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ABSTRACT

The way that state-level postsecondary education agencies currently apply, and could address, the concept of both system-level and institutional missions is discussed. The focus is on how to implement, reinforce, and evaluate established missions. Topics include the consultative process, tools for change, proactive strategic planning, and reasonable expectations for mission review. Telephone interviews were conducted with many state-level postsecondary agencies known to be active in mission-related studies. Broad-based involvement at substantive levels was found, and no agency undertook mission development or maintenance on its own. Four groups of participants were identified: institutional representatives, other campus-based individuals, government officials, and the general population. Although practices varied across states, involvement in mission development and maintenance activities tended to follow common patterns. Stages of involvement in mission review activities are outlined, and examples of involvement patterns are provided. Also considered are: tools for maintaining missions, incentives for implementing missions, and the role of the state agency in strategic planning and mission development. (SW)

MISSION MAINTENANCE:

TOOLS FOR CHANGE AND THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

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Task Force on Role and Mission

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Introduction

The Importance of a Concept of "Mission for a System"

The concept of "mission" is of fundamental importance for the functioning of a system of higher education. Indeed, the definition of a system implies the integration of component units. A common dictionary definition of system is:

> a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole.

In a social system, such as a state system of higher education, the mission is the blueprint that establishes how each component part is to function in order to form "a unified whole."

Unfortunately, the dictionary also lists a less positive definition for system. When "the system" is used synonymously with the "establishment," its definition is:

> an organized society or social situation regarded as stultifying.

That is, some regard present systems as absurdly illogical.

The challenge facing state-level higher education officials is to define and implement missions in such a way that the former rather than the latter definition of system applies.

Purpose of this Paper

This paper discusses how state-level postsecondary education agencies currently apply, and could address, the concept of both system-level and institutional missions. We assume that institutional missions in the states already are understood reasonably well. (If not, the reader is encouraged to refer to a companion paper developed by Don Carpenter which discusses various state-level approaches to institutional role and mission development.) This paper focuses on how to implement, reinforce and evaluate

established missions. Topics include the consultative process, tools for change, proactive strategic planning and reasonable expectations for mission review.

The Consultative Process

The Importance of Involvement

Participatory decision making has become well accepted only recently in the business management literature. However, higher education has a heritage of collegial decision making. Likewise, group processes are also quite common in the public sector. For an issue of such importance as mission maintenance in a system of higher education, widescale involvement is both valuable and expected.

Of course, the value of involvement does not derive from the fact that participation has been the traditional way of doing business in higher education. The real value lies in the fact that participation provides a sense of ownership and commitment to the process and the product. Through properly structured opportunities for involvement, all participants begin to develop an appreciation for the mission of the overall system as well as for the missions of the component units.

Current Patterns of Involvement

In preparing this paper, we conducted telephone interviews with many state-level postsecondary agencies known to be active in mission-related studies. One question asked for a description of the consultative process used in role and mission development and maintenance. In our survey, we did not identify any instance in which the agency undertook mission development or maintenance on its own. Instead, we found evidence of broad-based involvement at substantive levels.

Four broad groups of participants were identified: (1) institutional representatives, (2) other campus-based individuals, (3) government officials and (4) the general population. Institutional representation was found among:

- o Constituent institutions
- o Other public sector institutions
- o Independent sector institutions
- o Proprietary sector institutions

Other campus-based representatives were from:

- o Faculty groups
- o Student groups

Government representation included:

- o State legislators/staff
- o State department of education
- o Executive branch

Finally, the general public has been represented by:

- o State postsecondary board members
- o Business and industry representatives
- o Members of the public at large

Although there are various ways to analyze the differences in practices across the states for involving others, agency type provides an interesting basis for comparison. Generally, governing boards or coordinating boards in states where each institution has its own board tend to work more frequently with campus-based representatives. Coordinating board staff in those states with a multiple-tiered structure, on the other hand, tend to work primarily with system-level staffs and the general public.

Matching Patterns of Involvement with Types of Issues

Another way to analyze patterns of involvement is according to the types of issues under consideration. Generally speaking, consideration of more controversial issues involves more participants than does action on less divisive topics. There are several reasons that may explain this.

First, the most controversial issues are seldom susceptible to simple statistical analysis by agency staff. Instead, these issues often appeal to institutional aspirations or community pride. The state agency and its board often are unwilling to "take the heat" themselves in denying such requests. To share this burden, the state agency often resorts to blue-ribbon committees, public hearings or some similar device. This approach can be used either to build support for the agency's preliminary position or to provide additional information that may cause the agency to change its stance.

Some issues are so technical that the state agency is unable to address them appropriately without outside expert involvement. Examples of these situations include issues related to planning for new programs in technical or highly specialized professional fields or in expanding technical assistance in these areas. The technical experts may be recruited from outside the system, when the situation requires choosing between competing institutional requests, or they may be drawn from within the system when the issue concerns how to serve the state's people more effectively.

Common Types of Involvement in Mission Development

Even with the varying practices across states, involvement in mission development and maintenance activities tends to follow fairly common patterns. That is, when the process involves some combination of the state board, its staff, institutional boards and staffs, outside experts and the general public, each plays a relatively predictable role. Exhibit 1 illustrates the way in which these various groups are most often involved.

An important distinction exists between involvement and decision making. No matter how much institutional representatives, experts or the general public are involved, final decisions typically rest with the state board. The purpose for involving others is to inform important decisions rather than to transfer decision making authority to others.

Examples of Involvement Patterns

Our survey revealed several interesting examples of how the state agencies have involved others in their mission development activities. Determining when the involvement of others is most valuable is an important decision.

The Connecticut Department of Higher Education is a coordinating agency that oversees the efforts of the University of Connecticut, the Connecticut State University system, the State Technical Colleges and the Board for State Academic Awards. In mission development activities, department staff members worked primarily with the staffs of the four systems. Their general construct was that each system has a unique mission and that role and scope identities should serve to distinguish the campuses within the systems. Thus, the department staff had little contact with campus staffs in establishing system missions.

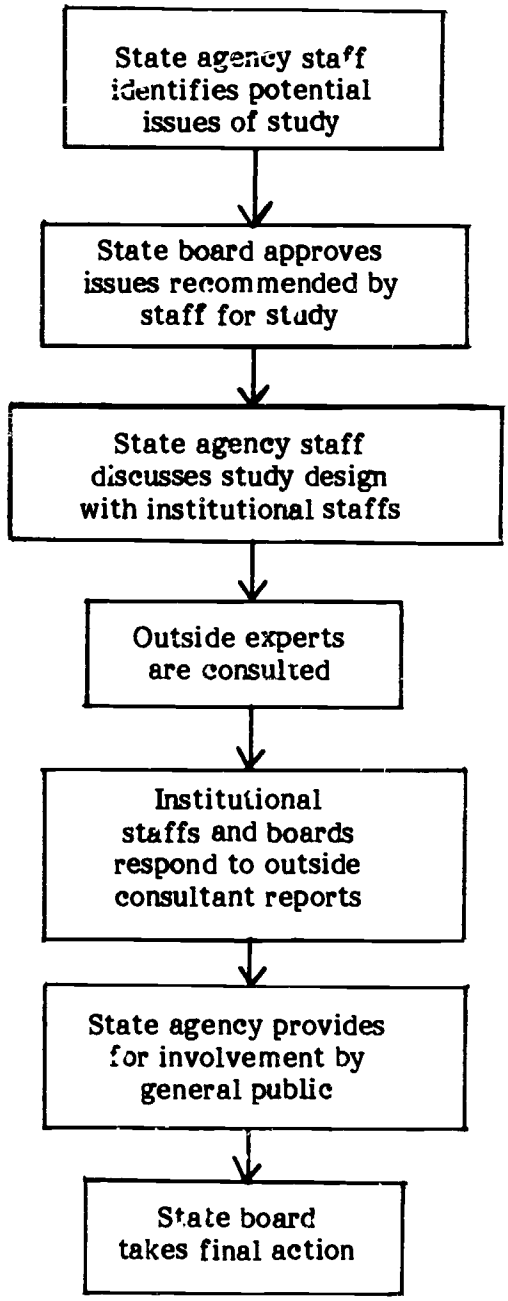
The department staff faced an interesting dilemma when they failed to provide for their own involvement at a crucial stage of mission development. As a result, they had to critique the format of mission statements after those statements had been officially approved by their respective system boards.

The Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board also works in an environment in which it oversees the activities of several systems that have their own staffs. In this case, the legislature instructed the board to carry out a mission development activity after an earlier board study identified the convergence of missions as a problem.

The board staff convened the chief executive officer from each system to determine the agenda for mission review. It then coordinated policy analysis on key issues with the cooperation of a task force of system-level staff. Broad, but substantive, policy statements were proposed for further consideration and adoption by the chief executive officers. Only after this extensive groundwork was laid and agreements were reached did the system boards consider mission-related documents developed by their respective staffs.

EXHIBIT 1

STAGES OF INVOLVEMENT
IN MISSION REVIEW ACTIVITIES



The Texas College and University Coordinating Board followed a similar approach, but with an added feature. The kick-off to its mission review process was a weekend retreat that included both system and institutional representatives. State-level staff from other states with recent experience in mission review were invited to attend as resource persons.

States with a single governing board for all institutions, of course, do not need to be concerned with the sequencing of official board approvals of mission statements. This structure, however, does not eliminate the need to clarify how various participants are to be involved.

In Kansas, the board of regents staff developed assumptions to guide the mission planning activities of the institutions. But when the mission statements came to the lay board for approval, those statements were rejected as too general and vague. The central agency staff was assigned to rewrite the statements with assistance from campus personnel.

In Arizona, on the other hand, the board of regents staff worked with institutional staffs on revising and sharpening mission statements before board approval was sought.

Tools for Change

Maintenance and Implementation of Missions

A major function of a state-level agency is to assist each institution under its jurisdiction to fulfill its established mission. Most agencies devote considerable effort to establishing and articulating institutional missions, but all too often their efforts stop there. Relatively little attention is paid to helping institutions implement their assigned missions. Somewhat greater efforts are devoted to mission maintenance activities.

The failure of some state-level agencies to be concerned with mission implementation and maintenance is not due to a lack of adequate tools to perform these

tasks. In fact, every other agency responsibility can be tied to helping carry out this important function.

Tools for Maintaining Mission

The most obvious tool available to state-level boards for maintaining institutional missions is academic program approval and review. Because academic programs are the major factors that help describe an institution's mission, any change in program authorization alters the institution's role and scope. Major programmatic changes, such as proposals to offer degrees at a higher level (e.g., to offer the doctorate for the first time) or to start an entirely new program, become changes in mission. For this reason, most program approval processes check whether the proposal is consistent with the currently established mission.

In the review of ongoing programs, an opportunity exists to ascertain whether current programs reinforce the institution's mission. For instance, a master's program in a physical science at an institution whose mission is to prepare students for careers in teacher education or local industry could be checked to determine whether the courses are applied or theoretical.

Many state-level coordinating agencies are responsible for reviewing budget requests from systems and/or institutions. These agencies often are not allowed to modify the institutional request, but instead are required to forward their recommendations to the executive and legislative budget offices.

Although the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, for instance, has a very limited budget review responsibility, it performs this task in a meaningful way. Its primary criterion in budget review is whether the proposed new monies will be used for purposes that are consistent with the mission mandated in its master plan.

The Arizona Board of Regents, as a governing board, must approve all significant reorganizations at its institutions. Believing that form follows function, the regents' staff evaluates each proposal to determine whether the planned action will serve to reinforce or to blur the institution's mission.

Some state-level governing boards also review campus recommendations for faculty promotion and tenure, or at least the board confirms institutional policies on these matters. Through establishing or enforcing different standards for institutions with different missions, the state board can help to maintain the established mission.

For instance, an institution that does not have any significant mission for research is a strong candidate for academic drift if its promotion and tenure policies place greater emphasis on research performance than on teaching and public service. In this case, the state board could work with the institution to align faculty evaluation practices with institutional mission.

A final area where most state-level boards exercise some mission maintenance authority is facilities planning and approval. Some types of buildings, such as general classroom facilities, have little likelihood of changing an institutional mission. On the other hand, some types of facilities are almost essential for carrying out an assigned mission, e.g., research laboratories at a graduate-research university.

Other buildings, however, can contribute to an unintentional change in mission. For instance, one could argue that a proposed dormitory might distract a college from fulfilling its mission to serve the needs of an urban area.

Tools That Provide Incentives for Implementing Mission

Most state-level agencies have at their command a number of tools that can be used to encourage institutions to implement their missions more fully. These tools include the development of budget formulas, the establishment of admissions and transfer policies and the development of plans for continuing education.

The budget process can provide tremendous incentives for an institution to behave in desired ways. For example, a budget formula that recognizes instructional cost differences by discipline or program area allows those institutions with high-cost programs to fund these programs more appropriately. A formula that provides public service funding based on the size of the public to be served, rather than as a function of the size of the teaching budget, encourages institutions to take this mission more seriously.

Many state-level agencies even have created special funding categories, such as categorical support for state-assigned programs of excellence, to assist their institutions fulfill their assigned mission.

Admissions and transfer policies provide another opportunity for a state-level board to encourage institutions to work toward achieving their missions. Many so-called graduate-research universities seem more concerned with having the largest freshman enrollment in the state than in fulfilling their assigned mission with distinction. To encourage freshman enrollment, these universities often have minimal entry standards and sometimes restrict the ability of incoming students to transfer by not accepting certain courses for credit.

In these situations, the state agency can encourage the institution to focus on its graduate-research mission by setting higher admissions requirements and becoming more active in the creation of articulation agreements. (This effort is more apt to be accepted when the budget formula rewards advanced instruction.)

A common state-level approach for coordinating public service and continuing education is to assign geographic service areas to each institution. For those institutions with a mission to serve the higher education needs of a region of the state, the reinforcing effects are obvious. Not so obvious, however, is the possibly negative effect on those institutions that have statewide missions. If the geography and the demographics of the state permit, such statewide institutions could have public service

missions only for those programs in which they hold exclusive teaching and research responsibility.

Use of Tools in the Absence of Articulated Missions

In those states where attention has not been given at the state level to articulating stated institutional missions, these same tools tend to influence the de facto missions of the institutions. In this situation, the application of these tools becomes the principal way in which the board communicates its expectations for an institution. Using as an example the typical budget formula that rewards graduate teaching at a much higher per-hour rate, the state board is communicating, in effect, that it wants an institution to offer more graduate work. Left unexamined, these tools may contribute to academic drift.

Proactive Strategic Planning

Role of State Agency in Strategic Planning

State-level higher education boards are taking an increasingly active role in strategic planning. Whereas this author concluded in an earlier (1981) publication that the concept was not well developed, this is no longer the case. Numerous states have recently or are currently conducting such planning activities. Ellen Chaffee, in a companion paper, offers an evolving concept of the meaning of state-level strategic planning.

At least one important product of strategic planning at the state level should be the evaluation of current institutional missions, especially with respect to how each institution is to contribute to the overall mission of the system. In the terms of a Kentucky Council on Higher Education official, their strategic planning effort "provided the context for state-level decision making."

Despite several notable successes with strategic planning at the institutional level, many institutions appear to be more concerned with short-term benefits than with what would be in their best interest in the long run. The Indiana Commissioner of Higher Education, therefore, suggests than an important role for state boards is to help institutions adopt policies which they know are in their best interest in the long run, even when no short-term benefit can be seen. Strategic planning can be an important vehicle for assisting state-level boards to fulfill this important role.

Planning to Define Issues

Strategic planning is especially useful for identifying policy issues that will need to be addressed. The various tools, especially environmental scanning and approaches for "matching" external opportunities and constraints with institutional strengths and weaknesses, can often identify future significant issues before they become crises.

Hopefully, use of these tools will permit the state board to seize the initiative rather than being forced to respond to legislative and/or executive mandates. By taking the lead on issues, state boards are better able to mold public opinion about higher education.

Examples of seizing the initiative can be found in Kansas and California. In Kansas, the board of regents commissioned a set of papers to serve as a prelude to its institutional role and scope delineation efforts. These papers focused on the Kansas demography, the outlook for the state's economy, the impact of changes in educational technology and the state's social and political environment.

In California, the staff of the Postsecondary Education Commission analyzed and projected demographic trends. They identified minority growth as an issue that is likely to influence the future and delivery of higher education in their state.

Issue-Driven Planning

An alternative approach is to let contemporary issues drive the planning process, and eventually to lead to policy development. This approach appeals to those state-level leaders who fear that policy-setting in a vacuum might be viewed as an irrelevant, ivory-tower activity by other state officials. In this approach, the state-level executive usually has some concept of an overall strategic direction for the state's system of higher education, but is content to tackle one issue at a time.

When designing its strategic-planning process, the Kentucky Council on Higher Education had the advantage of a laundry list of issues that had been developed by the earlier council-created Pritchard Committee. Working from this base, the council staff quietly developed a series of background papers to brief lay council members on each of the various issues.

Once the council identified those issues that it wished to address, the staff refined their background papers and listed an unconstrained set of options for council action. These analyses and options provided the agenda for a series of public hearings around the state. The spirited debates that followed permitted the council both to deal with several pressing issues and to develop state policy on more fundamental issues such as access and quality.

Realistic Expectations

Conflicting Expectations

One of the greatest deterrents to devoting state-level resources to mission development is the fear that expectations will not be met. The reason for this hesitancy perhaps was best expressed by Dick Chait several years ago when his "Point of View" article in the Chronicle of Higher Education challenged readers to match the names of three very different institutions with the mission statement of each. Indeed, the mission statements of most institutions do sound very much alike. For this reason, many state

higher education officials fear mission development will result in wasting scarce agency resources.

Their reticence is in sharp contrast to the urgings of those outside the higher education community who seem to have no limits to their enthusiasm for the potential benefits of carefully drafted mission statements. For instance, the National Governors Association recently called for the development of more specific role and mission statements. Many observers fear that state-level higher education officials and their governors may be on a collision course because their expectations for mission statements appear so divergent.

What is a reasonable expectation for how different one institution's mission statement can be from another's? The first fact to consider is that most institutions are more alike than they are different. As Brunetta Wolfman, president of Roxbury Community College and a student of higher education, noted in the AACJC Journal when she described her service on an American Council on Education commission:

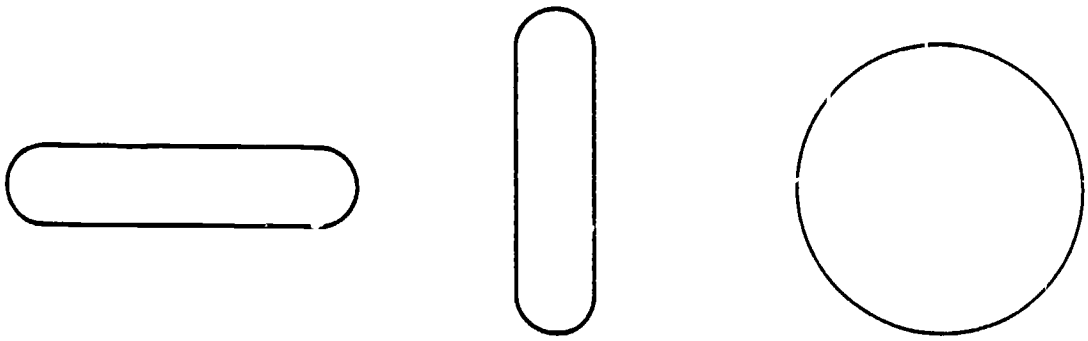
> While we may each represent different facets of American higher education, we share the same problems, only the magnitude differs. We found that the similarities outweighed the differences of region, institutional size, funding source. . . . This is a tribute to the overriding goals of higher education.

From this perspective, the fact that mission statements tend to look and sound like one another is not surprising.

Figure 1, taken from this author's earlier National Center for Higher Education Management Systems' handbook on mission review, attempts the same point visually. Geometric representations of three very different institutional role and mission identities are overlaid, with the result that the similarities are as striking as the areas of uniqueness. Although an understanding of an institution's unique responsibilities and characteristics is important for both the institution and its external publics, the recognition that institutions share many common concerns and responsibilities helps to place the uniqueness issue in perspective.

FIGURE 1

A. Different Mission, Role, and Scope Identities



COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Broad program coverage, limited degree levels

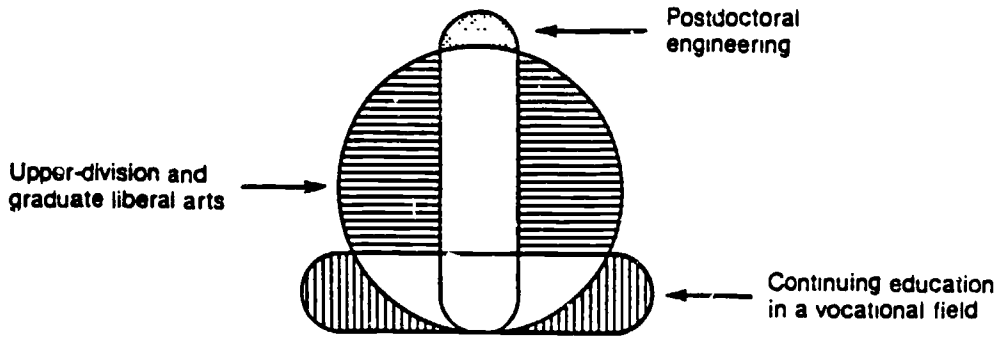
TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE:

Narrow program coverage, all degree levels

MAJOR STATE UNIVERSITY:

Broad program coverage, all degree levels

B. Areas of Unique Mission, Role, and Scope



Satisfaction with Results

The results of our telephone interviews of state-level higher education agencies show that the key groups involved in mission articulation have different levels of satisfaction with the resulting statements. We found a general tendency for lay board members to be the least satisfied, followed by state-level staff and then by institutional representatives. In Kansas, for instance, the board rejected the initial statements developed by campus officials and reluctantly accepted a second staff-developed version only after the media commended the progress being made.

More favor is reported with the mission review process than its product. Staff of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board, for example, report that the documents resulting from their mission development activity still can be described as global. However, they are much more satisfied with their increased understanding of the institutions and the system and with the impact that mission review has had on planning.