

ABOUT THE VSA®

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) is an initiative by public 4-year universities to provide understandable, comparable, and transparent information on the undergraduate student experience to students and families, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders through a common web report – the College Portrait®.

COLLEGE SEARCH TOOL FOR STUDENTS & FAMILIES

- Simple, straightforward presentation of comparable information directly from public universities at no charge to students and families.
- Data elements selected based on input from students and families seeking trustworthy data on campus safety, cost of attendance, academic programs, retention and graduation rates, admissions requirements, and campus community details.
- Rising college costs require students and families to make careful and informed decisions about which institution is the “best fit.” Much is gained from helping them make sound choices using reliable information that can be compared across institutions.

ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL FOR CAMPUSES

- Leveraged by institutions/systems to meet accountability requirements from governing boards, state legislatures, state coordinating offices, and other outside groups, reducing burden and duplication of effort. Examples include systems in California, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.
- Used collectively by institutions/systems to demonstrate commitment to transparency and the public good. Examples include California, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont.
- Evidence of institutional commitment to measurement of student outcomes and institutional improvement for regional accreditation. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation cites the College Portrait® as an “important companion to accreditation.”

SMALL INVESTMENT... BIG PAYOFF

- College Portrait® website averages 1,500 unique visitors a day and nearly 40,000 unique visitors each month. Projected visitors for 2010 are 500,000—making the College Portrait® an economical way to reach a large proportion of the 1 million high school graduates who enroll in 4-year institutions each year.
- The top VSA dues are \$2,500. On average, annual in-state tuition/fees at a public university are \$7,000. The VSA pays for itself with the enrollment of one new student.
- The VSA College Cost Calculator meets the requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and is designed for public 4-year universities—unlike the U.S. Department of Education template. Vendors charge annual fees in excess of \$10,000 for calculators.

COLLECTIVE ACTION BY PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

- A collective, voluntary response to the contention from government officials that a lack of useful data hinders policymakers, students and the public from making informed decisions.
- Consistent with recent federal legislation and leadership from the Obama Administration placing students/families in the center as savvy consumers in key areas—increased price transparency, reduced complexity, and improved information about institutional quality.
- Tangible demonstration of public university willingness to measure and publicly report learning outcomes and student engagement, while keeping the control of curriculum and measurement within the academy.
- Action by a majority of public institutions is more influential than action by any single institution. VSA institutions represent 63 percent of APLU/AASCU members, 69 percent of APLU members, and 58 percent of AASCU members. More broadly, VSA participants represent 52 percent of public 4-year institutions and enroll 66 percent of undergraduate students attending public institutions.

