

University of Idaho

From the Selected Works of Sydney Freeman Jr., PhD, CFD, COI

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**“Quality Assured? Comparative Perspectives on
Benchmarks and Standards in Higher Education”
(Accepted)**

Sydney Freeman, Jr., *Tuskegee University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/sydney_freeman_jr/3/

ASHE Symposium Proposal: CAHEP Division

(1) Objectives of the session

The objective of the symposium is to highlight the various ways in which higher education systems and institutions-around the world-deliver programs and monitor quality through various internal and external mechanisms. It also seeks to promote professional dialogue among those responsible for designing, delivering, assessing, and assuring quality in Higher Education Administration professional preparation programs in a multiplicity of settings.

(2) Significance of the theme or topic

Today's focus on accountability, combined with higher education often being viewed more like a business than a public good, places increased pressure on all higher (tertiary) academic programs to be concerned with the determinants of their future existence. Some of these determinants will be based on traditional higher education's ability to assure its quality in the world of global education. A more specific concern is the potential spill over of the failure of other sectors which have, like many graduate programs in Higher Education Administration, tended to be self-regulating.

(3) Presenters and a discussion of their backgrounds related to the theme or topic

Dr. Dianne Wright is an associate professor of Higher Education Leadership at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL. Her research interests include higher education program planning, implementation and policy analysis. Her work is informed by over 17 years of work in the areas of higher education finance and policy as scholar-practitioner.

Dr. Michelle Nilson is an assistant professor and program coordinator in the Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia, Canada. Her research interests include comparative international policy analysis in higher education and research use in decision making. Her research is informed by her experience as a doctoral academic program coordinator and participation in several evaluation and accreditation processes across North America.

Mr. Sydney Freeman, Jr., M.Ed, assistant editor, Journal of School Leadership, an international peer-reviewed academic journal, is a National Holmes Scholar and doctoral student studying Higher Education Administration at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. His research interest includes higher education program design and administrative competency development.

Ms Jennifer Behnke is a second year doctoral student in Higher Education at Florida State University. Her dissertation research will examine interdisciplinary team-teaching of sustainability curriculum, and other research interests include institutional culture, competitiveness policy, and student development and engagement.

The discussant for the session will be **Dr. Heinz-Dieter Meyer**, associate professor of Education Administration and Policy Studies at the University at Albany, State University of New York and has also taught sociology and organizational behavior in Germany and France.

The moderator for the session will be **Dr. J. Douglas Toma**, associate professor at the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia and has an appointment on the School of Law faculty. He also serves as dean of Franklin Residential College and co-directs the Postdoctoral Teaching Fellows program for the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

(4) Research or perspective that each presenter will contribute

This symposium presents a thematically coupled series of studies that reflect different national, regional, and institutional approaches to higher education program delivery and quality monitoring. They explore the internal/external, formal/informal and explicit/implicit mechanisms in use.

Dr. Dianne Wright

In today's world of accountability, benchmarking has become a central strategy to informing strategy. Benchmarking is defined as "a detailed review and comparison of processes with those of other organizations (Holloway & Francis, 2002). Wright will use comparative -critical analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) for presenting the results of her research related to Higher Education Administration program quality assurance in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. She will describe how these higher education administration program leaders and faculty assess program quality and student learning, and their attitudes toward related formal and informal processes. She will also share recommendations these program leaders and faculty offer, many of which revolve around concerns related to intrusion, perceived assaults on academic freedom, emphasis away from scholarship and replacement with burdensome bureaucratic demands.

Mr. Sydney Freeman

The discussion of standards and guidelines of higher education programs amongst United States higher education leaders and faculty are not generally

appreciated (Wright & Miller, 2007). Although many professionals in the sub-field area of Student Affairs have adopted guidelines and principles espoused by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), those associated with training leaders and policy makers in Higher Education Administration have not generally developed and excepted such requirements; which begs the question, what guidelines and standards do individual higher education programs incorporate into their curriculum? Freeman will apply Dressel & Mayhew's "three higher education program models" as he presents the results of his research summarizing Higher Education Program standards and guidelines currently in use by Higher Education leaders and faculty in the United States.

Ms Jennifer Behnke

Beginning in 1998 with the World Declaration on Higher Education (WDHE) and continuing in 2000 at the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) International Symposium, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization began an international dialogue to promote the expansion and professionalism of Student Affairs work in all nations (UNESCO, 2002). All nations must invest in higher education to have a relevant role in the knowledge society that has already begun. Ms. Behnke will present the results of a meta-analysis that identifies underlying and inherent values among higher education administrators and faculty that impact the delivery of services, programs, and resources to students, as well as outlines many common structural systems and best practices for program delivery. Examples of programs and issues in numerous international settings will be examined for themes, and contemporary issues and challenges to the Student Affairs profession and implications for an expanding global network of colleagues will be discussed.

Dr. Michelle Nilson

Higher education's boundaries are ambiguous, even in the best of circumstances; debates about whether its status as an academic field or discipline have been evolving over the past half century. Concomitantly, attempts to legitimate programs using various internal and external mechanisms contribute to the discourse. Are these attempts solely performative in nature or do they have any bearing on program quality? Using higher education programs as the unit of organizational definition, Nilson uses organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Anheier, 1990) as a theoretical framework for understanding and identifying various types of programs and delivery within and across institutions. She will contribute by presenting results and analysis from her interviews with several higher education program coordinators across Canada.

(5) How the session will be structured

The symposium will begin with the discussion guiding question, “how are higher education systems and institutions-around the world delivering programs and monitoring quality?” Each of the presenters will offer a contextualized answer to the question, while raising new ones for the audience participants and moderators. The moderator and discussant both bring a wealth of practical experience in international higher education development and analysis of the movement towards standardization. The moderator and discussant will prompt discussion through their analysis and synthesis of the papers and their knowledge of the topic. Some potential questions for discussion are:

- How can regional differences be honoured while moving towards benchmarks for quality standards?
- What are the benefits and consequences for students, programs, and universities as a result of standardization?
- Are the degree quality assessments/guidelines that are currently in place adequate for encouraging growth, diversity, and innovation?
- Are there programs, institutions, or higher education organizations that are more predisposed towards adopting quality assurance standards/guidelines? Why? Why not?