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CONCEPTIONS OF GOVERNING BOARDS ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE STATE
OF OHIO: A CASE STUDY (199 pp.)

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This study was designed to address the conceptions of accountability of the 13 board of trustees that govern the comprehensive, public, state universities in Ohio. The Case Study approach served as the research strategy designed to focus on one system of higher education that allows for autonomy in decision making by the individual boards of trustees.

This was a multi-year study involving the use of mixed-method research which combined the use of survey research and archival record review. Data was collected from multiple sources in three phases. The first phase involved the use of a questionnaire mailed to key internal and external constituents of the 13 state universities. The second phase, which focused on archival record review, investigated materials from the institutions themselves and state documents such as the Ohio Revised Code. The third phase involved completing phone interviews with the chairs of the boards of trustees of the state universities.

The study was guided by an overall research question “what are the conceptions of governing board accountability?” Three additional research questions guided the research in both phases:

1. How does the Ohio Revised Code frame accountability?
2. What are perceptions of governing board accountability held by key stakeholders?
3. How does each institutional governing board perceive the boards' accountability?

The literature review, for the duration of the study, continued to show a lack of empirical investigation of the concept of accountability as it relates to the board itself. The review of the Ohio Revised Code did not provide a sufficient sense of how the governing boards of the state universities address the accountability issue. The completed questionnaires from the key constituents found that external constituents feel differently about board accountability than internal constituents. Focusing further on the direction of the differences, external constituents were more positive about boards than internal constituents. Finally, information from the phone interviews, which included structured and closed-ended questions, resulted in identifying four main themes that described the feelings of the boards regarding their own accountability. These themes focused on compliance, the administration, transparency, and role ambiguity. The issue of governing board accountability remains ripe for further investigation.