

CUNY Sheds Reputation as "Tutor U"

The nation's largest urban university raises standards, and grapples with remediation

By Jon Marcus

NEW YORK

THE GAPING CANYON where the World Trade Center once stood is now Ground Zero of a soaring renewal. Commuters bustle to their offices in buildings that have been painstakingly repaired. Construction workers rush to finish new glass towers rising from the rubble.

One of the last grim scars of the terrorist attacks will also soon be taken down and replaced: Fiterman Hall, a 1950s office building that had been renovated into classrooms and offices for the Borough of Manhattan Community College, and was a month away from opening when 7 World Trade Center collapsed on the building, damaging it beyond repair.

Still a hulking ruin, covered in plywood and chain-link, on a largely empty side street, Fiterman Hall is at last about to be

rebuilt into classrooms. And not a moment too soon. Around the corner, the community college—part of the City

Critics complained that remediation programs were fostering an atmosphere of mediocrity in the City University of New York system.

University of New York system—is bursting with 18,600 students, a 24 percent jump in just five years.

The increase in enrollment is part of the renewal of CUNY itself, a turnaround that follows the introduction of stricter

admissions requirements and a virtual end to remediation programs critics complained were fostering an atmosphere of mediocrity in the four-year colleges of the nation's largest urban university. It largely defies predictions that this dramatic change would doom the school's tradition of helping immigrants achieve a higher education. And it has come with breakneck speed unheard of in higher education, bringing quantifiable improvements and a palpable spike in enthusiasm in less time than it seems to take most universities to set up a planning committee.

"The proof is in the pudding," said David Crook, CUNY's dean for institutional research and assessment: "Standards were raised, more students applied, better-prepared students applied. Those are the facts. There's a change in the attitude of the (high school) guidance counselors. They're encouraging students to come here."



PHOTOS BY LISA QUINONES, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

Fiterman Hall, at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, was destroyed in the World Trade Center attacks but soon will be rebuilt.

All of this is the culmination of events that started with a full-out attack on what powerful critics—among them Governor *continued on page 14*

Scholarship Sweepstakes

National Merit program offers millions in scholarship dollars without regard to financial need

By Pamela Burdman

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

ANDREW MILLER grew up in southern California, attended a private high school, and earned the high grades that virtually ensured him a spot at nearby UCLA or USC. But a two-hour test in his junior year altered his path dramatically. Along with more than a

Last fall, more than 1.4 million high school juniors entered the competition for National Merit Scholarships by sitting for the PSAT.

million fellow high school juniors, Miller sat for the PSAT. Though typically described as practice for its better-known older sibling (the SAT), the test's lesser billing obscures its role as the lever over hundreds of millions of scholarship dollars

in a national sweepstakes to attract the coveted top performers.

Miller's score of 215 (out of a possible 240) qualified him for consideration as a National Merit Finalist in 2003, putting him in the sights of schools around the country. He eventually picked the University of Oklahoma, which offers out-of-state National Merit Finalists the prize in financial aid: a "free ride" currently worth about \$65,000 over four years.

OU is one of the nation's top contenders in the competition among schools to enrich their portfolios of National Merit Scholars. The current freshman class includes 170—more per capita than any U.S. public university. In addition to the more than \$6.3 million that *National CrossTalk* estimates the university spends on scholarships and tuition waivers, OU courts this cadre of students with perks like special dorms and early class registration. "We make a big push to try to attract those students," said Associate Vice President Matt Hamilton.

It is a push that catches students' and parents' attention. Miller was entertaining offers from UCLA and USC when he learned about Oklahoma's arrangement.



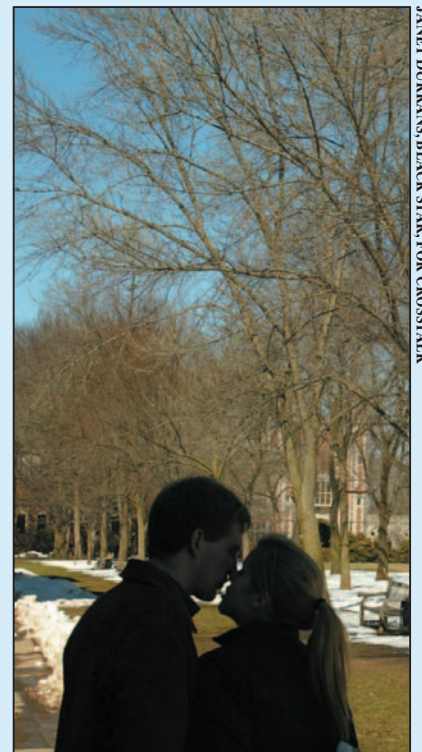
LISA HOKE, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

National Merit Scholar Andrew Miller received a four-year "full ride" scholarship to the University of Oklahoma.

UCLA offers just \$1,000 a year for National Merit Finalists without financial need, and even USC's \$13,000-a-year offer wouldn't have covered his costs. "I wouldn't have been out here if it hadn't been for the scholarship," said Miller. "I love it here. You feel really special."

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In This Issue



JANET DURRANS, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

ALTHOUGH MALE enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities is declining, a coed at Trinity College, in Hartford, Connecticut, managed to locate a member of this disappearing breed. (See page 6.)



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NEWS FROM THE CENTER

National Center Names New Board Members

CHARLES E.M. KOLB, president of the Committee for Economic Development, and California State Senator Jack Scott have been named members of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

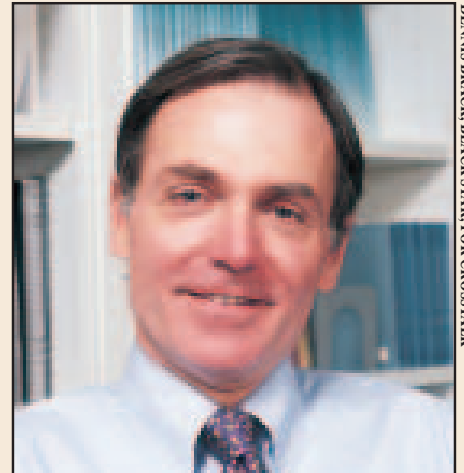
Since 1997 Kolb has headed the Committee for Economic Development, which is an independent, nonpartisan research and policy organization of 250 business and education leaders dedicated to economic and social policy research and the implementation of its recommendations by the public and private sectors.

From 1990 to 1992 Kolb served as Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. He also held senior-level federal positions in the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Education.

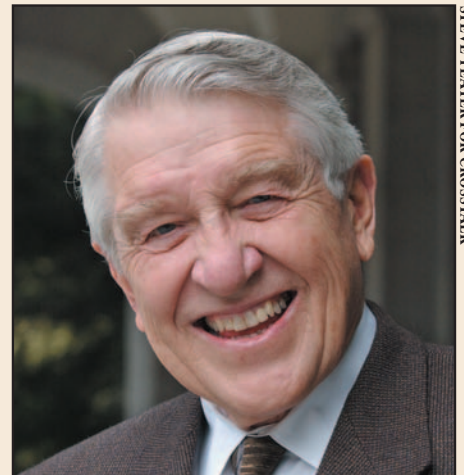
Kolb received his undergraduate degree from Princeton University and did graduate work at Baliol College, Oxford University, receiving a master's degree in philosophy, politics and economics. He also holds a law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law.

Senator Jack Scott, a Los Angeles Democrat, chairs the Senate Committee on Education and also the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Education, which oversees almost half of California's state budget. He has served in the Senate since 2000 and before that served four years as a state assemblyman. From 1987 to 1996 he was president of Pasadena City College.

Scott attended Abilene Christian College and later earned a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University and a Ph.D. in American History from Claremont Graduate University. ♦



Charles E. M. Kolb



Senator Jack Scott

Virginia B. Smith Award

GEORGE KUH, a leader in the movement to improve the quality of undergraduate education in the United States, has received the Virginia B. Smith Innovative Leadership Award for 2005.

Kuh, a professor of higher education at Indiana University, directs the National Survey of Student Engagement, an annual survey of more than half a million college students that provides information to help colleges, universities, states and policy-makers improve undergraduate education.

The award, which is co-sponsored by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, was presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Higher Education, in Atlanta in March.

"Through his work, George Kuh has helped to redefine the concept of quality in undergraduate education," said Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center. "Even more importantly, he has developed practical tools for campus improvement."

The Innovative Leadership Award is named for Virginia B. Smith, president emerita of Vassar College and founding director of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

Former North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt Jr. delivered the first Virginia B. Smith Leadership Lecture. ♦



George Kuh



James B. Hunt Jr.

DENNIS BRACK, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

STEVE YEATER FOR CROSSTALK

PHOTOS BY STANLEY LEARY, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Guaranteed student loan program defended

Editor—At a time when Washington is focused on reining in the budget, dangling the prospect of saving billions of dollars is understandably attractive to policymakers. Unfortunately, the student aid windfall that Robert Shireman claims for federal direct student loans in his article in the Winter 2005 edition of *National CrossTalk* hangs on precarious projections.

If future interest rates fail to follow the forecasts of the Congressional Budget Office (and who can really predict future interest rates with any accuracy?), and if loan servicing and loan default performance fail to measure up to the hopes of direct loan program advocates, the treasure chest of new student grant dollars promised could easily turn out to be full of fool's gold. Federal taxpayers would wind up shouldering higher costs, and worse yet, colleges and universities, as well as students and parents, could lose the benefits of choice and competition that have spurred significant enhancement of student aid services.

Few government finance experts are as certain as Shireman is about the cost efficiency of the direct loan program. For ex-

ample, in 1999 the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Education concluded that in any given year the total cost of either student loan program (the direct student loan program and the private-sector-based guaranteed student loan program) may be greater given the impact of prevailing economic conditions on federal subsidy costs.

Also, the Department of Education

Last year the direct loan program paid almost three times as much in financing costs as it received in interest from borrowers.

has had to *increase* the estimated costs of the direct loan program by \$8 billion over the past five years (while at the same time *reducing* its estimates of the cost of the guaranteed loan program by \$10 billion). Last year the direct loan program paid almost three times as much in financing costs as it received in interest from bor-

rowers. Over the past few years, almost 500 schools have returned to the guaranteed student loan program.

To divert attention from the direct loan program's dismal record, Shireman critiques the guaranteed loan program that has been successfully delivering loans for 40 years. Shireman's description of the role of student loan guarantors fails to reference any of the vital services these government and non-profit agencies provide. Student loan guarantors have played a pivotal role in helping to reduce the program's default rate to a historically low 5.2 percent. In fiscal year 2002, the nation's guarantors prevented default on more than \$22 billion in loans on which borrowers were experiencing significant payment problems.

Student loan guarantors also deliver services that promote access to higher education for American families, and two out of three guarantors serve as their states' grant and scholarship agencies, administering billions of dollars in additional aid to support needy students in their states.

Prudent policymakers should think carefully about turning the student loan

program upside down to pursue illusory cost savings. We need to ensure that access to postsecondary opportunities for students and families is guaranteed for the next 40 years and beyond.

Brett Lief
President, National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs
Washington, D.C.

The wrong president

Editor—David L. Kirp (in the Winter 2005 issue of *National CrossTalk*) tells the story of Leland and Jane Stanford's famous visit to the president of Harvard when they were considering founding a university to honor their deceased son. But he has the wrong Harvard president. It was Charles W. Eliot, president from 1869 to 1909, not his successor, A. Lawrence Lowell, who told the Stanfords they would need \$5 million—which, fortunately, they had on hand.

Richard W. Lyman
Former president of Stanford University

NATIONAL MERIT

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Indeed, for most involved in the National Merit Scholarship Program (NMSP), there is little to dislike. Students get seductive stipends. Schools get the status conferred by the trademark. Corporations get tax deductions and scholarship perks for employees. And the College Board, which co-sponsors the PSAT with the Illinois-based National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), gets the prestige that ensures an expanding market.

Last fall, more than 1.4 million high school juniors entered the competition by sitting for the test officially known as the PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). For the first time, an even greater number of non-juniors took the exam, said Beth Robinson, executive director of the College Board's PSAT Program. Altogether, 2.94 million students took the test, yielding an estimated \$32 million in revenue for the College Board.

The PSAT joined forces with the NMSP in 1979, and in recent years, the connection has escaped controversy. Despite a civil-rights complaint involving NMSP a decade ago, suspicions about race and gender score gaps have concentrated on the SAT, where an uneasy equilibrium has settled around cautions not to heed small score differences or rely on tests alone in making high-stakes decisions. The admonitions, however, seem to have bypassed financial aid offices and scholarship programs like NMSP, where small score differences on a single test can make all the difference.

Indeed, though National Merit Scholars are in the spotlight, the program itself operates in the shadows. But now, as it

marks its 50th year, the NMSP's definition of merit has come into the crosshairs of some in academe. In March, a subcommittee of College Board trustees was examining the organization's connection to the NMSP. And a University of California faculty admissions committee, in a strongly worded letter, was urging campuses to cut ties to the program.

New scrutiny over the nation's premier merit scholarship could elevate questions about similar programs run by states and institutions, heighten the debate over merit- versus need-based aid, and exert pressure on the College Board, whose tax-exempt purpose includes a "commitment to excellence and equity."

To critics, the NMSP connection violates part of that commitment. "What intrigues me is how the College Board can

As it marks its 50th year, the National Merit Scholarship Program has come into the crosshairs of some in academe.

get away with claiming it cares about equity and then endorsing and marketing this indefensible program," said Patrick Hayashi, a retired senior University of California official and former College Board trustee. "The College Board should not endorse any program that actually fosters inequality."

Hayashi's concerns, outlined in an eight-page letter last October, prompted the internal review. The letter asserts that during Hayashi's ten years overseeing ad-

missions at UC Berkeley, not one of the hundreds of National Merit Scholars who came to the campus was black or Hispanic. College Board officials repeatedly turned down requests for an accounting of poor and minority students in the program, he wrote.

"I estimate that the percent of National Merit Scholars who are black, Hispanic, and American Indian is close to zero and that the absolute number of poor students from these groups is also close to zero," Hayashi wrote shortly before ending his term as a trustee. "If we ever learned the precise figures, then we would be forced to question the wisdom and morality of sponsoring a 'merit' scholarship program that effectively locks out black, Hispanic, and American Indian students...The College Board endorses it and gives it national reach and impact. Without us, the NMSP would not have nearly the prestige, acceptance and impact that it does."

Subcommittee members were guarded about their deliberations. Their information packet "was marked confidential in 20 different places," said Esther Hugo of Santa Monica College. Asked about NMSP, subcommittee chair Ted Spencer said, "I don't have any concerns about it." Spencer, director of admissions at the University of Michigan, said he could not discuss the committee's work until it was



Use of the PSAT to narrow the field of potential National Merit Scholars is acceptable to some testing experts, including Ed Haertel of Stanford University.

finished, but added, "I'm not certain we'll ever finish."

Another former trustee responded to Hayashi's allegations in an e-mail to fellow trustees last November. Bruce Walker, vice provost at the University of Texas at Austin, said, "I believe that this could be one of the most important issues we will have faced as trustees." While conceding

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NATIONAL MERIT

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that NMSP's processes are "antiquated," Walker suggested that the partnership could help increase diversity.

"NMSC represents significant market advantages, and our partnership adds considerably to net revenues that can be used to accomplish goals for which there is no revenue stream...goals such as equity and access," Walker wrote. "I see no reason to sever our relationship with the NMSC. To

In a typical year, about 8,200 National Merit Scholar awards are available.

do so would be an act of fiscal irresponsibility." In an interview, he declined to elaborate. UT-Austin is a top recruiter of National Merit Scholars, but Walker said NMSP is just one way of recognizing merit.

As the Trustees' subcommittee reviewed the partnership with NMSP, the nature of the contractual relationship remained murky. College Board's Beth Robinson mentioned royalties that support research, development, and the PSAT program. But NMSC spokeswoman Elaine Detweiler insisted that no money changes hands. This much is clear: The NMSC agrees to use the PSAT to select winners, and the College Board agrees to provide juniors' scores to NMSC.

Even before the Trustees' review was concluded, College Board representatives made their position clear. "The practice that National Merit is following is very consistent with the requirement that they use multiple sources of information in making a high-stakes decision," said Wayne Camara, vice president for research and development. A week after

the interview with Camara, College Board trustees voted to continue the partnership for a year.

The use of multiple sources, avoidance of narrow score differences, and the caution to use tests only for purposes for which they were validated are hallmarks of professional guidelines established jointly by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education and of the Code of Fair Testing Practices, developed by testing officials, including Camara.

Whether National Merit meets those guidelines is subject to interpretation. The process begins in April, when NMSP staff identify the 50,000 juniors with the highest PSAT scores—eliminating more than 1.3 million others. In September, the list is reduced to 16,000 semifinalists, the highest-scoring students in each state.

NMSP refused to provide a list of state cutoff scores, though they are published on the Internet. They range from 202 in Arizona and West Virginia to 222 in Massachusetts and Maryland, Detweiler confirmed. (To critics who question the "merit" of the NMSP, the state-by-state differences belie the program's claim to be "national.")

Consider what the cutoffs mean in Andrew Miller's case: With a 4.0 average at the University of Oklahoma and plans to double major in mechanical engineering and pre-med, the clean-cut 19-year-old is clearly a high achiever. But had he scored a single point lower on the PSAT, he would have lacked the National Merit pedigree and the free ride at OU. Had he been born a year later, he also would have missed the cut—that year, California students needed 216 points to qualify. No luck either if he had attended high school in New York, which had a 218 hurdle in 2003. Yet, according to Camara, the difference between a 215 and 216, or between a 215 and 218, is meaningless.

Only for the 16,000 semifinalists do factors other than tests enter the picture. In February, NMSP staff eliminate about 1,000 of them—those whose high schools do not endorse them, whose grades are not high, or whose SAT scores do not confirm their PSAT scores. The



The University of California faculty admissions committee, chaired by Michael Brown of UC Santa Barbara, has urged UC campuses not to participate in the National Merit Scholarship Program.

remaining 15,000 finalists are all eligible for National Merit Scholar awards. In a typical year, about 8,200 such awards are available. Colleges offer roughly 4,600, sending sums of \$500 to \$2,000 per student in the fall to NMSC, which distributes the funds back to campuses each semester.

Many schools offer thousands more directly to students. About 2,500 students receive one-time scholarships of \$2,500 from NMSC, and around 1,100 corporate-sponsored scholarships worth anywhere from \$500 to \$10,000 a year go primarily to employees' children. Financial need is never considered.

While opponents stress that most students are weeded out by virtue of test scores alone, defenders note that other factors enter at the end of the process. Camara said winnowing students from 50,000 to 8,200 exceeds the "acceptable" ratio of 4:1. He added that since the PSAT accurately predicts SAT scores, it shares the SAT's statistical validity.

The 11-member University of California faculty admissions panel found Camara's answers unconvincing. "A test cannot be validated by proxy," wrote the chairman, UC Santa Barbara education professor Michael Brown, to campuses in early March. "Students who fall but one point below the cutoff score are summarily eliminated from further review. In other words, the answer to a single question (which is well within the range of psychometric error) can cause students to miss the cut." Others argue that 2:1 (16,000 semifinalists to 8,200 scholars) or even 16:15 (16,000 semifinalists to 15,000 finalists eligible for scholarships) is the operative ratio.

Testing experts differ on the alleged transgressions. To Ed Haertel, a Stanford education professor who helped write the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the NMSP's workings are

not troubling. "I don't see a grave injustice in the fact that you have to get a high score on the test in order to qualify, especially given that other things are also examined," he said.

Robert L. Linn, professor of education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, however, sees room for improvement. "It's better for the test not to be the sole factor. It would be better if somehow they could figure out how to put grades in it," said Linn, who has headed both the National Council on Measurement in Education and the National Research Council's Committee on Testing and Assessment.

"In principal, anything that has a single measure is faulty," agreed J. Michael Thompson, vice provost for admissions at USC. "But how do you do it otherwise?"

Such pragmatic concerns win the day in

The National Merit Scholar Corporation and College Board claim not to know how many of the scholarship recipients are minorities.

most discussions. "I would probably do the same thing if I were president of the College Board," said Linn. "I'd think it wasn't fiscally responsible to cut my revenue. It contributes to the volume of students taking the PSAT and how many times they take it. It would be good if National Merit did give demographic information about their scholars. You can anticipate that it wouldn't look good for them. It's pragmatism versus what might be more socially desirable."

College Board officials believe their

COLLEGE BOARD



Wayne Camara, College Board vice president for research and development, defends use of the PSAT in the National Merit Scholar selection process.

ROD SEARCEY FOR CROSSTALK

goals squarely target the public good. More than a practice test, the PSAT helps schools improve teaching and increase college attendance among minorities, said Peter Negroni, vice president for K-12. “We acknowledge this as a problem,” he said. “We as an organization are engaged in steps to try to do something about it.”

But though more minorities are taking the tests, Negroni offered no evidence that racial score gaps are narrowing, much to the frustration of Hayashi and others at UC. “If we can never get the data, we’ll never know where we are and where we hope to go,” said Judy Sakaki, vice chancellor for student affairs at UC Davis, and a member of the NMSP subcommittee.

Last fall, the College Board accused the anti-testing group FairTest, of copy-

Former UC President Richard C. Atkinson advocated abandoning the SAT, calling the focus on tests “the educational equivalent of a nuclear arms race.”

right infringement for posting average SAT scores by race, figures previously released by the College Board itself. The most recent data, for 2004, show whites scored an average of 1059, Asian Americans 1084, Mexican Americans 909, and African Americans 857. The averages for males and females were 1049 and 1005 respectively.

Tacit acknowledgment of scanty diversity in the NMSP came on the heels of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. With a 1964 Ford Foundation grant, NMSC established a parallel National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students (a name still used in its annual report). Though NMSC runs no programs for other minorities, the College Board started a National Hispanic Recognition Program in 1983.

“You could say that it’s socially responsible,” noted Brown. “But that’s tantamount to admission of an adverse impact. It creates an ongoing impression that racial minorities just cannot compete with other individuals in a ‘fair’ and achievement-based system.”

The College Board asks African Americans interested in the scholarship program to check a box on the PSAT answer sheet. Students are also asked to choose among eight racial categories. Still the NMSC and College Board claim not to know how many National Merit Scholars are minorities. “That is not relevant to the conduct of the National Merit program,” said spokeswoman Detweiler.

“They (NMSC) have always had a reputation of being very very hard-shelled and very difficult to get information from and have a dialogue with,” said Larry Gladieux, the College Board’s former director for policy analysis. “They are sort of ‘hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.’

They take the position that these scholarships promote achievement and excellence. They don’t get entangled in policy...and they don’t want the College Board to, either.”

A year ago, the NMSC took apparent action to address a racial policy development. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2003 decision regarding college admissions, it quietly increased the number of National Achievement awards it sponsors from 450 to 700, because colleges stopped sponsoring them.

Still, the overwhelming majority of funds—\$46 million out of \$48.7 million—goes to National Merit Scholars. (That sum includes additional scholarships offered by corporations for PSAT high-scorers, but not the additional amounts that colleges like Oklahoma offer.) Rather than money, the Hispanic program provides, for a fee, names of the 3,300 highest-scoring students who achieve a minimum grade point average to schools “interested in communicating with prospective students of Hispanic heritage,” according to the College Board’s website. No College Board officials interviewed knew the origins of that program.

The last major challenge to the NMSP occurred in 1994, when FairTest, unable to obtain racial information on scholarship winners, calculated that 60 percent were male and, since girls get better grades in college, filed a gender discrimination complaint. The case was settled with the addition of a writing section to the PSAT. Females generally score higher than males on tests of writing skill.

It is no coincidence that the new assault originated in California, the first state to voluntarily adopt race-blind admissions. Nor is it surprising that Hayashi, once a chief aide to former UC President Richard C. Atkinson, is behind it. Atkinson earned national attention in 2001, when he advocated abandoning the SAT, calling the focus on tests “the educational equivalent of a nuclear arms race.” The standoff led to the revised SAT that debuted this spring, with another writing assessment—this time an essay—settling the dispute.

Six out of eight UC undergraduate campuses, all but UC Berkeley and UC Riverside, still sponsor National Merit Scholars, with awards capped at \$2,000 a year, officials said. Systemwide, UC invested \$824,000 in 676 National Merit Scholars this year, far fewer than individual campuses elsewhere. The panel that unanimously recommended discarding the NMSP includes representatives from every campus, suggesting that several campuses will follow the committee’s lead, in what may be the logical conclusion of the university’s ongoing reevaluation of admissions practices.

“UC over the last four or five years has taken such a strong position, and basically led the effort to change the whole SAT test, that for us to continue supporting the NMSP, given the way they use the PSAT, I think is a problem,” said Tom Lifka, assistant vice chancellor for student academic services at UCLA. This year, UCLA sponsored 84 National Merit freshmen and enrolled a total of 115, more than any other UC campus.

Current National Merit Scholars would not be affected by a change, and at least one is sympathetic to the concerns. “Say you had a cold or your cat died that morning and you did poorly on the test, that would preclude you from participating,” said freshman Jonathan Beck at UC Davis. “Other scholarships look at more aspects of your high school career. Your GPA is not just one test. Your extracurricular activities are not just one night.” Still, he said merit aid is essential for students like him, who can’t receive need-based aid but also don’t get help from their parents.

As similar considerations shape the debate over NMSP, clearly there is a residue of hostility toward standardized tests among college leaders, revealed by the standing ovation Atkinson received after his 2001 speech on the SAT. Whether a departure by UC will influence those leaders or the College Board to break with NMSP is less clear. The nation’s most prestigious universities, Harvard first among them, recruit the students without dangling scholarships. When UC Berkeley dropped out three years ago, the campus fell from fourth to 30th place in the rankings published every February by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

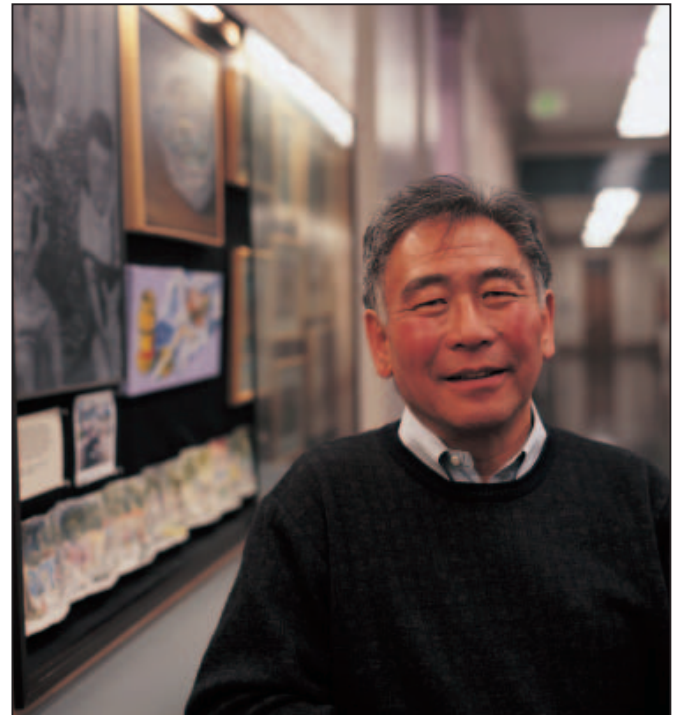
But with college presidents eyeing these rankings, dozens of admissions officials jockey for position each year, a habit that may be hard to change. Based on information provided by universities, *National CrossTalk* conservatively estimates

This year, the University of Florida attracted 259 Merit Scholars, second only to Harvard.

total award values of well over \$100 million, with public flagships among the major players:

- This year, the University of Florida attracted 259 Merit Scholars, second only to Harvard. UF offers a four-year package of \$24,000 to resident students, according to a university website. Non-residents receive \$40,000 plus roughly \$50,000 in tuition waivers. “We really go after those people aggressively, and that was a planned choice to try to upgrade our profile,” Academic Advising Center Director Albert Matheny told the campus newspaper.

- At UT-Austin, which perennially ranks in the top five for National Merit enrollment, Texas residents receive a \$13,000 package over four years. Non-residents re-



Retired University of California official Patrick Hayashi calls use of the PSAT to select National Merit Scholars “indefensible.”

ceive \$38,000, including \$8,500 in waived tuition and \$1,000 in scholarships annually. “We recruit them vigorously because they represent one type of merit, and it’s a type that turns out to be important,” said campus Vice Provost Bruce Walker.

- Arizona State University now ranks 12th, offering awards worth \$50,000 over four years to state residents and \$80,000 to out-of-staters. A press release lauding the “meteoric rise” from six National Merit freshmen in 1991 to 162 this year credits a recent increase in the students’ stipend.

- The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville offers \$40,000 over four years to students from Arkansas and Oklahoma. In 2003, the school announced ambitions to increase National Merit enrollment from 106 to 250 by 2010. That means recruiting and retaining about 63 a year. Already the school has risen from 92nd place in 2001 to 47th, with 47 freshmen this year. “We’re competing with OU for these high-ability students in Oklahoma,” said Suzanne McCray, associate dean of the Honors College. “We’ve moved up in *U.S. News & World Report*.”

Given the incentives, separating colleges’ interest and the public good isn’t easy, noted Michael McPherson, a financial aid expert and president of the Spencer Foundation. “From a broad social point of view, I think it would be better if schools de-emphasized merit scholarships in favor of need-based scholarships,” he said. But, as a former president of Macalester College, he understands why many don’t. “There’s a significant advantage in going out and buying National Merit Scholars rather than just buying kids with high grades or high SAT scores. You can take out an ad in the newspaper. If you’re trying to brand the school as a place that has a lot of highly talented students, buying National Merit Scholars is a good way to do it,” he said. ♦

Pamela Burdman is a freelance writer in Berkeley and former higher education reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle.

Where the Boys Aren't

For young males, the drift away from academic achievement is a trend

By Robert A. Jones

OSKALOOSA, IOWA

WE ARE BOUNCING down a county highway, deep in corn country. On the right side, a Cargill plant looms out of the farmland, converting corn into corn syrup for the nation's soda pop. Otherwise the fields are fallow and all is mid-winter quiet, just the way Tom Mortenson likes it.

Mortenson is the editor and publisher of *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, a monthly newsletter, and this day he's headed for Iowa City where he will drop off the latest edition at the printer. In the field of higher education, he may be the only pub-

Recently there has been a downward spiral in college enrollment among young males, the very group that so long dominated campuses.

lisher in the land to operate out of a farm town, and the location has its drawbacks. Today's trip to the printer, all told, will take more than three hours.

"This is crazy," said Mortenson. "If I lived in a city I could do this job in ten minutes." But he is smiling in a way to suggest it is unlikely he would ever abandon southern Iowa.

Opportunity has grown in influence over the last decade as it has promoted greater access to higher education for minorities and lower-income groups. Each year it grades colleges and universities on their enrollment efforts and has not flinched from assigning low marks to some of the country's more notable institutions. On several occasions the newsletter has

bestowed Harvard with an F.

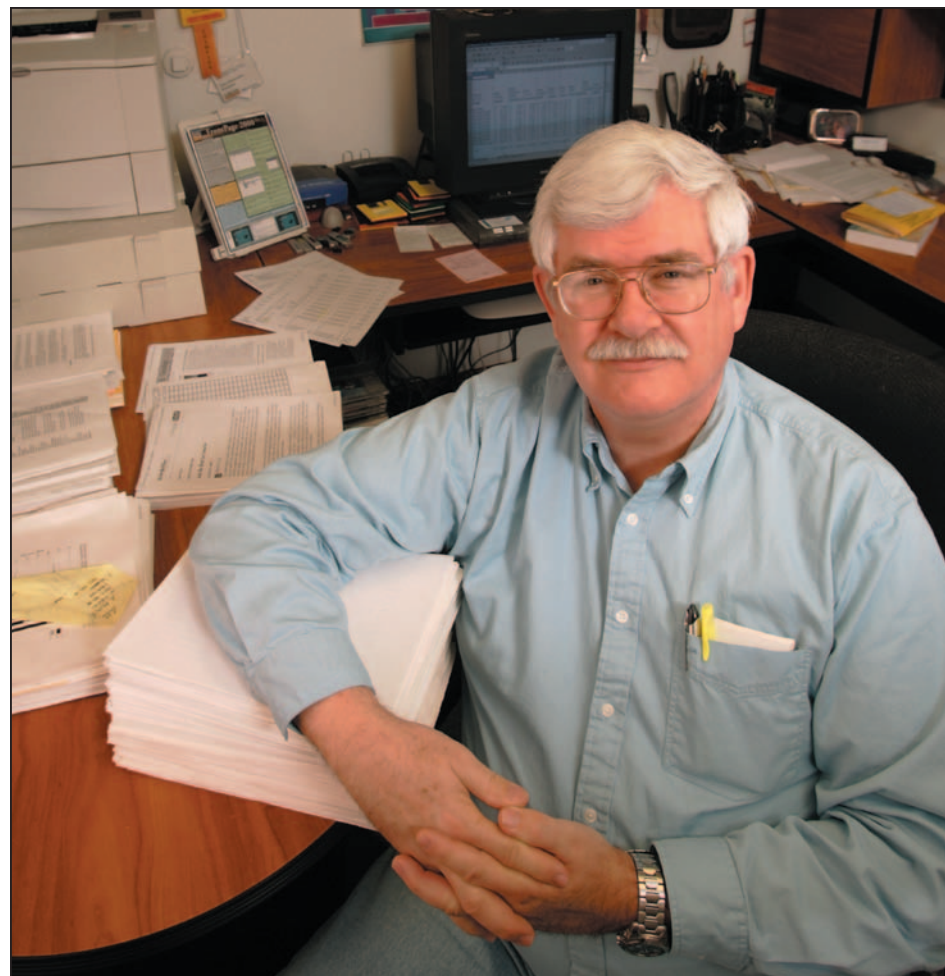
But much of Mortenson's reputation, and perhaps notoriety, stems from his pioneer work on an issue he never planned to undertake: the downward spiral of academic achievement among young males, the very group that so long dominated college campuses. Beginning in 1995, Mortenson more or less announced the phenomenon to the academic world in his newsletter, and he has continued to pound away at the issue ever since.

The 1995 *Opportunity* article was titled, "What's Wrong with the Guys?" The question startled many of his readers in the education world—as it did Mortenson himself—because it was assumed that males would permanently dominate the academic world and occupy the majority position. In fact, Mortenson pointed out, men had slipped into a minority.

In the article, Mortenson argued that male dominance on campuses had been crumbling for more than a decade. His graphs, ranging from high school dropout rates to the gender ratios of college graduates, starkly defined the issue: Males were walking away from higher education in alarming numbers while females were charging ahead. Virtually every measure showed a downward curve for men that continued into the foreseeable future. There was no evidence of a turnaround.

Mortenson concluded by predicting that the abandonment of higher education by increasing numbers of males would have a profound effect on the future of the nation. "The failure of men to rise to the challenge to increase greatly their educational attainment," he wrote, "will continue to alter nearly every aspect of our economic, social, political and family lives."

Today, the erosion of male presence on campuses is widely acknowledged by the education establishment and has been the subject of extensive media attention. Indeed, the evidence of the decline continues to be compelling and, in fact, has



GREG BROWN, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

For the last decade, Tom Mortenson has been sounding the alarm about the declining number of males on American campuses.

grown worse since Mortenson's original article.

In 2002, the most recent year for which figures are available, the percentage of male undergraduates on the nation's campuses stood at 43 percent versus 57 percent female. That figure constitutes the lowest percentage for males since the middle of the 19th century. In that same year, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to women exceeded those to men by 192,000. Between 1990 and 2002, female degrees exceeded males' by 726,000.

Though differences exist among races and ethnicities, the trend spans all groups. The sharpest drops in the share of bachelor's degrees have occurred among Hispanic males, followed by whites and African Americans. Asian American men have also lost share, though their percentages are the highest among the racial groups.

For boys, the downward spiral actually begins in middle and high school. Recent surveys have shown that boys study less than girls, make lower grades, participate in fewer extracurricular activities and take fewer college-prep courses. By the time senior year arrives, a large percentage of boys have already abandoned the college track.

In a 2003 report by the Council of Chief State School Officers, high school girls were found to be dominant even in subjects that were traditionally regarded as the preserve of boys, such as advanced math and science. In states from California to Mississippi, the majority of high school chemistry students were found to be girls. The same was true in trigonometry and geometry.

"Contrary to some current views and the patterns of the mid-1980s, more high school girls took higher-level math and sci-

ence than did boys in all of the reporting states," the report noted.

And just as the phenomenon begins before college, it continues after college, where women have grown to near parity with men in professional schools. A U.S. Department of Education survey recently noted that between 1970 and 2001 the percentage of law degrees awarded to women increased from five percent to 47 percent; medical degrees from eight percent to 43 percent; and dentistry degrees from one percent to 39 percent. Each year the percentages for women edge upward another notch.

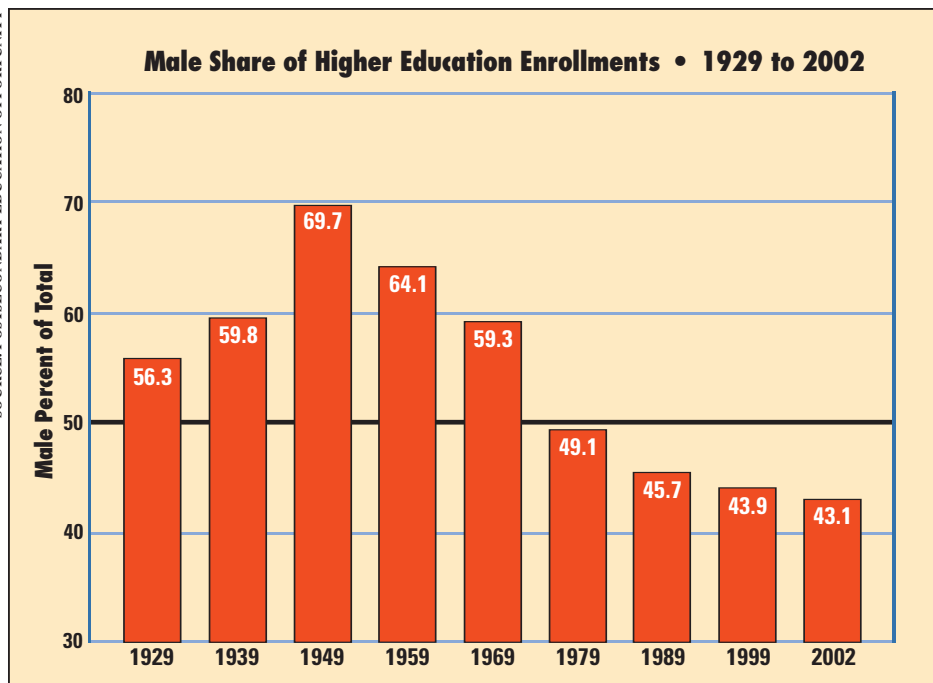
"The meaning of these numbers com-

In 2002, the percentage of males on the nation's campuses stood at 43 percent—the lowest since the middle of the 19th century.

ing out of colleges and graduate schools is very significant, and I don't know that many people have grasped it," said James Maxey, senior research scientist for American College Testing (ACT) in Iowa City. "We are moving towards a female dominated society in everything regarding the professions. I mean everything from the law to medicine to science, across the board."

Here in Oskaloosa, the phone calls from reporters come almost daily now to *Opportunity's* office in the basement of Mortenson's home. Some come from CBS and *Newsweek*, others from small newspa-

SOURCE: POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY



pers where the editor has noticed that all four high school valedictorians in his hometown happen to be girls.

Yet Mortenson is hardly satisfied. Getting the educational establishment to recognize the male decline took more than five years, he says, and even now the nation's educational system has not begun to respond in a way that might rescue the next generation of boys.

"You look for somebody trying to change the situation and you find nothing, Zippo," Mortenson said. "We don't want to accept the idea that boys need help. The notion about boys has always been that they can take care of themselves, even when the numbers prove otherwise."

Mortenson often expresses mild amazement that he has come to be regarded as the champion of boys. As a child of the

By the time senior year arrives, a large percentage of boys have already abandoned the college track.

'60s, he grew up in rural Iowa and then spent two years in South America as a member of the Peace Corps, returning with a zeal to do good works. He had always excelled at math and eventually decided to use those skills dissecting the educational disparities between minorities and women on one side and the reigning class of white males on the other.

Over the years he worked as a policy analyst for the University of Minnesota, the Illinois Board of Higher Education and ACT. With his New Deal political idealism, Mortenson should have fit snugly into the education hierarchy. But somehow he didn't.

Mortenson, it seems, is a born gadfly—

an avuncular gadfly, with his shock of white hair and personal charm, but a gadfly nonetheless. Once engaged on a subject, he tends to talk non-stop, and the talk can grow passionate and blunt. He is also a man who quickly understands the real-world repercussions of statistics, and is impatient with those who do not. This approach does not always win favor in education bureaucracies.

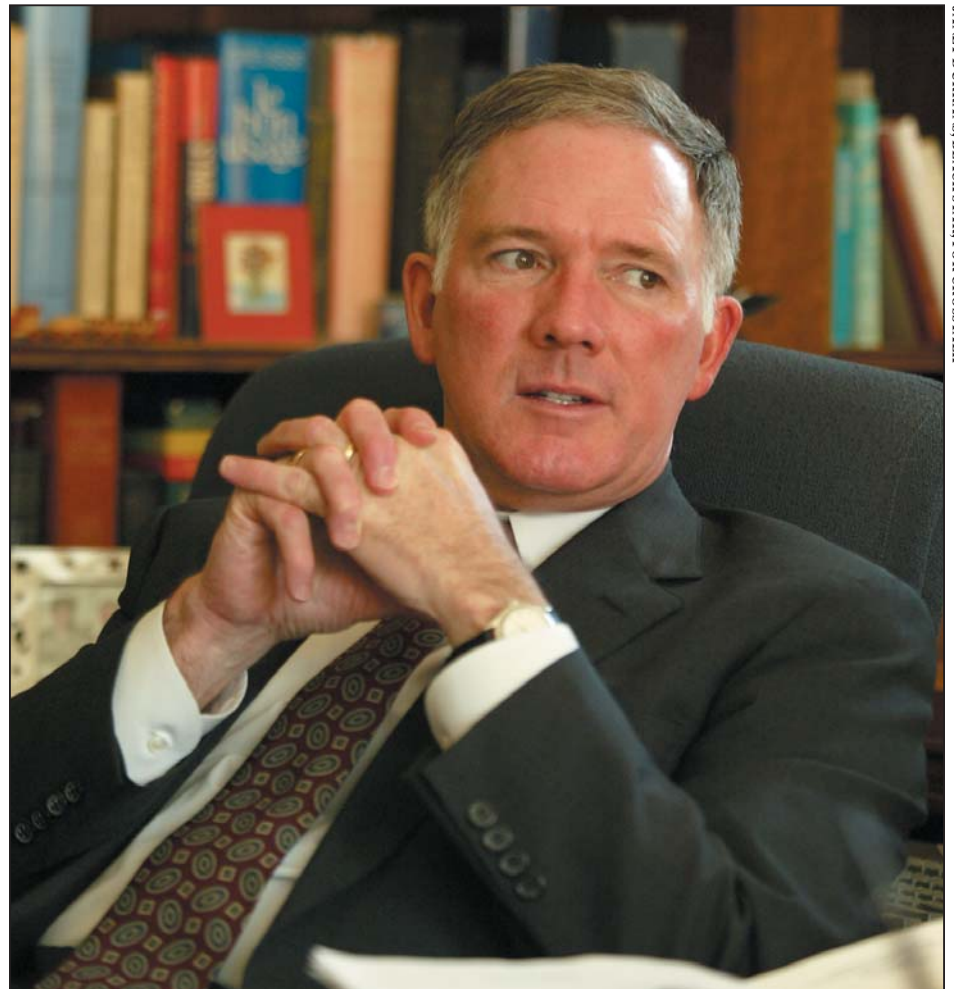
At ACT, for example, he became increasingly discouraged over the erosion of the value of Pell grants for underprivileged college students. Concluding that tinkering with the program wouldn't work, he pushed the ACT leadership to advocate the wholesale dismantling of Pell grants and then lobby for a new, more effective program. Mortenson's bosses did not agree, and soon he departed.

The founding of *Opportunity* came, in part at least, as a result of Mortenson's understanding that he needed a venue where his gadfly nature would be an advantage rather than a disadvantage. "With the newsletter I can lay out the numbers as I see them," he said. "I can push the envelope; I can make people mad. And no one can bump me off."

Then he laughed. "I don't think they can even find me in Oskaloosa."

Actually, Mortenson first noticed the signs of the male decline while he was at ACT, several years before he founded *Opportunity*. Initially he thought the slippage was a good sign. It meant that women—minority, white, rich and poor—were working their way toward parity.

But as he followed the numbers over the next few years, the slippage began to quicken. He pulled enrollment statistics from the '70s and was surprised to discover that the percentage of males going to college had gone flat during the decade. "I stared at the numbers and I was startled," he said. "For boys, the percentage was about the same in 1990 as in 1970. All the progress in higher education over those



JANET DURRAN, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

James Jones, president of Trinity College, believes most traditional liberal arts colleges "are really struggling with (male-female) imbalance."

twenty years could be attributed to girls. The boys had gone flat-line."

Still, Mortenson wrote nothing about his moment of epiphany. His franchise was minorities and women, he told himself, not males. Surely someone else would take up the cause of boys.

Five years passed and no one did. By this time, in 1995, Mortenson had started *Opportunity* and had continued to watch the decline of males. The downward curve, if anything, had grown steeper. Something big was happening. Mortenson began writ-

ing about it, and he hasn't stopped.

These days he travels often, addressing education conferences on the subject, and usually begins with slides showing boys' greater dropout rates, lower grades in high school, and general drift away from academic achievement. Then he puts up what he calls the "show stopper."

It's a slide of suicide rates among boys between the ages 15 and 24. The graph shows a horrific rise beginning in the 1960s and peaking in the 1990s, when the ratio of male to female suicides exceeded six to one. The rates are the highest ever recorded for that age group.

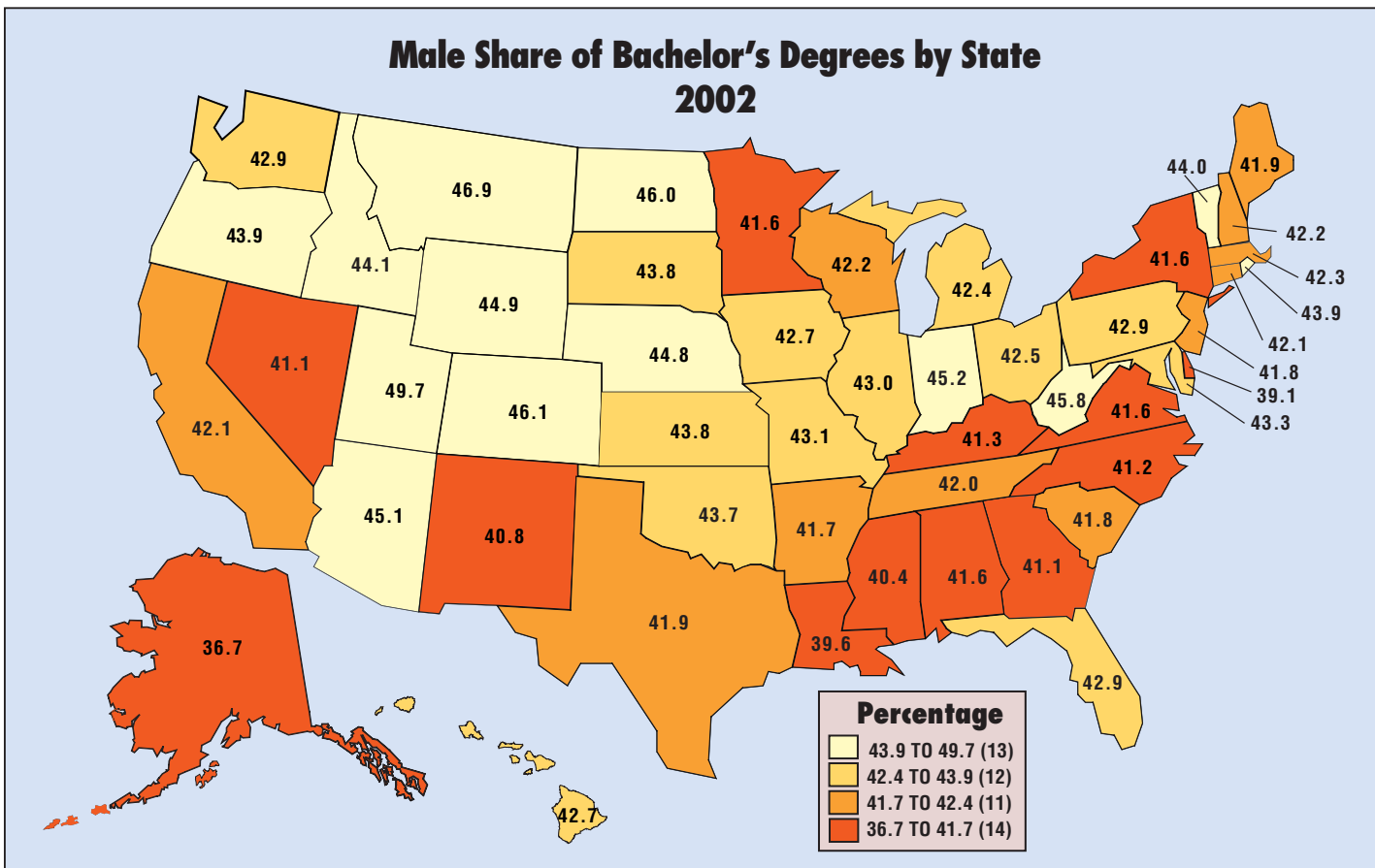
"You can sober up any audience when you lay out the suicide data," he said. "The

**"We don't want to accept the idea that boys need help. The notion about boys has always been that they can take care of themselves."
—TOM MORTENSON**

room tends to go quiet. The audience is staring at figures showing young males giving up on life at the very beginning of life, and they understand that something dangerous is happening in our culture."

In recent years several studies by the U.S. Department of Education, the American Council on Education, and others have confirmed Mortenson's findings. But some question whether the situation amounts to a cultural apocalypse.

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from preceding page

Michael McPherson, former President of Macalester College and now head of the Spencer Foundation, recalls that during his undergraduate days at the University of Chicago several decades ago, about two-thirds of the student body was male. "I don't recall anyone going nuts over it," he said. "I think it's easy to look at a trend like this and overstate the repercussions. At this point we don't really know what it means."

Jacqueline King, director of policy analysis at the American Council on Education, would like to see the emphasis placed on minority and low-income white males. "The trend impacts all groups, that's true, but as income rises, the gender gap decreases somewhat. Economically, if you look at the bottom rung of males, you see a truly terrible situation."

King also argues that the shift to a female majority does not suggest that females are grabbing college spots formerly held by men. "Higher education is not a zero-sum game," she said. "It tends to expand to accommodate new groups and larger numbers of a group such as women. Women are not taking spots away from men, they are taking advantage of an expanded pie."

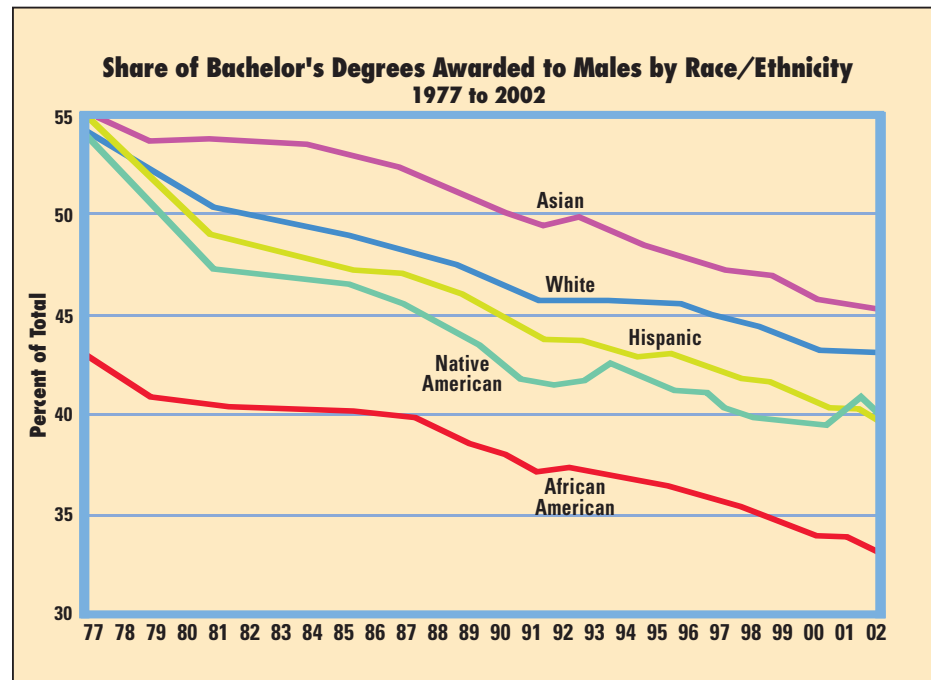
She agrees, however, that the male decline is troubling and raises many unanswered questions. When asked if she could explain why males, even those from middle and upper-middle class families, have gone into a tailspin, she replied, "No, I really don't know the answer. I'm not sure anyone does."

For individual colleges, the question is what, if anything, can be done to keep gender parity on their campuses. James Maxey, at ACT, says the options are fairly clear. "They can push more scholarship dollars at boys, they can practice some version of affirmative action, or they can spend more time and energy recruiting boys," he said.

Several college officials interviewed for this story said institutions probably were utilizing all those strategies although they would be loathe to admit it. "When a college sees its gender gap getting close to 60/40, they're going to get nervous because that's roughly the point where the college starts to lose its attractiveness to both males and females," said one official. "In that situation the leadership will take steps to pull in more boys, even if those steps are carried out under the table. The market realities are such that I don't think they have a choice."

One reason for the reluctance of colleges to discuss their tactics was described by Rebecca Zwick, of the University of California, Santa Barbara, in her recent book, "Fair Game? The Use of Standardized Tests in Higher Education." She cites the case of the University of Georgia, which has a sizable majority of women, trying to maintain a balanced campus by giving men preference among borderline candidates. A female applicant filed a lawsuit over the practice and the university dropped it.

Zwick also refers to an annual meeting of the National Association for College Admission Counseling where one partici-



pant referred to affirmative action for men as "the issue that dare not speak its name."

Though the undergraduate national gender gap stands at 57 percent women, the phenomenon is not evenly distributed across all campuses. In general, small liberal arts colleges have been hit hardest by the shortage of males, and large public universities the least. That is because large public institutions usually have engineering departments, business schools, and football and basketball teams, all significant draws for men. Small liberal arts colleges often do not.

And within the liberal arts group there is a pecking order. Top-tier schools have encountered little difficulty thus far in maintaining a 50/50 balance while second- and third-tier schools have found it almost impossible. One official speculated that this may reflect an unspoken affirmative action policy on the part of first-tier schools who are admitting male students that formerly would have attended a lower-tier institution.

James Jones, president of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, says his institution is not finding it difficult to maintain a balanced student body, in part because of Trinity's high-level reputation

"Economically, if you look at the bottom rung of males, you see a truly terrible situation."

—JACQUELINE KING

and also because the college has an engineering school and specializes in business and finance.

"But when I was President of Kalamazoo we struggled to keep the student body at 55 percent women and 45 percent men," he said. "What you will find is that any traditional liberal arts college—except those in the highest tier—are really struggling with imbalance."

Jones points out that colleges and universities are actually caught in the middle of the problem. Males begin to drift away from academic achievement long before

their college years, and their failure to earn postsecondary degrees will affect the larger culture long after the college period.

"We are looking at a very serious issue. This is a complicated, seismic shift, and the schools must address it," Jones said. "But by 'schools' I do not mean just higher education. I mean from the first grade on through college."

Jones says that he suspects the core of the problem arises from the "de-masculinizing" of boys in the early years of education when they are introduced to a matriarchal school society and forced, contrary to their nature, to sit quietly for long hours in the classroom. Boys grow up without a sense of who they are or what it means to be a man. "I guess the feminists would say that's perfectly alright because guys have run the world for a long time," he said. "But I don't think it's that simple."

In Oskaloosa, Mortenson would applaud that conclusion. He believes boys' drift away from college begins at an early age and has been influenced by some of the larger cultural shifts of the past few decades. Namely, millions of fathers have lost their jobs in manufacturing and agriculture, leaving them without economic purpose and unable to provide a vigorous role model for their sons. Millions of other boys have been raised in families without any father present.

"For generations, men served as the breadwinners in the family. That was their role," said Mortenson. "Today that role has been removed. I live in one of the richest farming regions in the world, and an economist told me recently that Iowa now has two farmers per township who actually make their living from farming. Two. What about the rest of the men? I don't think we have begun to discover what to do about men in an age when their economic purpose is being changed so profoundly."

Over the years, as he hammered away at the issue, Mortenson has brooded on the question of who will save boys. The paradox, he says, is that men—as an interest group—have virtually no political infrastructure. In Washington, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) exercises a potent voice in support of women in higher education. But an AAUM doesn't even exist. Nor do any

other groups designed to work on behalf of male gender issues.

"Men won't, or can't, save themselves. That's the sad fact," said Mortenson. "They don't have their act together, and they don't seem engineered for that kind of effort."

These ruminations have led Mortenson to an unexpected conclusion: Women must save men. In his view, women have their act together and can work toward change far more effectively than men. They must realize that their own, decades-long struggle to win educational parity has succeeded beyond all expectations, and now they must lend a hand to their vanquished adversary.

Besides, he argues, women have a lot at stake in this issue. "This year approximately 200,000 more women will receive bachelor's degrees than men," Mortenson says. "That means 200,000 women will not find a college-educated husband to marry. Next year there will be 200,000 more, and on and on. Women are being faced with two bad choices: not to marry at all, or marry a guy who delivers pizzas."

In a more general sense, he argues that a culture filled with ill-educated, drifting men does not add up to a pretty picture for anyone, including women. Mortenson cites a conversation he had with the president of an historically black college where the female/male ratio had reached the startling figure of five to one.

"He was really disturbed about the environment on the campus, saying it bordered on domestic abuse," Mortenson recalls. "The men were treating women badly, playing them off each other. Women were getting into fistfights over men. The social conditions were totally unacceptable."

Mortenson was encouraged to hear Laura Bush's announcement early this year that she would take on the issue of boys during the Bush second term, and he notes that it was she, not the president, who took the initiative. But even Mortenson is at a loss to describe what policy changes he would recommend to Mrs. Bush.

He toys with ideas like a return to gender-separated schools that would allow boys to operate in a more rambunctious environment. Or efforts to redefine masculinity toward the service-oriented jobs of the future. At this point, he says, no one knows what will work and what won't.

The difficulty stems, in part, from the very scale of the issue. The unraveling of a gender involves half the population. Social issues usually arise within sub-groups and minorities whose problems are connected to their own special conditions. But a gender spans all racial groups and economic classes; it encompasses virtually every human condition.

The prospect of discovering effective antidotes is daunting, Mortenson says, and he is not optimistic about the near future. "Right now I see only the faintest response to this issue," he said. "I am convinced that we will not see resolution in my lifetime. And I can guarantee you that it's going to get worse before it gets better." ♦

Robert A. Jones is a former reporter and columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

"Culture of Quality"

Northwest Missouri State University's corporate-style goal-setting and number-crunching

By Susan C. Thomson

MARYVILLE, MISSOURI

DEAN L. HUBBARD fires up his laptop and clicks open his "dashboard," a display of two dozen squares, all green or purple with just a few slivers of yellow or red. One quick glance at the screen tells him "everything is looking pretty good" at Northwest Missouri State University.

Hubbard is Northwest's president, and the "dashboard" is a color-coded, real-time snapshot of how well the university is measuring up to its academic, fiscal and administrative goals. Deeper in the dashboard, clicks away, lie explanatory trend

Northwest Missouri State University has gained a reputation as an innovator in higher education management.

lines, scatter plots and raw data. Throughout, green means on-target; purple, above; yellow, a little below; and red means trouble.

Hubbard has had some personal red moments, close calls that could have cost him his job, early on in his tenure of almost 21 years. But he has hung in steady, gaining himself and the university reputations as innovators in higher education management.

Under Hubbard, Northwest expanded a small experiment with alternative fuels such as wood chips and paper pellets and reduced the university's heating and cool-

ing bills by 79 percent, or \$1.8 million a year, money that now goes into instruction. The university also boasts of becoming, in 1987, the first in the country to put a computer in every dorm room and office.

But, more than anything else, what sets Northwest apart is its unrelenting, unqualified adherence to "total quality management," a concept that U.S. businesses imported from Japan in the 1980s. Hubbard arrived at Northwest in 1984, already a convert to the movement and its chief notions of "continuous improvement" and "fact-informed decision making."

"If you can't measure it, you can't improve it," he likes to say. And so at Northwest, the quest for endless self-improvement goes hand-in-hand with endless quantitative analysis. The university as a whole, and every department in it, sets measurable goals and constantly charts progress toward them.

Hubbard and other Northwest administrators walk around with some of the most telling numbers in their heads. Major among these is the calculation that the university spends almost \$500 more a year per student on academic programs, and that much less on administration, than the average for 41 other U.S. universities that Northwest has picked as its peers and external benchmarks. "That's quality right there!" enthuses Kichoon Yang, who became Northwest's provost in January.

Northwest monitors itself on scores of statistics—the costs of various programs, the state of student recruiting for the coming year, sales at the campus bookstore, even problems with campus fire alarms. With a few computer keystrokes, Hubbard or another administrator also can summon up data on learning, measured



PHOTOS BY CRAIG SANDS, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

"Total quality management" has enabled President Dean L. Hubbard of Northwest Missouri State University to weather tough budget times.

by student performance on nationally normed tests in their major fields, and teaching, tracked by students' evaluations of their classes.

Quentin Wilson, Missouri's higher education commissioner until the end of last year, says that during his more than two years in that job Northwest stood out for "managing for results and applying quality principles in everything they do." He calls the university and Hubbard leaders in this respect, "not just in Missouri but in the country."

This deliberateness and attention to detail stood Northwest in particularly good stead during what Hubbard describes as the "meat-ax budget cuts" Missouri inflicted on higher education when the state's economy lurched into reverse in the latest recession. In fiscal 2002-03 the state slashed appropriations for its public colleges and universities by 10.2 percent. According to an analysis by James C. Palmer and Sandra L. Gillilan of Illinois State University, only Oregon, with an 11.1 percent cut, was hit harder.

Northwest's share of the budget pain was \$4.1 million, and it hurt. But the university was nimble enough to adjust without resorting to the layoffs, larger classes, course cancellations and double-digit tuition increases, including a 19.5 percent rise at the University of Missouri, that made headlines around the state.

"Northwest was able to plan and manage through the tough financial times at least as well as anybody in the state, if not better," Wilson said.

Hubbard's prescience helped. After riding out a state budget crunch years earlier, he took a vow of never-again, and insisted on building Northwest's reserves against the inevitable next rainy day.

When it came, reserves were healthy enough to absorb comfortably a third of the state's big budget shock. A tuition increase of nine percent made up a similar amount. The remaining third came out of administration, which Hubbard had already squeezed down to a handful of vice presidents and deans with no subordinates called "associate," "assistant" or

"deputy."

Over the years, Hubbard has seized on attrition in the non-academic ranks to eliminate, combine and redistribute jobs, often using students to plug gaps. In a typical move, when one of his two executive assistants resigned a couple of years ago, the president gave her duties to a graduate student now working for him part-time.

There is no such stinting when it comes to salaries. After the big state budget cut two years ago, the university imposed a one-year salary freeze. But it has since followed up with substantial raises—12 percent one year for the staff, and seven percent another year for the faculty. All told, employees' paychecks have either tracked or outpaced inflation over these last few financially trying years.

Missouri has budgeted no money for higher education capital projects since 1999-2000, but Northwest has navigated its way around that roadblock, too. Two

Dean L. Hubbard, the university's president of almost 21 years, visits every campus department once a year to review progress toward its particular quality goals.

years ago, the university improved its football stadium to the tune of \$2 million, all from private donations. Last fall saw the opening of three new residence halls, and construction is to start on yet another this spring, with \$56.6 million in revenue bonds financing all four.

All are designed with apartments and suites—the accommodations today's college students prefer, and a definite plus for Northwest, given its small-town home in a sparsely populated rural area where incomes trail Missouri averages. Way off

continued next page



Low out-of-state tuition lured Kara Ferguson, from Clarinda, Iowa, to Northwest Missouri State. She graduates this spring.

from preceding page

center in its home state, the university increasingly trolls for students in nearby Iowa and Nebraska, and it offers various ways for students from several midwestern states to qualify for in-state or reduced out-of-state tuition.

For senior Kara Ferguson, from Clarinda, Iowa, 35 miles away, Northwest was simply the best college bargain available. Senior Ryan Smith, from Council Bluffs, Iowa, 110 miles distant, says not only Northwest's price but also its size attracted him. He likes being at "kind of a big school" that is still small enough that, though he doesn't know all students by name, he at least recognizes most of them.

After cutting appropriations by 10.2 percent two years ago, Missouri has begun to restore some of the funding.

Smith also speaks highly of classes that are "not huge" and faculty members who go out of their way to help.

Hubbard expects no less of his faculty. He promotes the view that students are customers, so satisfying them is a paramount Northwest goal. Periodic surveys show that the university succeeds—mostly. But the square for student satisfaction on Hubbard's dashboard, while largely green, occasionally shows a little slice of cautionary yellow.

Northwest students complain about the usual things, such as parking. ("People just don't want to walk," Ferguson said.) A sore point for senior Leon Harden III, from Kansas City, Missouri, is often being the only black student in classes at a university where more than 95 percent of the students are white, and African-American enrollment is only 2.2 percent. "Some of

my friends came here and they didn't stay," he said, guessing that they were discouraged in part by the lack of racial diversity in Maryville as well.

Michael Hobbs, an associate professor of English and president of Northwest's faculty senate, says the faculty has its grumblers too—those who do not buy Hubbard's students-as-customers theory, his obsession with quality and the corporate-style goal-setting and number-crunching that go with it. But in his own dozen years at Northwest, Hobbs has seen a trend, as "even some who were resistant and skeptical began to see that there were some benefits in examining ourselves." So, he says, the whole campus now has pretty much bought into the habits of what Northwest promotes as its "culture of quality."

Even Northwest students, however vague on the details, pick up on that three-word mantra, which decorates comment cards and mailboxes placed here and there about the campus. They invite one and all to drop a line, pro or con, with or without signature, on anything about the university that has caught their attention. Most of the filled-out cards go directly to Hubbard, who says he reads them and passes them along to the relevant department heads to decide what, if any, action to take.

A 50-year-old horse chestnut tree standing where the new residence hall is to be built recently evoked a flurry of cards, with a vocal spare-the-tree faction suggesting that either the tree or the building site be moved. Hubbard named a committee to study options.

He takes it for granted that students



Northwest Missouri State Provost Kichoon Yang noted that the university spends more money on instruction, and less on administration, than many other campuses.

will sometimes use cards to carp about what they see as a boring class here, or an unfair teacher there. The president says that rather than reacting to random complaints, he reads the cards as he does all Northwest data—for trends. In just one case, he says, comment cards helped lead to an instructor's dismissal.

For all the detail at his finger tips, Hubbard avoids getting bogged down. An apple-cheeked, white-haired man with a neatly cropped beard, he is warm in person, generous with his time, and expansive, given to the big picture in his conversation. Recently, he gave the better part of an hour to an interview with a reporter for the campus newspaper, for instance, answering all questions at length, concluding with an invitation to call back with any follow-up queries.

Hubbard exudes the ease and confidence of a man who has done this job for almost a generation and, whatever his challenges of the moment, has put some of his biggest battles behind him. Ron Moss, a semi-retired Northwest management professor, says the faculty was initially wary of Hubbard because he came from a small, religious school—Union College, a Seventh Day Adventist college in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he had been president.

Hubbard's bachelor's and master's degrees come from another Adventist school, Andrews University in Berrien, Michigan. After a Ph.D. from Stanford, he worked as a pastor for the denomination in Asia for ten years.

Though Hubbard says he belongs to no church now, there remains something of the missionary about him, especially when it comes to quality. He arrived at North-

west preaching it, holding up successful for-profit corporations as examples to emulate. But, said Moss, "A lot of people on the faculty were not convinced that was the way the university should be going."

Northwest's problems came as a rude awakening for Hubbard. Shortly after arriving, he learned that Missouri's higher education department was brewing a plan to shut the university down. Enrollment was anemic, about two-thirds of today's 6,600, and deficits were running about \$1 million a year.

Hubbard says it took five years to stanch the red ink and ensure Northwest's survival. Meanwhile, he jeopardized his own, first by talking quality, something of a foreign language in academia at the time, and then by tightening standards for

Hubbard has seized on attrition in the non-academic ranks to eliminate, combine and redistribute jobs.

promotion and tenure. At that, he says, the already skeptical faculty erupted "in open rebellion" and voted no confidence in him. The university's governing board reacted by giving him a raise and a five-year contract.

Now Hubbard has a contract that will take him into mid-2009, when he will be 71. If the president holds true to form, what may be his last four years at Northwest will be anything but more of the same. Colleagues say he is always thinking of something new. They have learned to expect surprises, such as the announcement two years ago of his plan for Northwest to join the four-campus, 55,000-student, statewide University of Missouri system. This was no impulse on his part, he says, but something he had been talking up behind the scenes for years.

University of Missouri president Elson



Leon Harden III, from Kansas City, Missouri, is one of the few black students at Northwest Missouri State, where enrollment is 95 percent white.

S. Floyd embraced the idea for what the two men said would be the country's first voluntary combination of public universities. As the system's fifth campus, Northwest would gain access to some University of Missouri programs, they said, and the enlarged system would gain strength and political clout.

Both universities' boards endorsed the plan, but bills that would have made it a reality stalled in committees in last year's testily partisan, budget-dominated legislative session. For the current session, Floyd and Hubbard have set the merger plan aside in order to concentrate their legislative efforts on the overriding issue of funding.

More money for higher education seems unlikely, however. Missouri's new governor, Matt Blunt, soon after being inaugurated in January proposed a budget for the coming fiscal year that would hold the line on higher education spending.

That line has risen some. After the 10.2 percent cut two years ago, and some smaller hits immediately before and after, Missouri has begun to restore to its colleges and universities some of the money it has taken away. Northwest has now gotten back about half of the total of 14.8 percent it lost. However, even after a boost of \$700,000 this year, state support has dwindled to 46 percent of the university's current operating budget, from 52 percent just four years ago. To make up some of the difference, tuition for in-state undergraduates has increased from \$3,330 to \$5,325 in those same four years.

Hubbard saw to it that all of the new \$700,000 went toward Northwest's new

American Dream Grants for first-generation, low-income students who meet certain academic criteria. He claims these grants as another national first, because they cover not just full tuition but room and board as well for two years. After that, Hubbard says, recipients will be expected to take responsibility and borrow to finish their degrees. Among last fall's 1,182 full-time freshmen, 151 were American Dream students.

Hubbard professes a soft spot for them, having been a low-income, first-generation college student himself. He talks of working on farms and milking cows as a youth, and going to college largely because one teacher encouraged him.

While he talks, without missing a word, Hubbard reaches now and then into his pocket to check messages on his new "absolutely remarkable" BlackBerry. He and a few administrators, faculty members and students have been issued the gadgets to test his notion that the university might save about \$500,000 a year by giving them to everybody on campus and removing the phones from students' rooms.

That's pocket change compared to what Northwest stands to gain from Ventria Bioscience, a start-up developer of drugs made from plants. Hubbard was instrumental in persuading the company to leave Sacramento, California, for Maryville, to join the university in creating a new Center for Plant-made Pharmaceuticals. The move is scheduled for late this year, after the university refits a vacant industrial building for the company.

Hubbard describes an arrangement of mutual benefit, with Ventria employing



Michael Hobbs, president of the faculty senate, says some professors were skeptical of the "quality management" approach, but most now accept it.

students in its research and Northwest hiring some of the company's 13 scientists as part-time teachers, expanding its science offerings and taking a financial stake in the company.

Hubbard admits there's a risk, though he insists it is small because the university "vetted this company very carefully." But, he added, "If Ventria succeeds big time, substantial money would come to the university. When I say substantial, I'm talking millions of dollars."

Even with these new balls in the air, Hubbard is pitching quality as hard as ever, persisting in his habit of visiting every campus department once a year to review progress toward its particular quality goals.

Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, says there was "quite a blip" of enthusiasm in academia for "total quality management" in the early 1990s, with 40 or 50 colleges and universities embracing the idea. Most have since either limited its use or abandoned it altogether, he says. "It's a fairly rare phenomenon to be doing this whole hog," as Northwest does.

Hubbard's unusually long tenure at Northwest is key to his success in working quality "into the DNA of the institution," said Travis Reindl, director of state policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "This is something you just don't translate into a university overnight."

Twice in the last eight years Northwest has won one of the two to four awards for quality management given annually by a non-profit Missouri foundation.

The state awards are modeled on those a national organization gives each year in the name of Malcolm Baldrige, who helped to popularize quality theory while he was U.S. secretary of commerce from 1981 to 1987. Northwest has applied for one of these awards for two years in a row now.

The latest application ran to 50 double-column pages, beginning with discussion, diagrams and lists detailing Northwest's organization, values and processes. Finally came 100 charts coded in dashboard colors and showing the many ways the university measures itself against either its own goals or outside norms. Green (for "on target") predominated.

Hubbard draws special attention to the first chart, showing somewhere between

The university as a whole, and every department in it, sets measurable goals and constantly charts progress toward them.

50 and 60 percent of Northwest's upperclassmen scoring above the national average on the Educational Testing Service's Academic Profile test. That's important, he says, because freshmen enter the university scoring exactly at the national average on the ACT test. The improvement proves to him that students get "added value" from their Northwest educations.

Both of Northwest's applications have impressed the Baldrige organization enough that it sent teams of examiners to the campus for follow-up visits. But the university did not win either time.

But Northwest is not into quality for the recognition, Hubbard said. "We do it because it is the right thing to do for our students. We'll continue to do it even if these awards go away."

Still, the university is going to try for the Baldrige one more time, he said. "We like to win." ♦

Susan C. Thomson is a former higher education reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

By the Numbers

Northwest Missouri State University

Founded In 1905

Location

Maryville, Missouri, population about 10,600, about 90 miles north of Kansas City, Missouri, 140 miles southwest of Des Moines, Iowa, and 110 miles southeast of Omaha, Nebraska

Enrollment

6,600, including 5,500 undergraduates and 1,100 graduate students

Student body profile

68 percent from Missouri; 58 percent female; 95.5 percent white; 2.2 percent black; 1.2 percent Hispanic; 1.1 percent other

Full-time employees

675, including 238 faculty members

Largest enrollments

Business and Education

Average class size

22; 30 in laboratory sections

2004-05 operating budget

\$63.1 million

Annual tuition

\$5,325 for a full-time, in-state undergraduate

OTHER VOICES



Strategic Missive

Is the criticism of Lawrence Summers just smart marketing?

By David L. Kirp

WHEN HARVARD PRESIDENT Lawrence Summers wondered aloud whether “intrinsic aptitude” contributed to the paucity of women scientists and engineers, his critics had a field day. Sickening, sexist, clueless—those were among the more polite insults aimed his way. Summers initially defended his comment as a “provocation,” a sport at which he is expert. But that attempt at sangfroid made his antagonists mad, and his subsequent acts of presidential contrition only made them madder. During two “emergency” Harvard faculty meetings, the proud president was obliged to stand in the pillory as distinguished professors pelted him with the rhetorical equivalent of rotten apples. Later, the faculty of arts and sciences expressed a lack of confidence in Summers.

These events were as scripted and predictable as a Noh performance—in academe, you know you’re in trouble when your most prominent defender is Charles Murray of “Bell Curve” infamy. The stunner, though, was a public statement, issued by the presidents of Princeton, MIT and Stanford, calling Summers to task for his remarks.

The anti-Summers statement from the presidents of MIT, Stanford and Princeton sends a clear signal to disaffected women academics: Our universities value your contribution.

“The question we must ask as a society,” that statement reads, “is not, ‘Can women excel in math, science and engineering?’—Marie Curie exploded that myth a century ago—but, ‘How can we encourage more women with exceptional abilities to pursue careers in these fields?’” Summers’ observations about the power of “innate differences” might “rejuvenate old myths and reinforce negative stereotypes and biases.”

What is startling isn’t the substance of this message—it reflects the conventional liberal wisdom—but rather its source. Public chastisement of a fellow member of the presidential club is unprecedented. Academic leaders are generally allergic to controversy, since stirring the waters risks offending donors, which is why their declamations are usually so forgettable. But the

Summers spanking is hardly forgettable.

So what’s going on?

Partly it’s a matter of principle. There is no reason to doubt that these presidents are telling the truth as they see it. All three are scientists, and that gives them a certain claim to expertise. And two of them are women, who may well know at first hand the impact of Summers-style patronizing.

Yet academic leaders rarely say anything controversial without calculating the consequences. In this case they had everything to gain by speaking their minds. Their missive doubtless made them local heroes (Yale’s president, who didn’t sign the letter, was taken to task by 100 women scientists, mostly graduate students, at his home university).

Most likely the presidential trio didn’t fret overmuch about whether Summers would take the dressing-down personally. To speak out this way is “very rare, and it’s new,” said David Ward, president of the American Council of Education, “but in some ways Larry (Summers) himself has established the idea of being quite open and controversial.” Club members usually protect their own, but in this crowd Summers is about as popular as George Bush is among the leaders of “old Europe.” To borrow a line from old grade school report cards, he doesn’t work and play well with others. “You know, sometimes fear does the work of reason,” he told a *Guardian* reporter last fall. And when he came under fire, schadenfreude rather than sympathy must have been an irresistible temptation.

There is more to this story than principle and politics. It is also a tale about the blood-sport competition among institutions at the top of the academic heap.

Elite higher education is a classic winner-take-all game, and no school is more fiercely competitive than Harvard, which was recently ranked number one in the world by the *Times of London* and annually competes for top status in the crucially important *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. These rankings are how the score is kept. To win this game—to reach the top of those charts—requires a stable of academic superstars. Their presence, and the reflected glory they represent, is as critically important to a prestige-driven university like Harvard as Barry Bonds is to the San Francisco Giants.

If you pose Cicero’s classic question, *cui bono?*—that is, who benefits?—when the presidents of MIT, Stanford and Princeton bash Harvard in the name of principle, the answer is clear: those three schools are the big winners. Their presidents’ statement sends a clear signal to disaffected women academics: Our universities value your contribution.

When it comes to recruiting top-flight professors, this is a powerful message. Many of my female colleagues tell dispiriting stories about the impact of chauvinism on their careers. Why should they fight for respect at Harvard, where the old boys are still in charge, when they can go elsewhere and receive the unreserved welcome that they deserve? Nor is this just conjecture. Since l’affaire Summers began, the *Harvard Crimson* reports, “universities appear to have been stepping up efforts to recruit Harvard faculty members.” Caroline Hoxby, an African American economist, has confirmed that she is one of those being wooed—by Stanford.

To talk openly about how universities seize every opportunity to sell themselves is as *infra dig* in academe as to be “provocative” about biological cognitive differences. If the PR offices of these three schools are on the ball, they’ll be sending furious letters of denial. Shocked, shocked—but in an era when smart marketing is essential to win the game, the anti-Summers missive simply shows that these three presidents are doing their job. In this instance, doing good also turns out to mean doing well. ♦

David L. Kirp, a professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley, is the author of “Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education” (Harvard University Press), which has recently been issued in paperback.



Toward Continuous Improvement

Rebuilding the compact between higher education, the public and our elected officials

By Larry R. Faulkner

PUBLIC TRANSACTIONS concerning the development and operation of our nation’s universities, especially our public institutions, sometimes remind me of mud wrestling with the family treasures in an open shirt pocket. The universities win some of the rounds, but in every one we get dirtier, and we might not be able to find the valuable things again after each new tussle is over.

We are just not in the right game. There is too much risk that a mistake, by us or by public leaders, will be grievously damaging to long-term community interests. We need to change the game. We need rules that create a healthier environment for the public business of higher education. We need a new compact between the public, our elected representatives, and our institutions of higher learning.

Much easier said than done, not least because there is no one to define the public side of the compact. And because that is true, the responsibility for changing the environment rests with us, the leadership of American higher education. It needs an idea.

This is a big subject, worthy of long and serious conversations; but I offer five points that, in my view, must be on any agenda. Two are about recovering faith; two more about reducing fear; the last about gaining stability.

First, we must work to rebuild a broad understanding in the larger society and its leadership of what our institutions do, and how they establish—through their several

Academic leaders are generally allergic to controversy. Public chastisement of a fellow member of the presidential club is unprecedented.

missions—public benefits for a healthier present and future.

To a remarkable extent, folks see only one mission when they look at us. To a very great fraction of the American public, including most legislators I have encountered, we are strictly about undergraduate education. To much of Washington, we are about research and occasionally about graduate education. To other segments, our mission may be athletic entertainment, or the arts, or extension, or regional economic development, or libraries or cultural preservation.

The power of America's institutions of higher education lies in the total of what we do and how the parts fit together. Because the public and public leadership are not grasping that reality, they become frustrated by our segmented financial picture—about “why resources over there can't be used for my concern”—and they see us as afflicted by foolish lack of focus.

A related, very important matter is the loss of recognition for higher education's contribution to the common good. Over the past three decades, our work has been largely redefined in the public mind as yielding mainly private benefits, in the form of undergraduate and professional degrees having personal economic value. This one misconception is central to the erosion of support from state legislatures across the nation.

We must address these perceptions immediately and with effect. Our associations can help to organize national efforts, but there is local work to be done, too. The paired ideas of multiple missions and the common good deserve a place in nearly every Rotary Club speech, but they also merit delivery to audiences close to us, such as our students and their parents.

The second item in my five-point agenda is this: We must work to restore trust that we are genuinely committed to serving our students and our larger society and that we work daily with competence and quality.

With public leaders and elected officials, we have to do a better job of establishing regular contacts, engaging in honest, mutual development of long-term and short-term goals, frankly discussing financial tradeoffs, and reinforcing the balance of missions that we must undertake.

Now, I know that most of us think we do this, but in my experience, we really don't. Our contacts with public leaders are typically driven by a single issue or the exigencies of a legislative session. Greater texture is needed in the relationships, especially with key leaders. We also need to be thoughtful and collaborative in working toward that end, because it is not possible for every institutional president in most states to establish relationships such as I have described. Public leaders have many mouths to feed, and we must always respect that reality.

To build trust with the public at large, we need to sponsor accountability, not just to accept it grudgingly. We ought to help to define indices of performance that make sense, and we should help to found a credible reporting center. We need to be forthright about shortcomings, and we ought to embrace a culture of continuous improvement.

Third among my five points: We must work with public leaders and among ourselves to establish sound, credible mechanisms for continuing the national tradition of ready financial access to higher education by middle-class students.

Let us not underestimate the depth of fear that exists in the country over this one point, and let us not discount the threat to our democracy. In my judgment, the worry is not misplaced. Now, I realize that there is a well-documented misperception among the public concerning the facts about college costs—that on average the public thinks of college as costing two to three times what it actually does—but I also think there is plenty to be concerned about in the truth.

At the typical flagship public institution in America, the academic cost of attendance (mandatory tuition and fees) is now in the range of \$5,000 to \$7,500, or about 11 to 17 percent of median family income. If the trends of the past 15 to 20 years continue, the share would rise to something like 30 percent of median family income by 2020.

In our current system, middle-class families, representing perhaps one to three times the median family income, do not get much mitigation of these costs. The impact on these families of a large rise in cost of attendance as a share of income would be enormous; consequently, I do not believe that it would be allowed to happen. Political leaders would react by capping our charges and draining resources from our missions other than undergraduate education. These actions would inevitably degrade the quality of public-sector institutions and would cause a fractionation of quality in this country strictly along public-private lines. I do not need to go further into what such a result would mean socially and economically, given that the public institutions serve three-quarters of American students.

This is a serious problem, and it needs attention now. I believe that a solution can be achieved. That solution could also become the central point on which a new social compact is founded.

The key is to strive for a consensus among public leaders and the leaders of higher education concerning a target for the out-of-pocket academic cost of attendance at public institutions of various kinds as a fraction of median family income. This is what matters to people, and this is what will determine the evolution of public policy concerning higher education. Note the focus here. The conversation should be about what people actually have to pay to go to school. It should not be conflated with living costs, which can be addressed in various ways and may not be limiting to opportunity. If there are scholarship or grant programs, or if tax benefits exist, or if there are habits of discounting, these factors should be reflected in the out-of-pocket academic cost.

We need rules that create a healthier environment for the public business of higher education.

On the basis of information available to me, I cannot propose exactly where the target should be set, but my instinct says that for a flagship institution the upper limit should be something like 20 percent of the median family income. Of course, that would be 10 percent of twice the median family income, which is probably a better benchmark for the middle class than median income.

If consensus on the target can be achieved, the annual discussion with all players—institutional administrations, students, parents, governing boards, legislatures, executive leaders of state government, Congress, and relevant federal officers—can be consistently pointed toward realizing it through actions that are much more thoughtful and concerted than today's.

But I do need to be clear about something: The states will continue to have the definitive role here. A stable, healthy pattern can be achieved only if legislatures and governors make a sustained commitment to affordability with quality.

The fourth point in my agenda is this: We must find a way to make a college education seem essential and more reachable to the parents of the most talented students from lower-income families.

Over the past seven years, I have spent a good deal of time in Texas high schools as we have worked to use the state's “top ten percent” admission law to rebuild minority representation at The University of Texas at Austin. We have succeeded, I am glad to say. But my experience in something like a hundred schools—mostly urban, mostly minority dominated—has taught me something about the challenge that all of us face in elevating college-going rates of students from lower-income families. And that's important, not only from the standpoint of justice, but also because college-going rates of these students must be elevated to preserve even the current level of educated adult talent in our nation.

When I talk to a top-ten-percent audience in these schools, I am speaking to the best students, not the average ones. Most likely, they are the top three percent of those who entered in the ninth grade, because two-thirds of their entering class have already dropped out. Every single one of these students should be going to college somewhere. Only about a third does so.

Why does this dreadful waste of talent occur? For two reasons, I think: The students do not grasp the value of a college education to their future, and they do not believe us when we say that we can make college financially possible.

We in higher education must develop a more coordinated, more effective strategy to reach talented students from lower-income families. I do not have a recipe, but here are some elements that ought to be in the picture:

- Families, as well as students, have to be recruited. The attitude of impossibility runs deeper than the student.
- We need to identify strong talent in middle school and work with talented students and families to target college all through high school. Research shows that decisions about going to college are generally made before high school or early in high school.
- We need to help students and families to understand how the finances can be addressed much earlier than when the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form comes out in the student's senior year.
- We need to simplify the packaging of the finances. They are typically much too complex now to inspire confidence in these families, who are mistrustful of promises and debt.

There is a fifth and final point in my agenda: We must address costs. More specifically, we must mount serious, effective efforts to limit the *rate of growth* in the educational cost per student. It is in the range of 4.5 percent per year, a substantially inflationary figure, but more important, a figure significantly larger than the long-term growth rate of the economy.

We all know that there are good reasons for it: There is intrinsically high inflation in salary costs for our labor-intensive business built on rare talent, and there are progressively added costs associated with the growth of knowledge and the facilities required for teaching.

But it is very likely that a growth rate of 4.5 percent cannot be sustained indefinitely. Of course, we can reduce the growth rate of costs by degrading quality. That is not the answer. We need to look for ways to take that growth rate down while sustaining quality, so that whatever advances are made along that line can become broadly shared among us. This is hard, but it is important for the stability of our mission and our work. It merits serious initiative, both collaborative and local.

This is my five-point plan for rebuilding the compact between higher education, the public and our elected officials. But it still requires a willing effort on all sides. We in the universities must tell our story—that our institutions continue to serve our students and benefit our society at large; that we are striving to make a college education valuable, accessible and affordable—and we must plainly act toward those goals to the greatest degree that we can. After we demonstrate our commitment, we can hope that our public leadership—in homes, schools and statehouses across the land—will pick up the partnership once again, in the interest of America's future. ♦

Over the past three decades, there has been a loss of recognition for higher education's contribution to the common good.

Larry R. Faulkner is president of the University of Texas at Austin. This article was adapted from his 2005 Robert H. Atwell Distinguished Lecture, presented at the 87th Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education.

CUNY

from page 1

George Pataki and then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani—called the university's pervasive culture of remediation. "An institution adrift," is how former Yale President Benno Schmidt described CUNY after chairing a committee of external investigators. Some students had a catchy name for it, too: "Tutor U."

Five years ago, as a result, the university's highly politicized board of regents, by then including Schmidt, swept aside emotional protests from faculty and others and agreed to require, for the first time in three decades, that applicants for its bachelor's degree programs meet minimum scores on national standardized tests. Those who didn't would have to pass a

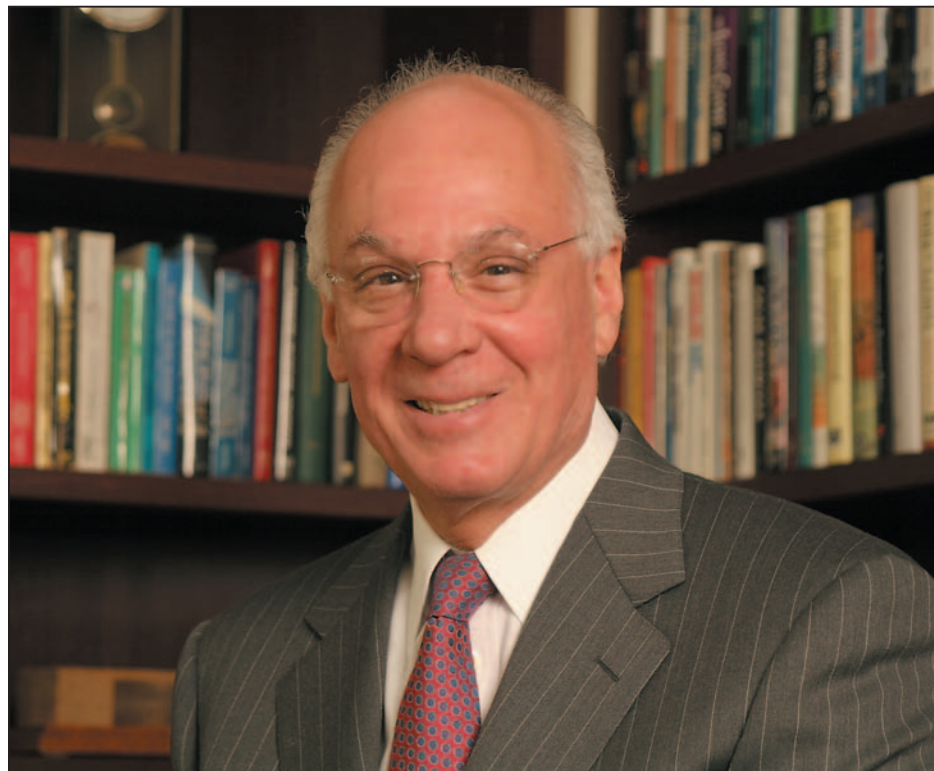
Enrollment has continued to rise for five years in a row at CUNY, despite the addition of admissions tests and tuition increases.

new skills test. And if they couldn't do that, they would be excluded from the system's four-year universities altogether until they could demonstrate that they were ready to do college-level work in math and English. Sophomores and community college graduates would have to pass the CUNY Proficiency Exam before being promoted, or allowed to transfer, to a senior college for their junior year.

The many opponents of the change, including Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, predicted that 46 percent of blacks and 55 percent of Hispanics would be blocked from getting a bachelor's degree. The shift, they said, was a betrayal of the words of Townsend Harris, founder



Ikhtiar Allen, an economics major at City College of New York, also is enrolled in the CUNY Honors College.



At the City University of New York, enrollment has increased, and academic standards have risen, since Matthew Goldstein became chancellor in 1999.

of what was later renamed City College: "Open the doors to all—let the children of the rich and poor take seats together and know no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect."

As it has turned out, the children of the rich and poor still do take seats together. Only City College, now the flagship of the 17 two- and four-year schools that make up CUNY, registered a decline by a few dozen in the number of entering freshmen, almost entirely because of cuts in a particular remediation program for disadvantaged students who did not meet regular admissions criteria. Enrollment actually went up 27 percent at Baruch College in Manhattan, an increase so dramatic that the school had to scramble to find enough space.

Enrollment has continued to rise for five years in a row at CUNY, despite not only the addition of admissions tests, but significant tuition increases and a new technology fee. (CUNY once charged no tuition, but this year students at the senior colleges are paying about \$4,250 in tuition and mandatory fees; community college students are paying about \$3,000.) The number of students in the university system, previously in decline, has gone up 16 percent in five years and today is at its highest level since 1975.

The quality of those students also has improved. At the five top senior colleges—Baruch, Brooklyn, City, Hunter and Queens—the average score of newly arrived students has climbed 168 points on the SAT and ten points on the state high school Regents' Exam in English. Among all freshmen enrolled this year, average SAT scores are 1040, compared to a low of 953 in 1997. The national average is 1026.

The average high school grade point average of entering freshmen is also up, and the proportion of freshmen who return as sophomores has

increased from 79 percent to 85 percent. And the number of students who come to CUNY from the best city high schools—Stuyvesant and the Bronx High School of Science—has soared 20 percent in five years.

"Those were scare tactics," Jay Hershensohn, vice chancellor for university relations, said about the dire warnings that minority enrollment would drop off. "You can call them what you want, but they were scare tactics." Whatever you call them, the predictions didn't come true.

By 2002, a report by the state education commissioner said the tighter admissions standards at CUNY had not significantly reduced minority enrollment in bachelor's degree programs. In fact, while their proportions of total enrollment had dropped slightly—from 23 percent to 21 percent for blacks, and from 26 percent to 23 percent for Hispanics—the actual numbers of black and Hispanic students are up. "If anything, you can argue that opportunities for higher education have increased despite the more selective admissions process," Dean Crook said.

That was when the state regents, who had originally voted only narrowly to impose new standards, reaffirmed the change unanimously. Schmidt declared that the institution adrift was now "the pride of the city." He said, "I know of no comparable gains in such a short time in any public university system in the United States." Neither did the heads of five other universities, including Ohio University and the University of Missouri, who conducted a review and pronounced the turnaround "not equaled in any other urban university that we know of."

The liberal Center for an Urban Future, a think tank often critical of Mayor Giuliani, praised CUNY's "vast improvements" and said it was a model for the nation. "When we set about changing CUNY, the naysayers said our reforms would not work," Governor Pataki said. "They were wrong." Even CUNY's teacher-training programs, so many of

whose students failed that the state threatened to shut them down, increased their passing rate from 62 percent to 93 percent on one certification exam, and from 71 percent to 95 percent on another.

Then came the *piece de resistance*: Last year, two students from CUNY were named Rhodes Scholars. "Yes, CUNY," was how the *Daily News* reported it. The university hadn't scored a Rhodes scholarship since 1991, never mind two in one year. To make the story even more compelling, both students were immigrants from the former Soviet Union: Eugene Shenderov from Brooklyn College, who had come to the United States after his immune system was damaged by the Chernobyl nuclear mishap, and Lev Sviridov from City College, whose journalist mother had to flee after exposing former KGB operatives. Sviridov was homeless for a time, sleeping under the George Washington Bridge and scrounging cans for money.

Months after the fact, university administrators still cannot contain their glee about their Rhodes jackpot. It was a gift from the gods of public relations, and before long Shenderov and Sviridov were being trotted out by CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein as the faces of the new CUNY—including at the launch last November of an eight-year, \$1.2 billion fundraising campaign, the largest ever at an urban public university. If he had tried that five years earlier, Goldstein said with some degree of understatement, "I'd have had a challenge on my hands." Half a billion dollars has already been raised toward the goal. The state and city have promised another \$1.5 billion.

CUNY needs the money. Its next challenge is to shore up its facilities. The panel of visiting presidents, as impressed as they

"When we set about changing CUNY, the naysayers said our reforms would not work. They were wrong."

**—NEW YORK GOVERNOR
GEORGE PATAKI**

were, said the school was clearly underfunded. Its Rhodes Scholars, Shenderov and Sviridov, complained that they were hindered in their research by the lack of up-to-date science equipment.

Of the money being raised, \$400 million will go toward new or renovated science labs. "CUNY's academic standards have marched forward, but its funding has lagged far behind," conceded Goldstein. But he said the lesson is that changes in perception—the same ones that are attracting better applicants—also mean that CUNY can, in fact, raise large amounts of money and take other steps for which it might otherwise not have had the backing. "We're trying to acquaint people with why investments need to be made after a university has shown a willingness and a determination to do things better than it's

done before," he said.

The chancellor has also been emboldened to take on the university's bureaucracy and faculty. He has proposed extending the trial time before considering a professor for tenure. In response to a report critical of a civil-service culture that "breeds centralization and paperwork" in CUNY's 700-employee central administration, he pared down the hierarchy from 13 deputies and vice chancellors to three: a chief academic officer, a chief operating officer, and a chief external affairs officer responsible for lobbying and public relations. And he abolished the system under which all CUNY presidents earned the same salary, differentiating them depending on

CUNY actually still has remediation. It just calls it something different and has pushed it somewhere else.

their performance and the size and success of the institution each one leads. The presidents are now evaluated annually instead of once every five years.

All of this is occurring on the back of a reversal in remediation—a wonky word that became the catchphrase for detractors who claimed that standards were being lowered on a massive scale. This is where perception comes back into play: CUNY actually still has remediation. It just calls it something different and has pushed it somewhere else. "I really do believe that the tests, and all of these standards, was for public relations. And [university administrators] get very angry when I say that," said Susan O'Malley, president of the CUNY Faculty Senate. On the other hand, she said, "It worked. It worked in the sense that it got us better press."

Suspensions about whether standards had improved as much as advertised could only have been heightened when, after only 27 percent of students passed, CUNY

reduced the required minimum score from 40 to 36 out of a possible 53 on the new remedial reading test given to entering freshmen. After the threshold was lowered, 60 percent passed. Even Giuliani, who supported it, said the test was too easy.

More than 90 percent of rising juniors pass the CUNY Proficiency Exam, which requires them to write long and short essays. Many get three tries, since only a quarter of the students pass on their first attempt. As of last summer, just 65 students out of the 83,260 who had taken the exam were removed from CUNY because they failed it three—and, in some cases (after filing an appeal), four—times. This despite free coaching workshops offered by the university.

The skills exams for entering freshmen and rising juniors have, "in some cases, raised standards," said O'Malley. "But you also have to look closely." Students can be exempted from taking those tests if they score at least 480 in verbal and 480 in math on the SAT or 75 on the New York State Regents Exam. "Some people feel that's not high enough," O'Malley said. Students who attended non-English-speaking foreign high schools or whose families are poor also can delay by one year passing the entrance test.

Even so, many of the students who do have to pass the test simply cannot. Of 6,000 students initially accepted in 2000, the first year the entrance tests were given, 600 failed. For them, CUNY provided free brief intensive workshops, after which 350 of the 600 were re-tested and passed. On the other hand, some of the students who failed the entrance test were graduates of State University of New York, or SUNY, community colleges and selective bachelor's degree programs at places like the University of Maryland. CUNY boasted that this showed how high its standards were; critics say it just proved the university was turning away perfectly good students for political purposes.

What is impossible to know is how many students now do not bother to apply to CUNY, put off by the higher stan-



Susan O'Malley, president of the CUNY Faculty Senate, thinks the new emphasis on testing and higher standards is "for public relations."

dards—or where the students go who fail the new entrance tests. "What would the diversity be if you weren't shutting people out?" asked Bill Crain, a professor of psychology at City College and chair of the Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee, who is opposed to standardized testing. "Every report indicates that tests like these tests are not valid. They don't predict success at CUNY. Even the SAT doesn't predict success."

Too much emphasis is placed on the testing, Crain said. "There's this mania over testing, more and more tests," he said. "Instead of a love of learning, it creates high-pressure anxiety over tests. I think our students are tested more than any other students in the country. It's souring learning."

Crain prefers that grades, course rosters, and letters of recommendation be used to judge applicants. "They should lean toward giving people opportunities," he said. "They should lighten up. Most colleges around the country provide remediation. If [students] have only one remedial need, let 'em in."

In fact, rather than getting rid of it,

CUNY has effectively driven remediation down the educational ladder to its community colleges and even to public high schools. Now remediation starts in the ninth grade under a hugely expanded college-preparation course in the city's schools. "It's more tax-efficient if a student's remedial needs can be addressed while they're in high school. You don't have to compensate when they're in college," said Selma Botman, who was brought in as executive vice chancellor in October to oversee these efforts. Forty-four percent of CUNY's student body comes from New York City high schools. "We have an inextricable connection with the public schools," Botman said.

"Universities historically have really ignored what happens in high school or even before high school," Chancellor Goldstein said. "And there has always been the sense that when students come to a university, they're prepared. Well, the fact is that solving some of the problems is much harder than just assuming that is the case."

The college-prep program, called College Now, was long constrained by turf wars between the university system and the public schools. But in the last five years it has grown from 9,100 high school students to 52,000 at 213 high schools, with a budget that has rocketed from \$2.7 million a year to \$20 million. Another program, CUNY Prep, offers free classes for high school credit for dropouts aged 16 to 18.

If, after that, a student still can't pass the entrance test for a CUNY senior college, he or she can take a one-semester transition course at a community college called Prelude to Success, then transfer to a four-year school by successfully taking the exam again. Or a student can stay in community college and then transfer to a senior college as a junior, assuming he or she can pass the CUNY Proficiency Exam.

CUNY also has other safety nets, including a new separate freshman orientation, seminars, and counseling for black men (a demographic conspicuous by its scarcity there, as at other schools), and a language immersion program for students

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Trends in Enrollment: Fall 1999 to Fall 2004

	FALL 1999	FALL 2000	FALL 2001	FALL 2002	FALL 2003	FALL 2004	PERCENT CHANGE 1999 TO 2004
Senior Colleges	132,922	132,308	133,856	140,618	142,408	144,827	9.0
Community Colleges	62,072	63,095	63,497	68,044	70,303	73,307	18.1
Total University	194,994	195,403	197,353	208,662	212,711	218,134	11.9

Enrollment of Undergraduates by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 1999 and Fall 2004

	1999	2004
	N	N
American Indian/Native American	301	294
Asian/Pacific Islander	21,893	27,566
Black	53,834	57,806
Hispanic	42,865	48,930
White	49,161	53,879
Total	168,054	188,475

SAT scores of enrolled CUNY students at the top-tier senior colleges:

1999:	1005
2000:	1017
2001:	1027
2002:	1047
2003:	1058
2004:	1063

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who do not speak English. “There’s no higher-education institution in America that has this level of complex support,” boasted Botman, a Middle East studies scholar and herself the daughter of an immigrant.

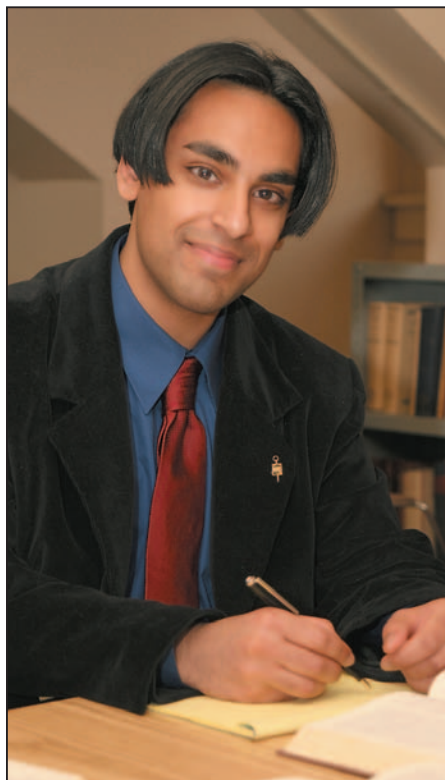
It’s all just remediation under a different name, O’Malley retorted. “I think that is what has happened,” she said. “But people don’t like to talk about that.”

What is impossible to hide is that their new role in remediation has helped bring CUNY’s six community colleges to the point at which they are “bursting at the seams,” as O’Malley put it. Led by Borough of Manhattan Community College, they have seen an average enrollment increase of 15 percent. Bronx Community College, on the former New York University campus in the Bronx, is using old dorm rooms as classrooms.

This phenomenon is not unique to CUNY. Community colleges today enroll 45 percent of all American undergraduates, a ten percent increase in just the last decade. But a trustees committee found that as CUNY’s senior colleges raise their entrance standards, even more students are opting to start at the community colleges.

This has had another effect: Eighty-six percent of freshmen entering the community colleges of what CUNY boosters extol as “the integrated university” now need at least some remedial work, more than double the national average. Only 28 percent graduate with a degree within five years, less than half the rate at SUNY community colleges. Almost 80 percent of CUNY’s community college students are minorities, 40 percent are older than 25, half are foreign born, and 60 percent grew up speaking a native language other than English.

The CUNY administration understandably is focused on the most selective of the senior colleges, and at these schools the SAT scores are rising, and remediation is no longer conducted. “That’s the good



Yosef Ibrahim, a Queens College senior, has been accepted by four prestigious law schools.

news,” said Dorothy Lang, a professor at the College of Staten Island and head of the CUNY Association of Scholars, a chapter of the National Association of Scholars. “The less-good news is that most students entering CUNY do not enter directly into these more selective of the CUNY four-year schools. Where the majority of students enter is at the two-year colleges and the less-selective four year colleges. And conditions at those other schools are not as positive. What was done is that those students who were in need of at least some remediation were told, ‘Well, you’re admitted to CUNY but you’ll need to go to a two-year program somewhere.’”

Meanwhile, students at community colleges complain it has been hard to transfer to CUNY four-year colleges. Faculty at the four-year colleges, in turn, complain that community college graduates arrive unprepared in core subjects. (In fact, the transfers have less than a quarter of a point difference in their grade point averages compared to students who took the traditional route.) CUNY is now working to align course content and requirements. In January, Governor Pataki proposed a bonus of \$250 to CUNY for every student who manages to actually earn a two-year associate’s degree within two years.

The community colleges are not the only place where CUNY has a graduation problem. Only 43 percent of its bachelor’s degree candidates graduate within six years. That’s an improvement from 2002, when barely 39 percent succeeded in completing college. Only 35 percent of blacks graduate. Nationally, about 63 percent of full-time university students graduate within six years.

The worst graduation rates are at CUNY colleges like Medgar Evers, which are not considered in the system’s top tier. The school’s graduation rate puts it 109th out of New York State’s 113 public and private universities and colleges, with fewer than 18 percent of its bachelor’s degree candidates receiving one within six years. CUNY officials say all but about 20 students at Medgar Evers are enrolled in associate’s degree, not bachelor’s degree, programs, making it hard to draw conclusions from these figures.

Like other CUNY colleges, Medgar Evers has seen enrollment increases—the number of students is up 14 percent to about 5,000, one of the biggest jumps in CUNY—and officials are now turning their attention to improving its campus in Brooklyn with a new \$155 million academic complex now under construction.

Crook, the institutional research dean, said CUNY as an urban system has special challenges. A third of its students are part-time. Almost three-quarters attend part-time at some point of their careers at CUNY. Thirty percent are parents. Still, the university set up a task force in February to examine the graduation problem.

CUNY officials would rather talk about the program likely to produce the next new faces for its glossy color brochures: the CUNY Honors College, which now enrolls more than 1,000 students, toward a goal of 1,300. Its first students graduate this spring



CUNY Honors College student Diana Esposito plans to enter a master’s degree program at the University of Michigan.

and head off to top graduate schools and jobs at major corporations.

To be accepted to the Honors College, students need a combined 1350 on the SAT. In exchange, they get free tuition, laptops, theater tickets, and private academic instruction. More than 1,400 students applied for the first 200 seats—some against the wishes of their teachers, friends and parents.

“My decision to go a CUNY school was met with some confusion from my peers,” said Yosef Ibrahim, a graduate of the prestigious Stuyvesant High School. “At the time, City University had a rather poor reputation.” But a CUNY reception held for high-achieving applicants “convinced me that this wasn’t some kind of fly-by-night program, but that they were really committed to changing the reputation of the university. I thought it would be better to be a pioneer in this program than to just be another number someplace else.”

Ibrahim, who is graduating from Queens College this spring with a double major in philosophy and political science, has been accepted to law school at Cornell, George Washington University, Boston University and Fordham. He said he has no regrets. “Because the administration is so committed to the program, where students at other schools might only see their presidents and chancellors once or twice as distant figures in their careers, I’ve met with Chancellor Goldstein probably 50 times. He wrote a recommendation for me for graduate school.”

Ikhtiar Allen, another Honors College student, said his father was against his going to CUNY. “He said, ‘No one knows about it.’ But I went for it. It was the image of CUNY at that moment he was worried about. Honors College, sure, but it’s still CUNY. That was the stereotype about CUNY at that time.” An economics major at City College, Allen said he, too, is happy to have taken the risk. He is graduating to a job in the prime-brokerage department at Bear-Stearns.

“People look at me funny” when they hear CUNY, said Diana Esposito, who attends Brooklyn College under CUNY’s

honors program. “I try to say I’m from the Honors College of CUNY,” not just CUNY. Esposito is headed for a master’s program in Middle Eastern studies at the University of Michigan.

Those first Honors College students were concerned about one thing, said Laura Schor, dean of the program: “Would people recognize their degree. And they have found that they do. Despite the gloom and doom that was surrounding us, despite the very real problem with under-prepared students, CUNY has always had a very strong faculty. So when the leadership said let’s make our expectations higher, the faculty was there. Some were skeptical, some were doubting, some were not sure. But after teaching the students once or twice, the faculty became thrilled that you can have great classes again. You can expect students to write cogent papers. So it turned around quickly.”

It has helped turn CUNY around, too. The Honors College “has had an enor-

Of 6,000 students initially accepted in the first year the entry tests were given, 600 failed.

mous impact, there’s no question,” Schor said. “These students would not have applied to CUNY if there had not been an Honors College.” Other students pay attention, too. “Students in high school hear about the CUNY Honors College,” said Executive Vice Chancellor Botman. “They know of (top) students who have chosen CUNY over other colleges. The entire campus is elevated as a result.” And, as with the fundraising campaign, “If we had done the Honors College seven or ten years ago, I think people would have laughed at us,” said Goldstein. ♦

Jon Marcus is executive editor of Boston Magazine, and also covers U.S. higher education for the Times of London.