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ABSTRACT

The leadership role of the State must be to assure access for all of its citizens to a quality education. This is an all-encompassing role, and it includes many factors. An important factor is that States must support the low-tuition principle in colleges and universities. The best student aid program ever devised is low-tuition. Closely related to the matter of low-tuition are the State appropriations to higher education. If the State appropriations process is an orderly and fair process, colleges and universities can develop reasonable expectations of State funding. These expectations are necessary for planning, development, and for the consistent execution of college policy. A responsible financial attitude on the part of the State can eliminate breaches of personnel procedures, faculty programs, and deterioration of morale. (Author)

State Leadership in Postsecondary Education: A Balance of Powers

Allan W. Ostar

State colleges and universities were placed under the jurisdiction of independent boards of trustees, thus duplicating as far as possible the freedom of the private university. My concern is that we are witnessing an erosion in the authority and responsibility of boards of trustees.

The extent of the state's role in postsecondary education has been a point of debate since before the enactment of the Morrill Act in 1862. The new relationship between the Federal government and State governments developing out of revenue sharing intensifies this question.

The question involves the relationship between two very different entities: the elected state government and the enduring college or university. I start with a premise that some of you may not agree with. That is, public colleges and universities, although they receive support from state tax dollars, are not simply another agency of the state as is the highway department. First, there is a difference in funding. State colleges and universities receive approximately 40 per cent of their operating funds from state revenues. The remainder of the operating budget is made up of funds from student tuition and fees, grants from the Federal government, and voluntary contributions. Colleges and universities have sought funding beyond state revenues in order to enhance educational quality. In this respect they have demonstrated initiative which is not characteristic of, say, the highway department. Secondly, there is the most basic difference of function. Colleges and universities are not short-term, problem oriented. The building materials of colleges and universities are not

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asphalt and concrete; they are minds and ideas. Where tight state control over the specifications of building material will result in more efficient highways, state control over the specifications of expression in the colleges can only result in a restriction of knowledge. Logically, the state's relationship to colleges and universities cannot duplicate its relationship to the highway department.

In which direction, then, should a governing control take? The state governments, as political creations, must view matters from a *political* self-interest. Colleges, as academic creatures, have a propensity to act from *academic* self-interest. The measure of control which strikes a balance between the entities is the lay governing board. The composition of the lay board is intended to free it from political influence and professional persuasion. The only self-interest of the lay board is its trust of the university: to assure that the university continues to serve the public interests of state citizens as opposed to political interests and academic interests. The public stewardship of the colleges and universities best lends itself to freedom of knowledge. As Malcolm Moos, now President of the University of Minnesota, so aptly put it when he was staff director of the Eisenhower Commission, freedom enhances efficiency in higher education because it best enables colleges and universities to achieve their basic purposes as social institutions — gathering, disseminating, and creating knowledge. It was for this reason that state colleges and universities were placed under the jurisdiction of *independent* boards of trustees, thus duplicating as far as possible the freedom of the private university. My concern today is that we are witnessing an erosion in the authority and responsibility of these boards of trustees. More and more of the basic decisions affecting our public institutions and even our private institutions are being made as a result of administrative regulations by state and federal agencies and by the political bodies that control the purse strings.

This is a matter of deep concern to educators who believe that only by serving in the public interest can colleges fulfill their educational promise to society. In watching the lay boards yield their power to agencies of the state, I believe we are watching the colleges recede from their role as vital contributors to the progress and improvement of society.

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education notes in its recent report, *Governance of Higher Education*, that lay boards are more important than ever to higher education because besides holding the public trust they must serve as buffers between the campus and the state, arbitrators between conflicting campus elements, and agents of needed change. The report also states that the independence of campuses and their boards is justified by the professional nature of

many of the decisions that are made, by the desirability of the campus community as one of the checks and balances in our pluralistic society, and by the experience of history as to what works best both academically and politically.

The growing trend among the states to transfer authority from independent lay boards to state officials has implications which must be considered before states proceed further.

Foremost among my concern is that we risk the danger of politicizing the colleges. During the past eight or nine years, college administrators have been fighting to preserve the campuses as fertile fields of academic objectivity, as against the social battlefields of political thought. It has not been an easy effort to free the campuses from a political taint. But I think the campuses have reached a level of objectivity. Having undergone this period of political pressure, much to the dissatisfaction of the public, I find it ironic that the state governments are drawing colleges into the arena of politics once again. Knowledge must never be partisan.

Related to this is the matter of continuity. One of the criticisms leveled at voting student membership on boards of trustees is the student is a transient in the college community and his needs are immediate. He cannot be expected to vote with an eye for where the college will be in 10 or 15 years. By placing college control in the hands of the state government, which can change radically following an election, we run a similar risk of lack of continuity. The uncertainty created by changing political leadership can impede the careful planning necessary for efficient operation of our colleges.

Additionally, when the state has direct control, it has the responsibility; and what might have been a crisis isolated on one campus then becomes a crisis resting on the state government. During the student demonstrations of several years ago, there were many mini-crises resolved at the discretion of the president without violent confrontation. However, had the state been vested with the responsibility, its logical action to call in agents of the state could possibly have escalated the problem into national headlines — and a state government crisis. I think we can do without instances such as occurred on a campus in Ohio, where "bearded" demonstrators charged with helping to initiate a rock-throwing contest were actually undercover state troopers.

Second, we must consider the costs. The official charged by the governor with responsibility for colleges and universities needs administrative assistants who need aides, and they all need offices. This far surpasses the costs needed for a lay board, which serves for a nominal fee or for expenses and which does not require a large office space. In indirect costs, we add another layer

of bureaucracy to education. This retards the reaction time of colleges, slowing down their capacity to respond to change; and the flexibility of colleges to respond to change has been one of the requisites of their viability. Also in a bureaucracy, those removed from the decision-making power tend to assume attitudes of irresponsibility toward the results of their activities. This brings up the very serious subject of accountability.

I do not think that I am overestimating my fellow educators when I say that they have come to realize the full measure of accountability to the public, to the state, to the faculty, and to the students. I think the American Association of State Colleges and Universities is a good example of college administrators formally adopting a statement of institutional responsibilities. Administrators and their lay boards recognize fully the areas of accountability. Incidentally, I was pleased that Dr. Millard thought well enough of the statement to distribute it widely to the ECS constituency.

The financial accountability of colleges can be accomplished best through a post-audit by the state auditor. These audits give a very clear picture of the efficient use of resources. In contrast to this is the concept of pre-audit, as represented by the line-item budget appropriation. This is not accountability, this is control by the political state. Needed programs of a college's constituency, such as Indian bi-lingual programs or adult literacy campaigns, may be pre-empted in a pre-audit simply because they are of a low political priority. In this same vein, a source of irritation is the time needed to argue with clerks in state purchasing departments over the make and model of a piece of equipment, such as a microscope.

Financial accountability, because it is so integrally related to academic quality, should be the responsibility of the institution. Last year, the president of Mankato State College here in Minnesota ordered a departmental survey of all courses to determine their present value to the institution and to the students. The aim was to trim those programs whose benefits did not surpass the costs of the programs in order to free old monies for needed new programs. This type of resource switching can be accomplished very well at the campus level when it is done by professionals who know the programs.

Colleges are making great strides in meeting the needs of local constituencies. I think this is demonstrated by the many additions of community-based programs, of less than baccalaureate programs with career orientation, and the many new continuing education programs. Colleges can be accountable because of their familiarity with regional needs, and the self-knowledge of their own capabilities.

The governor's office holds a constituency far broader than that of

colleges. A cabinet official responsible for program development must contend with not just one college, but all the colleges in the state. His familiarity with regional needs and college resources are second-hand. The farther one moves from the source of the problem, and the more sources one has to contend with, the more diluted becomes one's ability to act effectively.

In personnel practices, through the guidance of regulations formulated by the Department of Labor, HEW and State Governments, colleges are developing sound personnel practices commensurate with the performance of academic inquiry. This condition exists because of the balance between the agencies which formulate general policy and the college, which executes the policy. But, if the agency which regulated policy were to formalize the criterion for hiring and promotion, it could result in a conformity of academic inquiry, which in the true sense is not academic inquiry at all.

Similarly, attempts to standardize classroom performance can have unfortunate consequences. The action by the New Jersey legislature to tie budget appropriations to the number of hours that faculty spend in the classroom has been challenged in court — which is the worst place I can think of to try to carry out a dialogue in a cooperative spirit. Similar proposals to set teaching hours run the danger of undercutting teaching quality rather than enhancing it because there is not enough empirical information to judge the factor contributing to teaching performance.

If the states are to continue promoting accountability, they must see to it that the authority for decision-making resides with the responsibility to implement the decisions. If we separate the source of decisions from the source of results, we have fragmented accountability.

In summary, I would like to say that the leadership role of the state must be to assure access for all of its citizens to a quality education. This is an all-encompassing role and it includes many factors. An important factor is that states must support the low-tuition principle in colleges and universities. The best student aid program ever devised is low tuition. Closely related to the matter of low-tuition are the state appropriations to higher education. If the state appropriations process is an orderly process and a fair process, colleges and universities can develop reasonable expectations of state funding. These expectations are necessary for planning, development, and for the consistent execution of college policy. A responsible financial attitude on the part of the state can eliminate breaches of personnel procedures, jerry-built programs, and deterioration of morale.

An example which involves both personnel procedures and responsible appropriations concerns state control of institutional personnel

contracts. Now, there may be reasons for states to assume the negotiation responsibility. But, what has happened in one state this year is that the state negotiated contracts which will result in personnel cost increases in excess of 20 per cent of the college's budget; and at the same time the governor's office recommended no accompanying appropriations from the state to cover the increases. That is a large problem for the institution to cope with.

States must coordinate broad program development within the state to minimize a duplication of effort, thereby freeing more resources for program development.

And lastly, states must influence, not control, quality education programs through such devices as incentive grant programs, the formulation of public opinion, the assessment of state manpower needs, the opening of communication channels, and the conduct of workshops and seminars which bring administrators and lay boards in contact with state officials who work in areas of broad concern to the state, such as health, environment, transportation, and welfare. The state must assert a role of positive influence, not negative control. The control must continue to reside in the lay board so that it can effectively carry out its traditional mission of insuring that our colleges and universities operate in the public interest.

If we destroy the viability of the lay board by transferring its responsibilities to organs of government, the public interest will be poorly served indeed!