and from a desegregated perspective, but then also to identify any gaps in equity and to develop plans, to address those gaps in equity.

We really understand that we can't do this alone. You know, we're an office of 11 people. This is going to take all of our institutions participating, a lot of partners around the country, and a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation is going to support that work.

We have academies, we have fellowships, and really what we've learned is that institutions now more than ever need our support. They need partnerships, they need mentorships. They need to be partnered with one another so that they can really use the goodwill that I think that we're seeing at our institutions. Our institutions realize that this is, to Dhanfu's credit, a dual crisis that needs to be addressed.

So, we're encouraged by our role as an agency, but I would say we're more encouraged by the collegial engagement that we have at our institutions. And we want to work with Complete College America, regional colleagues, and all the national thought leaders that are helping us support our institutions.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:14:40] Thank you Dr. Powell, appreciate you, and we're going to turn the floor over now to Dr. Earvin from SACSCOC.

Larry Earvin: [00:14:49] Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to join this conversation. As many of you know, SACS COC represents about 800 institutions in the Southern region – a variety of types of institutions that provide a number of opportunities for students historically within this region, but also reaching out to students who are outside of the region.

I would say that just looking at the current situation that we're in the health crisis, as well as the equity issues that are coming to fore in our cities around the country, have really brought to the frontpage the issues that we confront with making sure that students have a good chance of being successful in their higher education pursuits.

This is true where we've had conversations for a number of years about student completion, and how do we make it possible for people who are at various stages of pursuit, pursuit in their higher education, progress to be able to use those past experiences and go forward. Much to the challenge has been not so much with the accrediting agency because we in fact adjusted our principles more than 12 years ago to allow greater flexibility for our institutions to be able to accommodate students who were trying to transfer credits. Much of that however has been within the purview of the institutions themselves because in the end, their faculties have a great deal of oversight over which credits will be transferred.

I think we're doing it, as my colleagues have already indicated, much of the same things we we've had conversations, we have a Lumina grant that has allowed us to address this issue and bring together different sectors in higher education to address how we might be more successful in ensuring student success and completion of students' credentials.

Within the context of those discussions, we have talked about the need to disaggregate data as has been mentioned before, so that we can look more closely at students coming from different sectors and different backgrounds to determine how we might be of assistance so that they might have access and be successful in their post-secondary pursuits.

We changed our principles most recently, principles of creditation in 2018 to provide even more flexibility for institutions to be able to accommodate students who, for whatever reasons, might've changed institutions and were attempting to transfer credits from one or more institution to another institution to gain a credential or to finish a degree.

We've had varying amounts of success with that, most recently, I guess, as a result of the pandemic we've been in conversation with our institutions about their flexibility in terms of accepting credits from other institutions that will allow students a chance to be more successful.

I think too, just given where we are, not only with the pandemic and with what's going on with the equity issues there is just a general sense that we are going to have to break down some of the barriers

and walls that exist between and among institutions and institutional factors in order to accomplish this goal.

And I think that played out recently in the department of education's decision to classify us all as institutional accreditors rather than regional accreditors. And it'll be interesting to see how that plays out over the next years as we work together collaboratively to provide more opportunities for students.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:19:36] Thank you very much, Dr. Earvin. I want to give each of you an opportunity to just to kind of frame the conversation. You know, I want to make sure that we use as much of our time as possible just to jump in and get as many questions answered. And I think it's important to kind of share how this discussion... we know what institutions are dealing with right now, you know, they were working through the COVID environment, quickly moving to online modalities, thinking about what enrollment will look like for the fall. Then of course, on your end, I think many of you have just shared that there are these conversations around. What does this mean for my site visits? And, you know. What does this mean if I was in the middle of, you know, our QEP plans and all of these other kinds of nuanced things that have taken place at an institutional level, but someone on a previous... said "you know what, I don't know what this means for our success moving forward. Because this conversation is not a short term one.

This is about the future of higher education. And so, I'd really like to start off this conversation by asking a question, and just in the spirit of candor, we've had different connections with all of you on the line. You know, Mack were involved in projects together. You know, Karen HLC is one of my, I used to be at an HLC institution and have served as a peer reviewer, and Dr. Earvin and I have a long history having worked at HBCUs and worked at engines at fall in the SACS region. And my question is about the future. How do you view it, you know, accreditors playing a role the transformation that we know needs to happen in light of these doors.

So, you know, not just the short term, you know, how do we help institutions move this moment? But is your organization, is your agency thinking about, you know, kind of some might need to be revisited for us to really ensure that our institutions are sustainable, not just for next year, but for the next decade.

And so, I welcome anyone to kind of jump in on that.

Larry Earvin: [00:22:06] That was one of the things I kind of touched on when I mentioned the fact that we are reaching out to our member institutions to ask them to be more flexible. You know, some hesitancy amongst some institutions about signing on with the interstate passport, for example. While we fell short of asking them to do that, clearly our conversations are moving in that direction. And we've had varying responses, as you might imagine, but I think there is a clear recognition that going forward ... we've seen in the past.

And again, that is not for the short term and so the investments will have to be made to make sure that not only do you have the resources, the physical resources in place, but that you've also... in terms of professional development to accommodate the new normal...

Karen Solomon: [00:23:10] At HLC, we had a national think tank convened for three years to help us really understand the changing landscape that's out there. And some of the folks that we brought onto that think tank from institutions, others were thought leaders, and other sectors of higher education. And they really pushed the umbrella quite a bit.

One of the things that they really wanted us to think about was meant to have an innovation lab where we would have a group of institutions in their testing and researching together ... things like that. And we have funding for that from the Lumina foundation and we were ready to kick that off in March when we had to cancel the events and go to remote work.

But we're really rethinking that now, and actually, thinking small select group thinking about innovation. We're going to flip that whole concept and ask our institutions to inform us what they've been doing in terms of innovation, what's working well, what would they need some additional support on and things like that.

We recognize that and even when I go back to that concept... these learners are going to move through our institutions gathering different pieces in different ways, which goes to Dr. Earvin's, comments about transferability. We need to think about that in different ways. We had a policy about, on our books regarding consortia relationships between accredited institutions.

It wasn't required so we've removed that policy so that our institutions can engage with one another more easily than having to go through an approval process or a notification process with us, recognizing that partnering across institutions is going to be something that we really need to encourage.

Mac Powell: [00:24:57] Yeah, I think those are all great examples and I think, for us, it goes back to we have a new president for about two years. One of the things we talk a lot around the office is purpose versus process. You know, a lot of accreditors for a lot of years are really focused upon what a report looks like, and when it gets submitted and, you know, the technicality of the visits and those are all important things they're required by the Dept.

I think we as a staff get a lot more value out of the multi qualitative relationship we have with the institution. I mean, that's an old Peter you'll quote you can be compliance focused or you can be quality focused. And you know, we kind of go back and forth I think as agencies, but I'd say that the North really made a concerted effort to be a lot more focused on the purpose and the quality of the engagement we have with our institutions. That's why we went from, I think 130, some standard elements to 50. We basically just try to hone down everything we do, every conversation we have is about student success and, you know, getting back to kind of one of the kernels of the question you asked Dhanfu was about "how do we support long-term transformation?" I think has to be in every conversation. I think this can't

be a conversation that we have for this one week, it really needs to be embedded. So, it's embedded in our standards, it's embedded in our processes.

We recognize that our institutions are not going to look like they look like even a year ago.... Our institutions, how we work with our institutions is critical. I think it also requires having a little bit different perspective. I think so rather than us being the experts all day, all the time, we've brought in people from Complete College America, AGB, she engines, really trying to find the best minds out there that are on the cutting edge of how we can support our institutions and making that in some ways redefining what the baseline is to supporting our institutions.

What getting to that third point you mentioned in your introduction Dhanfu. What are the sacred cows in higher ed? I think being able to convene a conversation ...

I think it's very critical, we've seen a lot of change in the state of Alaska, the governor decided to cut the budget \$120 million and that was an amazing structural challenge for us. So, as an accreditor being able to go into the situation and have a conversation to convene all this work through them with the idea that as accreditors, we're not going to be the barrier to transformation. We're going to be the supportive element around which, and through which this transformation.

Larry Earvin: [00:27:38] I think you're exactly right. We will be a part of the process will not be driving the process, and I've been in higher education for about well more than 45 years. And I can tell you that is a matter of respect ... has driven how we interact and how we dealt with students who come to us. It has been a fairly dramatic change, but it hasn't been fast enough. And I think what you're going to see is ... the change, as we actually take a more introspective look at higher education. What is our purpose? I mean, our purpose is not to ... success, but to provide pathways for them to ... hang the experiences and successes that they are looking for, why they come to us in the first place.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:28:40] One of the things you mentioned, Dr. Earvin earlier in your comments was about the state passport.

So, the idea broadly just seems like a no brainer, and there have been a lot of organizations and I know wacky is working on the interstate passport. But, now we are seeing so many students that can't come back to school and they're making these very hard financially about can I go to my out-of-state institution, can I go back, can I start there or should I now look at a community college. So that idea around transfer of credit I think has risen dramatically. Are you thinking that this is something that will need to be accelerated around this idea of comprehensive transfer systems?

I think you alluded to that Dr. Earvin, but I want to make sure I'm clear what that looks like in the short term, especially considering COVID

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Larry Earvin: [00:29:42] I think, it's going to be accelerated part of, when we go back and look at our principles as we just went through things that have been long standing principles that have driven our work over the years.

And there are perhaps one or two things, that we discovered that needs some reconsideration by our board as to whether or not they have students being able to transfer their credits easily and gain the credentials that they're seeking. So that's something that's on our agenda and that's we have our eye on; what used to be a summer board meeting, but it'll be sometime in September, I think this year

Karen Solomon: [00:30:28] at HLC, we just had a conversation this week with a group of 10 institutions that are working on guided pathways.

And trying to create that flexibility that students could move easily across those 10 institutions, they're revising their for their majors and things like that. This is a group of community colleges ... received information about this. Our first reaction was, "Oh, this is different." We step back and, and push ourselves to sit down with these institutions and talk with them about what they were doing so that we better understood it and realized.

Eventually walking home from that first reactions, to realize this is not a significant change, it's just a modification and it streamlines for students, their ability to move around institutions and to move forward into an upper level, more seamlessly than they had before. But it takes that practice to ask the questions and respond to something that's unusual for us.

Larry Earvin: [00:31:34] One of the things I think Karen, that I'm seeing among particularly small private institutions is that they are coming together themselves, forming little clusters so that they can, in fact, not just the community colleges, but particularly the privates, small privates ... to fund their operations and, allow a greater flexibility...

Karen Solomon: [00:32:00] And our region, well actually are our office. We actually encourage institutions right now that if they don't have strong practices and distance education. To find other institutions and to partner with them so that there can be a more seamless way of students still moving forward in their educational journey.

But sharing across institutions in different ways and, and hoping that our institutions will take advantage of that opportunity to really help the students

Mac Powell: [00:32:28] I'd say in the Northwest, we've actually seen significant statewide effort, around essentially getting high school graduate, their sophomore or junior year, essentially when they transferred to the senior, occasional institution.

And that's produced some governance challenges. It's produced some institutional challenges in terms of quality. But I think that getting back to one of the equity challenge, the question of equity, I think it's lost a lot of times in these grants for conversation. I think it's even more pronounced at our institutions with really the reliance on technology right now. We have 12 tribal institutions and each one of them are telling many of their students are struggling with the implementation of technology. Our Hispanic serving institutions that are in more rural areas as well. And technology is a challenge. So, this in this age where we're trying to increase, obviously we want, I want transferability of credit and then we also have to acknowledge the mode of delivery and how that's, how that's affecting us right now and our institutions.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:33:44] Absolutely, and one of the things when you talk about some of our larger issues around equitable outcomes, you know, one of the

I'm looking here at our chat and Karen someone responded to your point about who's expected to innovate. And so, I think now there's a conversation, not just on kind of at a student level, but at an institution level around what does it mean to be more equity minded?

So, I'm interested in the exacerbation of the already existing problems that we knew existed, and the problems that we knew were already in front of us and that our institutions are facing. But what does this mean now? You know, to think about some of the most vulnerable minoritized students, you know, does this change our approach any, or does it only been talked about in our larger strategic plans?

[00:34:41]

Karen Solomon: [00:34:42] I think, nationally, we're at a point right now where we're having a sustained conversation, which we have had. I think in our agency, our strategic plan actually has one tenant about equity. As an [00:35:00] accrediting agency for us. And the plans being developed or the goals being developed in there refer both to students being treated equitably, but also institutions being treated equitably.

And we look at some of our vulnerable institutions and how they are sometimes under constant review of what our mission is. But it rubs against standards of an accrediting agency. And we need to think about how we work more closely with those institutions going [00:35:31] forward.

Mac Powell: [00:35:34] Uh, so I'm one challenge I'm saying is we have states that are actually prohibiting work that would support the achievement of one particular curriculum or another. Essentially, if it's not equitable in the sense of equally accessible, then the state has to fund, the efforts of the institution. I think this hearkens back to the beginning of the question, Danny, if we would just—[00:36:00] I don't think all institutions are at a place where they realize that a rising tide will raise all

boats. Certainly, in many of our states and many of our institutions, while completion is improving, completion for African American students, for other students is declining.

So, I just think that we're not there yet. You know, we're becoming there. I think these conversations sort of make sure it is sustained. I think we all have to have—I don't think there's a lot of data scale businesses that they look at the data and they don't necessarily believe it...how great the equity disparities are. What's going to be required to get us to—I don't want to say that we're in the middle of the work yet. I think we're only at the beginning. I think we're only framing the conversation. I think we're only beginning to explore what it's going to take.

There are examples throughout their CCA and others have deployed this in many institutions, but, [00:37:00] it's a, it's a universally accepted or understood conversation yet.

Larry Earvin: [00:37:03] You know, we're really shifting periods here. On the front end, when we started equity, it was about access to higher education and it ended there. And the conversation has more success, and when you start desegregating data, you find that yes, there may have been improvement in the only access road. But not as it comes to student completion and graduation rates and all the other measures that we look at. This is a more difficult conversation for many in higher education. Particularly, when they had taken a breath, so well we've taken it. But access without a success of the end does little.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:37:57] Duly noted. One of [00:38:00] the questions that was in the, in the chat was from one of our members in Louisiana. And he was talking about institutional flexibility in this moment from accreditation agencies. And so, I think that each of you have touched on this a little bit, but, what kind of requests are you getting from your institutions? Especially some of our most vulnerable institutions related to, you know, how they can modify, maybe with additional time, maybe even restructure in this current moment that we're in for the new normal, for their institution.

I'm interested in what you were hearing from the field and from your, institutions that represent your various agencies.

Larry Earvin: [00:38:46] Well on our end, I guess I'll go first. It's primarily for institutions to increase their use of technology in offering courses. Many of our particularly small [00:39:00] institutions have not done very much in that area.

And there's a process to go through. And they're giving some flexibility in terms of, uh, being able to move in that direction immediately and to be able to identify what it is that they are doing. They've got a little more time to be able to do that. We recognize that, uh, that many of these institutions will not be able to offer face to face courses.

And without that flexibility, to be able to... bring that to a technological platform, they're going to be in deep trouble. So, we've had a lot of conversations with—I'll dare say, at least, about the kinds of things they want to do, and to make sure that they are keeping us informed about what they're doing. Because this is the front end of it. And [00:40:00] we've been able to defend what's being done on the backend. So, we need to know what's going on and to work closely to make sure the quality is not compromised.

And. And that they are in fact being true to their mission, which is really what it's all about.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:40:21] Kara, Mac, either of you or jump in on this. I'm sure there are some consistencies around the requests from institutions, but it might be different even on a regional level. So, I'm interested in what you're saying.

Mac Powell: [00:40:37] We're saying very similar things to what Larry is saying at Sachs. And I think, you know, the key, again to Larry's point, is we want to respect the mission of the institution to fulfill our own implementation of our standards to allow them to best serve their students. I'd say the only, maybe the thing I've been seeing more and more lately is the role of advising. With credits, [00:41:00] there's holes in advising. Really, it has to do with getting back to collective bargaining agreements.

We're seeing a lot of our eight institutions rethink their advising model because in this age of COVID being more online, the traditional advising models haven't been working. And that, in many cases, as part of a collective bargaining agreement... We're obviously engaging with all the parties in that, to try to understand then how it can be dynamic and addressing some of the strategic goals it has around a student work.

Karen Solomon: [00:41:28] What's been interesting is that from the portfolio of institutions that I work with, some of the most vulnerable fragile institutions are the ones that have been the most quiet over the last few months. I think they're sort of hoping, waiting that they can get back to that normalcy of how they deliver education.

So, I've been reaching out to talk about some of what they're working on and things like that. In the spring, we asked for all of our institutes to submit a [00:42:00] notification of what they had done in terms of the semester or the term. Had they split it? Had they gone to remote and this, that, and the other.

We just gathered that information, so we knew what was going on with our institutions. And at that time, we also asked how were they maintaining business continuity? We're asking institutions now to notify us about what they're doing for the Fall term. Those institutions about 17, 18% of our institutions did not have approval for distance education programs. And we've granted a waiver for this Fall term, or if they submit some additional filing with us on how they will follow and track the principles of distance, education, of best practice of distance education. So, those have started to come in and what's been interesting—I've been really pleased to see how some of these institutions have instituted faculty development over the summer, and the faculty are actually participating, even though they're not on contract, how [00:43:00] they've been working to get hotspots up, whether it's on their reservation or out in rural areas or things like that, providing students with computers, a lot of the federal funds were very helpful to these institutions. Otherwise they wouldn't have been able to identify ways to provide more support for the students.

But the majority of those institutions really want to be back on campus this year. Now, they're going to be challenged with distance education, and that's why we're encouraging them to join in some

consortium partnerships with other institutions that could provide some of those courses for those students.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:43:38] If I can build off that. So, how do we, how do we address that idea that institutions say we want to be back in person. And some institutions, that's their brand. You know, they sell the idea that know we're a small, unique, environment and that's what student success is about for [00:44:00] us. And so, I know that HLC, you talked about your work with Lumina and this larger kind of student success agenda and these accreditation standards, and one of the concerns was about—across all of the other agencies as well as—is metrics of quality. No. But how do you assure that there are metrics of quality in this environment where everything is variable? And so, you know, I'm very interested in how you are seeing that take place and how you, as an accreditation organization, are thinking about that?

Karen Solomon: [00:44:33] Well, that's a great point. And what we're doing is looking at some ways that we can support our institutions during this time. And so, we're working to roll out a series of webinars about quality and education, partnering with another organization, that provides a lot of distance education of developments and training. And one of the strategies is making the board of education available for faculty at [00:45:00] institutions to an understanding about a multi-modality curriculum. What is a flipped classroom look like? That our institutions during this time, when we know their budgets are really stretched and can't necessarily go out and train all of their folks and things like that.

We want to provide some training opportunities for folks at these institutions to really work on developing a few folks that can be the trainers, and help get that message across the institution in time, reiterating what our quality expectations are for, for institutions.

Larry Earvin: [00:45:34] Okay. That's one of the things that... we don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are folks out there who would, and the main thing that we have to do is ensure that that folks who have not been trained to have an opportunity for training and regular development, because it's not our one time deal that this will have to be carried over for a while until the capacity [00:46:00] is there in all the sectors and all the types of schools and those that are most fragile. And I'm encouraged by some of what I say, some of the higher education agencies pulling together the consortiums so that some of the vulnerable institutions that you mentioned might have access to some of the resources that have been in place for a while at a number of other institutions.

Karen Solomon: [00:46:24] Right.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:46:28] Mac, one of the things that you mentioned in your introductory comments was related to doing with the Gates foundation, but I think all of us are working with variety of partners, whether it be philanthropies, other organizations... We talked earlier about this idea of transfer. And there's also, I think, a layered conversation within that, which is around the collection of data to provide some levels of apples to apples. So, I know that there are a number of [00:47:00] initiatives, but one of the big ones is kind of the postsecondary data partnership with National Student Clearinghouse, to ensure that the States are kind of looking at common definitions around to these data points.

Can you talk to us a little bit about how it's, in WCCU, it's kind of engaging in that type of work? Because I know you're also starting to dig a little deeper in a more, kind of related to institutional transformation. And so, I think that's unique. That'd be interested in how you see that individual role to that national role.

Mac Powell: [00:47:38] It kind of started with a conversation that we had with the Senate health committee a couple of years ago, when they said, "How do your institutions compare to other institutions around the country?" And it's a question that, if you've been asked that by any of the Senate representatives, you realize it's very hard to do. The accreditor dashboard, which NACIQI produces, doesn't really do a good job of telling us what [00:48:00] institutions are like institutions across regions, across countries. And certainly, it doesn't get down to the level of the student. You know, how are each students—how is each student doing within the institution? If a student transfers? So, systems out there, obviously the voluntary framework for accountability, SAMS... There are repositories out there.

The PDP does a good job of trying to draw in a lot of institutions from across the country, from across sectors. Obviously, the common terminology I think helps tremendously. We've seen a lot of our state systems realize that there's a lot of internal squabbling that might go in within a state system in taking the data. People wonder why such and such is counted and why such and such isn't. I'm sure that you all don't have any of those problems out there where you are. But the PDP does a very nice job of essentially saying, this is the playing field, this is how we're going to define everything, you send in your data, you get comparators. [00:49:00] This is where the public confidence question was going. I mean, we believe that the Senate, that the public is going to continue to ask, what is the value of an education at a particular time to another? I don't think we have a lot of great ways of doing it, artificially speaking, it's so different, it's very hard to even think about doing that. So, in our standards, we ask our institutions to, in their own self-reflection to identify, who do you compare yourself to? And we let the institution, essentially, define that for themselves. But having this repository with the PDP or some other repositories is incredibly valuable, I think, to have that conversation with the public, with potential students, with potential parents. But I think it also helps drive internal conversations around quality and resource occasions because, [00:49:50] who are you aspiring to be as an institute? And what do those outcomes look like for your students? So, having a repository, having apples to apples comparison for us is, extremely important.

[00:50:00] **Dhanfu Elston:** [00:50:03] Thank you. Dr. Irvin, I wanted to talk—make sure that this conversation could go in so many different directions, but I want to make sure I bring us back to this bit that we're in. As institutions think about COVID and what happens post-COVID, but there's been a lot of discussion around higher education's role in this economic recovery. So, jobs, which is central, employees now need some form of credential that they might not have needed before or what areas in society might need it might need more work or workers or have higher demands. So, one of the questions of one of our attendees asked was related to things like prior learning assessment. And how do you ensure that credentials and things that people are learning, whether it be through military service or in the [00:51:00] environment, how do we use that as a lever or an opportunity for higher education? Should, if these individuals, beginning as that you need insurance for credit, all of those

questions are starting to kind of bubble up and I'm wondering if SACS COC has started to think about that any, and so I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Larry Earvin: [00:51:21] I think it kind of goes back to what purpose for which the student is coming to us. If it's to gather, we certainly have a capacity for doing that. Uh, and we've seen more and more... I remember working quite diligently with the institutional competency based education. And when we got through it was not the accreditor that that was standing in the way of the [00:52:00] initiative.

It was the federal requirements. So, you know, it's, it's not going to be just one group—the accreditors or the institution. We're all gonna have to go with the conversation about this and agree on a playing field so that we don't disappoint. And we don't mislead people as they are trying to get their credentials.

You're going to find, and might be imagined, more and more people in the medical profession. How do you do that? And I just had a conversation from an institution in Mississippi about nursing and how to get credit for the experiences that an individual student had had. And that's another thing that we'll have to talk through. But in the end, it's about quality and making sure that the quality of the experience is comparable to what it is expected, and being able to measure that and to demonstrate it. I think we have the [00:53:00] capacity to do it.

It is out of the comfort zone for a lot of folks. But, it's clear to me that the needs are going—are already outpacing the awake force. So, we're going to have to find ways to be able to assess the competency of individuals. And somehow find some credential for it. I'll fall short of saying academic credit because I've been a faculty member, too.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:53:36] Understood, as I was president. So, I think you're trying to get out on this Karen.

Karen Solomon: [00:53:45] That's why the concept of learner record is so important. You mentioned, you know, military training, things like that. How does it—how does a learner package all that and take that around with them? And that's all NASPA are working on right now, about how that [00:54:00] learner record can become portable. And it's a student that doesn't try to find their transcripts 20 years later from an institution that is closed. How do they carry that with them and have that portability? It's going to be more important than ever that you can accumulate learning from different sources, whether it's alternative education providers, whether it's military or other formal organizations, as far as that goes.

That's become clear. A stakeholder meeting with a wide range of folks from state agencies, business and industry, different folks about Fall. And what was interesting is the commentary from business and industry said, "We also need to change our hiring practice." Our default is you need a bachelor's degree, but the bachelor's degree doesn't necessarily help us.

We want to see what the elements of learning have been to know if they best fit with what we need in terms of employees. There's a shift, I think, taking place on both [00:55:00] sides.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:55:02] Absolutely. And I know that we're nearing our final five minutes. And so I, I really had this—I'm looking through our list of questions and I just want to make sure I get to this last one.

And so this is kind of a lightning round where I'll ask you just to kind of give you just, maybe a short snippet, less than a minute. But the final question is for all of you, and question is from one of our colleagues and they wanted to build a little bit on this conversation around equity and eradicating equity gaps.

So, the question is, what's the most challenging aspect for accreditors in transforming institutions or assisting institutions and transforming to data gaps. So, specifically, they're asking are there things that are harder to do that we should probably more special attention to?

[00:56:00] **Larry Earvin:** [00:56:00] At first response to that is that is, it's not one or two things—it's comprehensive. To out one thing and say, well, if we do this first, then everything else will fall in line. It doesn't work that way. In order to deal responsibly with these issues, I think it takes comprehensive—it's not just education, it's just not the workforce, it's not just healthcare, but it's all of those things that have to be addressed.

And that's what makes it really challenging. That's one of the things that makes it a challenge.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:56:41] Thank you.

Mac Powell: [00:56:44] Yeah, I could, I think that's absolutely right. It has to be a systemic issue. It has to be built into the strategic plan. It has to be built into all of our processes as accreditors. I think it has to know who you are and know who you want to be, as you continue [00:57:00] to assess, just like, we want our students to know what they know. We need to know our institutions. They need to know who they are or where they're going. I think that we need to recognize that they're going to be people and stakeholders that push back, whether they're legislators or individual politicians or people looking for a pulpit.

And I'd say that being consistent in our message and consistently focused that we are going to eradicate these barriers is essential for us, as agencies.

Karen Solomon: [00:57:30] One of the papers we published last year regarding the student success work was a piece about disaggregate student populations. And I don't think our institutions understand how to talk. We find in our student success academy that even utilizing data is challenging for the students. So, on the front end of the academy, helping them figure out what data they have and how to use it. Proposed was really a heuristic framework that looked at students characteristics and behaviors under three [00:58:00] elements: financial support for those students, academic programs and the support for that, and also then student engagement. And being able to identify your populations and look through these various lenses, past the one lens they keep proceeding towards, but looking at what the different barriers and how does that shape out different populations of your institution. And I think we need to keep focusing on that work and moving that forward.

So, really calling our institutions out to say, disaggregate your population, know where you really need to dive in and put onto those different populations.

Dhanfu Elston: [00:58:41] Thank you very much. All of our panelists, not just thank you for your participation, but thank you for all that you continue to do in this space and representing institutions and ensuring that they are focused on the ultimate goal, which are our students.

As we close out just a [00:59:00] couple of very quick updates and final comments. We look forward to continuing to partner, not only with you as accreditation bodies, but also all of the individuals online to figure out how we can advocate for the needs to support our campuses and our students.

Earlier I showed you a map of our regions, and so if you go to completecollege.org, you can see which strategy director is responsible for your particular region or manages your physical region. Reach out and we would be happy to jump on a call and talk about what we're learning and identify practices that can be used to scale efforts in institutional transformation.

Our recording of this session will be made available on the CCA Live portion of our website. We've had some amazing conversations previously, if you didn't get a chance to check them out, some great conversations with our president, Dr. Yolanda Watson Spiva and Charlie that from NACADA talking about [01:00:00] comprehensive academic advising. Another conversation with Deborah Santiago of Excelencia in Education. And a lot of conversations with organizations like AACRAO and how they're helping institutions to build out their calendars and planning for the Fall. So, we thank you very much for everything you do.

Thank you for joining us. You'll receive a short evaluation. Please let us know how you found value or how these workshops and sessions can be improved. And most importantly, continue to do the work that needs to be done for our students. Onward and Upward. Thank you very much from Complete College America.

Goodbye.