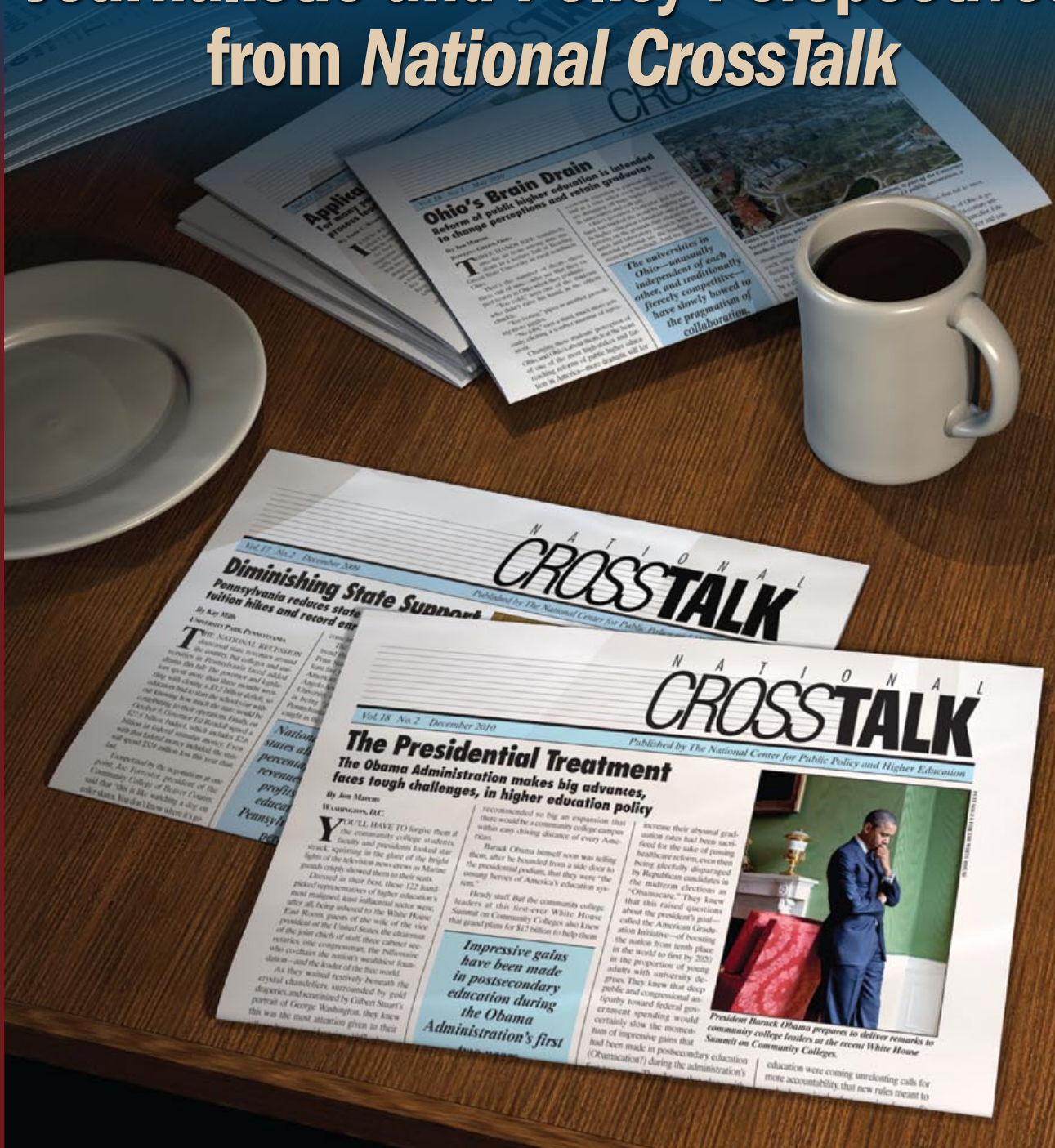


AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Journalistic and Policy Perspectives from *National CrossTalk*



Vol. 17, No. 2, December 2009
Diminishing State Summits
Pennsylvania reduces state tuition hikes and record enrollment

Vol. 18, No. 2, December 2010
The Presidential Treatment
The Obama Administration makes big advances, faces tough challenges, in higher education policy

Impressive gains have been made in postsecondary education during the Obama Administration's first

President Barack Obama prepares to deliver remarks to community college leaders at the recent White House Summit on Community Colleges.

**AMERICAN
HIGHER EDUCATION:**
Journalistic and Policy Perspectives
from *National CrossTalk*

Edited by William H. Trombley
and Todd Sallo

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**Dedicated to
William H. Trombley
(1929-2009)**

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Introduction

IN THE FIRST DECADE of the 21st century, the nation, the states, and colleges and universities began to grapple with the challenges of globalization, changing demography, the implications of the digital era, and of a less expansive public sector. Although not a transformative period for higher education, the decade saw significant innovations in teaching and learning, intense policy ferment, and debates over the future of colleges and universities and their roles and responsibilities in American society.

Parts one and two of this book describe several of the most interesting and significant developments in higher education, and in public policy, reported by leading journalists in the field of higher education. In part three, observers of American higher education comment on critical issues facing colleges and universities, the states and the nation. Most of the chapters appeared in their original form in editions of *National CrossTalk*, a publication of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Most of these articles were published between 2000 and 2011. Where appropriate, brief updates of these stories have been appended. The articles selected for this book focus on issues that remain relevant to policy and practice. The chapters describe, explain and interpret key events and issues as they were experienced, observed and debated.

Part one, Institutions and Innovations, focuses on how colleges and universities, new and old, engaged in new approaches to education. The first three chapters describe innovative colleges founded in earlier eras (St. John's, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, and Berea College), which have been sustained, though not widely imitated. The new century brought new designs and new institutions of higher education as reflected in the creation of the Florida Gulf University, Olin College, the University of California's Merced campus, the University of Minnesota at Rochester, and Western Governors University and its extension and adoption by the state of Indiana. Renewed emphasis on strengthening the readiness of students for college and the preparation of teachers is reflected in the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence and by the spread of early colleges. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship program advanced a new model for teacher training that was implemented by universities in several states.

Community colleges—the nation's largest sector of higher education—produced some of the most important innovations in higher education of recent years. These institutional and statewide initiatives are described in the chapters on Rio Salado and LaGuardia colleges, and the Virginia community colleges. In addition, several chapters describe past and current work of the Center for Academic Transformation. Working with a diverse set of institutions and their faculties to demonstrate the potential of courses redesigned to incorporate interactive technology, the Center has demonstrated how colleges and universities can implement cost-effective approaches to student learning. These methods are described in the chapters on Cal Poly Pomona, and on institutions that serve large numbers of underprepared students, including Virginia Tech and several Tennessee community colleges (including Cleveland State Community College, Northeastern State Community College, Jackson State Community College, Columbia State Community College, and Chattanooga State Community College).

In the last half of the decade, America's problem of low rates of college completion attracted increasing attention of educators, policymakers and foundations. Two chapters on the efforts to improve retention and completion rates include the North Carolina initiative to address higher education's "dropout" problem, and the University of New Mexico's program to bring dropouts back to college. In addition, the declining male enrollment in America's colleges and universities and its implications drew increasing attention in the media and among institutions of higher education. The challenges of the new century brought new leadership strategies and approaches at the California State University, Northern Kentucky University, and Denver's Metropolitan State College.

Part two of this book shifts to public policy issues, with an emphasis on states confronted with economic volatility, demographic shifts, pressures to improve educational outcomes and the impact of budgetary constraints. The topics of this section range from the floundering of California higher education—often held up as the model state higher education system in the post World War II era—to innovations in public finance, including performance budgeting in South Carolina and Tennessee. Several chapters describe experiments with state vouchers in Colorado, new tuition policies in Illinois,

and innovations in student financial assistance by Georgia, Oregon and Indiana. The next chapters offer accounts of initiatives by Ohio, Virginia and Kentucky to increase college participation in support of state economic development. Modifications of state governance structures and processes by Florida and Virginia are described in the following chapters. The systemwide “efficiency and effectiveness” campaign at the University System of Maryland is highlighted in the next chapter, followed by accounts of the responses of four states, Florida, California, New York and Pennsylvania, to economic distress and to financial pressures on higher education budgets. The evolving and highly volatile national and international context for higher education policy is represented by accounts of the British and Irish experiences and of the Obama administration’s first two years.

Part three, Perspectives, consists of opinion and commentary by higher education leaders and experts on issues that continue to resonate today. This section begins with the earliest article in the volume, Clark Kerr’s 1992 reflections on the recent past and the future of American higher education, the economy, changing demographics, the civic values that were the underpinning of the mid-20th-century expansion of higher education, and the California experience. This is followed by chapters by Michael Kirst and David Spence addressing the college readiness of high school graduates and the restructuring of high school curriculum to strengthen preparation and reduce college remediation. David Breneman, writing at the end of a decade that was bookended by recessions, places economic adversity in historical context.

Basic issues around core higher education values are raised by Robert O’Neil’s essay on academic freedom in the aftermath of September 11, 2001; in an interview with Derek Bok on the commercialization of higher education research; and by David Kirp’s article on the implications of the declining proportions of tenured and tenure-track college professors. The 1998 interview with University of Phoenix founder John Sperling preceded a decade when Phoenix and other for-profit higher education institutions emerged as the most rapidly growing sector of American higher education. Gene Maeroff’s essay on online learning was drawn from his widely read book on that topic. Robert Atwell’s essay articulates explicitly the theme of leadership that informs each section of this volume. This is followed by Donald Heller’s critique of merit aid addressing the continuing controversy about the appropriate role of student financial assistance.

The chapter by Joni Finney and Robert Zemsky proposes fundamental curricular restructuring to improve academic performance and cost effectiveness. Brian Noland’s essay follows by describing the components of a state policy agenda and West Virginia’s experience in articulating and implementing a “public agenda” for higher education. This section concludes with three chapters offering external perspectives on American higher education. Anne Roark recounts her experience as a parent negotiating the college admissions process; John Immerwahr summarizes two decades of research on the evolving views of the American public on colleges and universities; and Anthony Carnevale and Michelle Melton assess the demands that the knowledge-based global economy place on American higher education.

National CrossTalk was established by William Trombley, who came to the National Center as senior editor after a long and distinguished career in journalism, principally at the *Los Angeles Times*. Bill believed that the scholarly and analytic research that public policy centers undertake could be powerfully augmented by journalistic accounts of important developments and their implications for policymakers, institutions, students, faculty and others. We agreed at the outset that *National CrossTalk* would not be a house organ or newsletter focused on or promoting the National Center, but a set of eyes and ears with outstanding journalists independently reporting and interpreting key events and developments for the National Center and for our readers, and as a forum for policy debate. The quality and the extensive readership of *National CrossTalk* is primarily the result of Bill Trombley’s editorial leadership and the talented writers he enlisted. Bill was responsible for the basic organization of this volume and for selecting the chapters, until his death in 2009. The book was completed by his long-time colleague, Todd Sallo, who had worked with Bill on this project, and in editing and producing *National CrossTalk* since its inception. The book’s front cover and page layouts were designed by Mott Jordan, who worked on *National CrossTalk* for many years. Mae Kaven, who also worked on *National CrossTalk* over the years, reviewed the final copy of this book. Heather Jack, another of Bill’s former colleagues, previously the National Center’s first director of communications, served as project director and also played a critical role in bringing this volume to completion.

The National Center is grateful to the authors of these chapters and to all those who contributed to *National CrossTalk* over the years. We dedicate this book to the memory of our friend and colleague, William Trombley.

—Patrick M. Callan

Institutions and Innovations



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Technological Transformation

An ambitious effort...

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Keeping Them in College

East Carolina University's efforts to improve retention and graduation rates

By Don Campbell

GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

NEARLY A THOUSAND incoming freshmen and anxious parents are crammed into East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium on a steamy hot morning in late June.

Don Joyner, ECU's associate vice chancellor for admissions and advising, is pacing from one end of the stage to the other, microphone in hand, doing a dead-on imitation of a fire-and-brimstone television preacher exhorting the faithful in a high-pitched twang.

He's deep into a well-practiced recitation of what it takes to succeed in college—get involved in campus activities, use the library, learn some basic study skills, have realistic expectations—beginning with commandment number one: "Go to class."

"Let me tell you what's going to happen to some of you," Joyner shouts. "You're going to break up with your boyfriend or your

thing else. You've got to get over your depression! You can't use that as an excuse... because this place can be unforgiving!" Wide-eyed parents and students are cackling one moment and nodding their heads solemnly the next, mesmerized by a

Increased awareness of the dropout problem is leading to demands for increased accountability in higher education across the nation.

popular and locally famous ritual that Joyner performs in orientation sessions seven times each summer. His tough-love message for new students is just one weapon in an innovative arsenal that East



East Carolina University tries to involve new students like track and field athlete Valeria Moore in as many non-classroom activities as possible in their first few weeks on campus.

Retention and graduation are two of the hottest topics in higher education these days, as governing boards, accrediting agencies, and state and federal lawmakers

College dropout rates are not declining noticeably—and are rising in some cases—despite a wide array of programs aimed at keeping students enrolled.

A Quiet Counterrevolution

St. John's College teaches the classics—and only the classics

Photos by Steve Northup, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

FROM THE OUTSIDE, the Santa Fe campus of St. John's College looks not unlike a lot of other small, liberal arts schools. Located on 250 acres high above New Mexico's capital city, the campus consists of a cluster of two- and three-story adobe-style buildings, designed to blend in with the area's southwest architecture. T-shirt and jeans-clad students congregate outside the student union, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Most of them look desperately in need of a good night's sleep. Nothing unusual there.

But inside those buildings, St. John's is staging a quiet counterrevolution. Defying educational trends that emphasize multiculturalism and technical know-how, St. John's teaches the classics—and only the classics, insisting that they still are and should be the basis of a college education.

One morning last fall, freshman Anna Canning stood, chalk in hand, at the blackboard in front of her dozen or so classmates. Following Euclid's proof, she created an equilateral pentagon around a circle—without using outside measuring tools. "I've never really liked math," Canning, of Eugene, Oregon, said afterwards. But because the class had started with the very basics—What's a point? What's a line?—math wasn't so threatening, she said. And it was a lot more interesting. "Being able to see where things are coming from is very different than reading a textbook that says, 'This is *this* way.'"

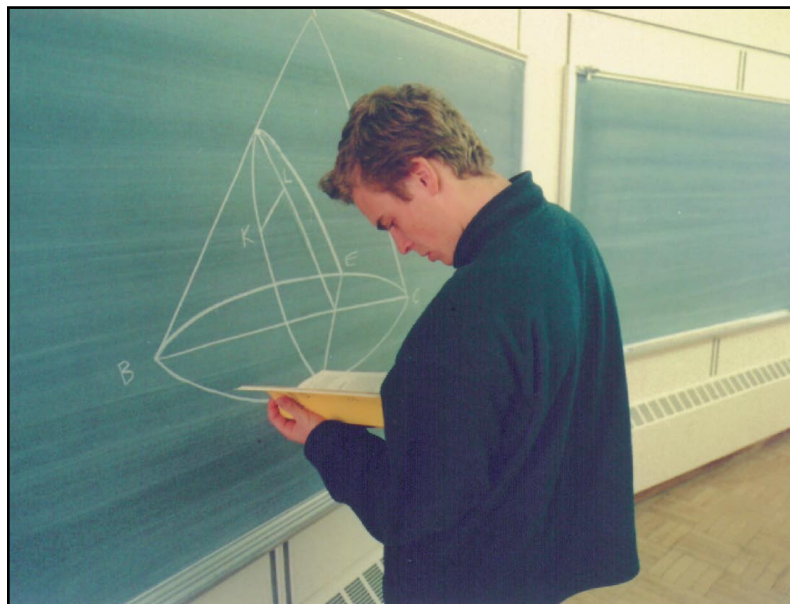
That's a sentiment heard over and over again from St. John's students, or "Johnnies," as they are known, who are taught not to take anything for granted. The tacit "because I said so" justification so often evident in higher education classrooms and texts does not make the grade at St. John's.

"St. John's is not committed to any notion of progress in history," said James Carey, who serves as dean of the school's Santa Fe campus (St. John's also has a campus in Annapolis, Maryland; each campus has 400 to 425 undergraduate students and another 80 to 100 graduate students). "We don't rule out the possibility that along with some learning of things in time, there's a forgetting of things that have already been learned."

Consider: Could you explain why the earth revolves around the sun? Write a four-voice counterpoint composition according to rules devised by a 17th-century composer? Discuss whether Aristophanes was justified in his criticism of Socrates? Prove the mechanical advantage that pulleys provide?

You could if you were a graduate of St. John's.

"The word 'liberal' comes from 'liberty,'" said Carey. "And liberal education is meant to be freeing." Freeing



Matthew Burritt works on a math problem at St. John's College, where the study of mathematics begins with basic questions like, "What's a point? What's a line?"

from what, exactly? From preconceived notions and the prejudices of the day, Carey said. Thus the curriculum, what St. John's refers to reverently as "The Program," consists almost solely of the great books of Western civilization—and it is mandatory for all students.

Textbooks—the middlemen of academics—are conspicuous by their absence. So are a lot of other things, like professors (teachers are called "tutors"), lecture halls (there aren't any lectures), majors (the curriculum is preset), and tests (students are evaluated on class participation and original papers; students see their grades only upon request). In Santa Fe, there is also no gymnasium and just 15 school-owned computers.

At St. John's, everything is secondary to the texts. And these are not simple texts.

Anna Canning and her fellow freshmen are starting with the Greek philosophers, historians and mathematicians: Homer, Sophocles, Herodotus and Euclid, among others. Next year, they'll move on to Renaissance thinkers: Shakespeare, Aristotle, Machiavelli and Copernicus. As juniors, they'll take on the works of the 17th and 18th centuries: those by Cervantes, Molière, Descartes, Newton, Hobbes, Rousseau and Mozart. And finally, in their senior year, they'll tackle 20th-century authors: Melville, Yeats, Dostoevsky, Freud, Heidegger and Einstein. And

"The word 'liberal' comes from 'liberty,' and liberal education is meant to be freeing."

—James Carey, dean of St. John's Santa Fe campus



St. John's students read few feminist authors because, says College Dean James Carey, "to build an education upon the desire to represent as many perspectives as one can is problematic."

that's just a sampling.

By the time she graduates, Canning and her classmates will have completed four years of math, two years each of ancient Greek and French, three years of laboratory science, one year of music and four years of philosophy, history and literature, as well as a semester of visual arts. (The visual arts program is offered in Santa Fe but not in Annapolis.) In the process, they will have digested classic works by more than 100 authors whose writings span nearly 3,000 years of Western history. Reading these works in chronological order, the thinking goes, students not only learn facts and ideas; they learn the process by which those facts and ideas accrued.

And because all students must study all subjects, they can see the links—and the gaps—between them. "There's no academic place to hide," said John Agresto, president of the Santa Fe campus. "It takes a kid to say, 'I want to be smart in all the areas a person can be smart.'" Some schools boast about the number of students who graduate with straight A's. Agresto brags about just the opposite: "We have only graduated four straight-A students in 30-odd years." That, he said, is partly because St. John's doesn't stoop to grade inflation, and partly because it is virtually impossible to be good at all the subjects students are required to take at St. John's.

No wonder the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* describes St. John's as "perhaps the most intellectual college in the country." And no wonder, too, that the attrition rate at St. John's is more than 30 percent. Officials acknowledge that St. John's is not for everybody. But for students who like to read, and talk about what they read, it's nothing short of collegiate heaven.

"It was like, books? All we do is read? That's my thing!" exclaimed Katy Christopher, a sophomore from Gunnison, Colorado, recalling her reaction when she first learned

about St. John's. As is the case for about 40 percent of her classmates, Katy did not apply anywhere but St. John's—a choice she has never regretted. "Being able to read all the time and talk to interesting people is so much fun," said Katy. "I go home and think, 'Well, gosh, I can't really have a conversation about Aristotle here!'"

"People at home just don't think that much," Katy continued. "They may not be stupid," she allowed, "but they just don't think." And to a Johnny, not thinking is, well, *unthinkable*.

That St. John's turned into a haven for intellectuals is little more than an accident of history—the silver lining to a rather ugly academic cloud looming over the school. St. John's was founded in Annapolis in 1696 as King William's School (it became St. John's in 1744), and for more than two centuries it limped along, distinguished primarily, according to Dean Carey, by its lacrosse team.

But during the Depression, St. John's lost its accreditation. Subsequently, the board of directors turned to educational reformers Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, hired them as president and dean, respectively, and gave them carte blanche to design a new curriculum. Unbound by the rivalries inherent in the academic departmental system, the two men were free to design an integrated system based upon the great books of Western civilization. About two-thirds of the authors included in the newly unveiled 1937 curriculum remain part of it today.

In 1964, rather than increase enrollment in Annapolis, the school opened the Santa Fe campus. Students can, and often do, transfer between the two campuses, which maintain the same undergraduate curriculum. (St. John's also offers a master's degree in liberal studies and, in Santa Fe, in Eastern classics, too.)

Unlike many top-flight liberal arts colleges, St. John's isn't all that hard to get into: The school accepts 75 to 80 percent of applicants, primarily based on three written essays and, to a certain extent, grades. There is no application fee, and standardized tests, like the Scholastic Assessment Test, are optional. About three-quarters of the enrolled students ranked in the top half of their high school class, but only one fifth graduated in the top tenth.

School officials said that's because they're less concerned that the applicant show a body of accumulated knowledge than a true desire for attaining it. And more and more students are indicating that desire; applications to the Santa Fe campus have increased more than 40 percent over the past decade, and they're up in Annapolis, too. About one-

The curriculum, what St. John's refers to reverently as "The Program," consists almost solely of the great books of Western civilization—and it is mandatory for all students.



The 250-acre St. John's College campus sits on a hilltop overlooking Santa Fe, New Mexico. A second campus is in Annapolis, Maryland.

fourth of each freshmen class is transfer students—who decide to enroll despite the fact that St. John's won't accept credits from other institutions.

This year, freshman Paul Obrecht of Wheaton, Illinois, was one of those transfers. Why was he willing to start over? "At state schools, the goal is to prepare yourself for a career, and the diploma is a badge," said Obrecht, who majored in education at the University of Illinois but dropped out after two years. "These classes call upon you to synthesize everything you've learned up to that point. It's a good opportunity to hone your thinking skills."

St. John's believes the key to honing those skills is discussion. So instead of professors, classes are led by "tutors," whose job is to engage the students in active learning. Don't be fooled by the humble title, though: Almost all of St. John's tutors have earned Ph.D.s, many from the world's leading academic institutions.

But according to the school's philosophy, even the most educated scholars remain advanced students at best. So, at St. John's, teaching is less about answering questions than it is about asking them. Even then, tutors try to limit their input. "Am I being too directive?" tutor Michael Bybee asked his "Hamlet" class recently, after he had suggested a course of thinking. Not a question you are likely to hear very often at other colleges—at least not from a teacher.

And while professors at other academic institutions are encouraged to specialize, tutors at St. John's are required to lead classes outside their fields of study. Over the past 33 years, for instance, tutor Ralph Swentzell has taught every single class St. John's offers, with the exception of French. The policy, said Swentzell, keeps tutors on their academic

toes. It's easy, he said, to lose empathy for your students if you lecture in the same subject year after year. "But when you're forced to be a student again," he said, "you pick up a tolerance which I think most college professors have lost."

St. John's also eschews the usual "publish or perish" attitude. Many tutors, Swentzell among them, have never published at all. Instead, they are evaluated on the strength of their teaching.

That teaching takes place in small, stark classrooms, which consist of a table encircled by 20 or so chairs. There is usually a blackboard, and only sometimes a clock, which, despite the lengthy and intense two- and three-hour classes, doesn't seem to bother anyone. Computers are relatively rare; computer classes are non-existent.

Even the science labs are pretty bare-bones. "But there's a reason for that," said sophomore Heather Davis of Easton, Maryland. "We're repeating experiments that have been done by the founders of science." They didn't have a lot of fancy high-tech equipment. What they did have was basic curiosity and intellectual reasoning—and that's what St. John's is attempting to foster, Davis said.

Part of the learning process is acknowledging intellectual failings. So, at St. John's, it is not at all unusual for students to 'fess up in front of their peers. "I don't get it," one student announced unabashedly at the beginning of her senior math class, which was studying Einstein. Like eager rescue workers, her classmates rallied to her aid, requesting that she pinpoint the source of her confusion so they could better assist her.

This skill—the ability to listen and engage in discussion, to work together toward intellectual growth—is a top priority at St. John's. "We try to develop habits of civility and rationality and discourse," said Carey.

While their dress can be described as informal at best (and sloppy at worst), students maintain a semblance of decorum by addressing each other in class as "Mr." and "Ms." And while "like," the '90s version of "um," shows up frequently during freshmen seminars ("Aristotle, he was, like, pretty hard, like, on Socrates..."), by the time they've reached the junior and senior level the students are noticeably more articulate, their comments more thoughtful. By that time, too, it is rare to find students interrupting each other, and when they do, they are quick to apologize. They seem less interested in appearing smart than in



President John Agresto frequently is called upon to defend the St. John's "Great Books" curriculum, which has changed only slightly over the years.

becoming smart.

And “smart,” according to St. John’s, doesn’t mean understanding the latest software or being able to predict the stock market’s future. What it means is being able to discern what is true from what is not. “Truth is an issue for us,” Carey said. Other issues that remain at the core of the St. John’s experience: What is a good life? What is a just regime? What is nature? What is God?

“Clarity about these questions is what we’re aiming at,” Carey said.

Indeed, at a time when the nation’s colleges and universities are struggling to broaden their appeal by offering unique specialty courses designed to attract a wider cross-section of students, St. John’s remains committed to its unswervingly intellectual, rigorous and Western-based approach.

Twenty-five years ago, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article about St. John’s College. According to St. John’s President Agresto, that article could be published today virtually unchanged. While some schools might be embarrassed by such an admission, Agresto, who has had to defend the St. John’s curriculum against critics who attack it as narrow and male-dominated, said, “I think that’s a good testimony to our steadiness.”

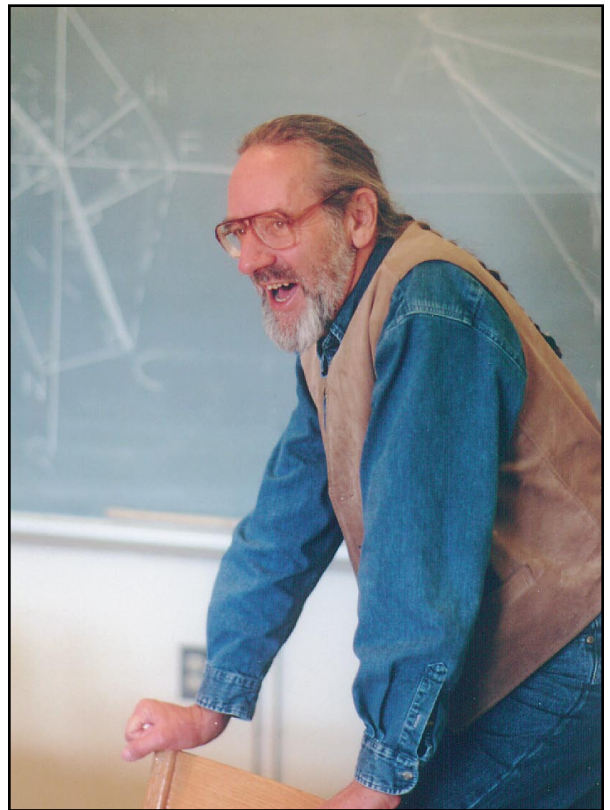
No one denies that most of the works read at St. John’s were written by white men—dead white men at that, since the program features very few late 20th-century books. Virginia Woolf and Flannery O’Connor have made the cut, but Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison, for instance, have not. Agresto said there is a reason for that: The works read at St. John’s have stood the test of time, and have had a lasting effect upon society.

Those who advocate multiculturalism, Agresto said, claim they’re doing so in the name of diversity, when actually they come armed with a specific social and political agenda. “Multiculturalism has been used by ideologists masquerading as educationalists for decades now,” charged Agresto. “And we’re not going to do that.”

Critics who suggest the school discriminates by excluding female and minority authors have got it all wrong, Agresto said. By choosing works based solely on their merits, St. John’s treats women and minorities more equitably, not less so, he argued. “Women need to know what men have known all these years,” Agresto said. “No sense giving lesser authors to the women and great books to the men.”

Carey concurred. “We wouldn’t be inclined to read someone because he or she represents a group that is disenfranchised,” he said. “To build an education upon the desire to represent as many perspectives as one can is problematic.”

Interestingly, female Johnnies accept the rationale without complaint. “Most of what we read is written by white men—there’s no doubt about that,” said sophomore Heather Davis. But she vigorously defended the curriculum.



Tutor Ralph Swentzell has taught every subject except French during a 33-year career at St. John’s.

“The point of these great books is to read and appreciate them regardless of sex or ethnicity,” she said, adding, “I’m not missing out on anything I won’t be able to get my hands on after I leave.”

And while her mother was skeptical because of the preponderance of white male authors taught at St. John’s, senior Carisa Armendariz of El Paso, Texas, said she thought it would help her function when she graduates and has to maneuver through a male-dominated society. “I’m learning to think from a white male viewpoint,” said Carisa, who is Hispanic. “And I think that’s going to be a good tool for me.” (Minorities make up about ten percent of the student body at each campus.)

Occasionally, students do study modern works of fiction by women or minorities, either in eight-week junior and senior electives called “preceptorials” or in student-organized reading groups. The school’s small bookstore maintains a section devoted to modern fiction, where sophomore Aaron Mehlhaff of Binghamton, New York, and Tommy Thornhill of San Rafael, California, were browsing one afternoon last fall. They admitted they rarely found time to read anything beyond their schoolwork, but “you can dream,” said Thornhill, longingly fingering a couple of trade paperbacks. The only way to squeeze in an extra book, he said, was to turn in early on a Friday or Saturday night—something he recently did in order to digest some Goethe.

That might sound alternatively confining and intimidating to some. But St. John’s students don’t appear to chafe at the curriculum’s constraints. Instead, they universally praise the cohesive nature of their education,

Officials acknowledge that St. John’s is not for everybody. But for students who like to read, and talk about what they read, it’s nothing short of collegiate heaven.

preferring an integrated educational feast to a smorgasbord of viewpoints.

Take, for instance, Kallisti Staver, a sophomore from Detroit, who initially was drawn to St. John's because of her interest in philosophy. At St. John's she has seen connections she never thought about. "I've learned things about Greek math from reading the Greek plays," said Kallisti. She was so excited by her academic forays into Greek civilization, in fact, that last year she joined a Greek study group that met outside class.

"I really think that the way [the curriculum] is put together lays a very strong foundation for branching off into any areas we might take," Staver said.

According to the college seal, that is the goal of the school. "I make free adults out of children by means of books and a balance," it states.

Yet even St. John's officials acknowledge that such balance sometimes eludes them. Despite its ballyhooing about classical education, there is one area in which St. John's is somewhat remiss: physical education. The school doesn't offer any intercollegiate sports, and physical education is not included in the curriculum.

The situation—and the attitude about it—is best summed up by a T-shirt popular on the Santa Fe campus. "Great Books, No Gym," it proclaims. The T-shirt is soon to be obsolete—the school has broken ground for a new student activities center that includes a gymnasium, but remains short of funds to build it, and the Annapolis campus already has a gym.

Meantime, as head of the Santa Fe campus student activities office, Mark St. John is relegated to a messy basement room out of which he runs the school's intramural

UPDATE St. John's College

August 2007

THERE IS A CERTAIN IRONY inherent in asking someone from St. John's College whether there have been any significant changes, since the defining philosophy of the institution is to stand on the most deeply held traditions.

Perhaps the most notable change in recent years involves the use of computers. In 1999 *National CrossTalk* reported that the Santa Fe campus had only 15 school-owned computers, but that is hardly the case today. "Students come in with computers as a tool, part of their everyday lives," said Larry Clendenin, who graduated from the college in the late 1970s and is now director of admissions for the Santa Fe campus. "At least two-thirds of our incoming freshmen are bringing personal computers with them," he said.

The Santa Fe campus has a computer lab with more than 50 machines, and the library also offers both PCs and Macs. "All of the rooms in residence halls are wired, so students have access to the World Wide Web," Clendenin said. Computers and software have found their way into the curriculum, he added, but he was careful to clarify that they are used only "as a support." St. John's College is "still a pencil and paper place in the classroom," he said.

According to David Cherry, admissions counselor at St. John's campus in Annapolis, computers are now "ubiquitous, if only because

Computers and software have found their way into the curriculum at St. John's, but they are used only as a support to the "paper and pencil" approach.

of the popularity of the net." But he added that it is "still rare for computers to be used for curricular purposes," and that it would be inappropriate for a student to submit a paper as an e-mail attachment. "They print it out, and hand it to their tutors in person," he said.

As we reported in 1999, the number of students who express an interest in

applying to St. John's continues to increase. But, since the college jealously limits enrollments to between 450 and 475 students at each campus, the only way for it to grow would be to establish a third campus—a distinct possibility, although there are no current plans to do so.

Both campuses boast new residential facilities, and are now housing a higher percentage of their students, currently about 70 to 75 percent. "Santa Fe is an expensive place for students to live," said Clendenin. "It's our desire for all the students to be able to reside on campus if they want to. And we have additional residence halls planned to begin construction next year." According to Cherry, when two new residence halls were recently built on the Annapolis campus, "within a year, every room on campus was booked."

When it comes to St. John's "Great Books" curriculum, of course, any changes are reviewed very carefully, with deliberations involving the Faculty Committee on Instruction and the Student Committee on Instruction. And the pace of change is glacial. In 1999 we reported that Flannery O'Connor had recently "made the cut," with the inclusion of some of her short stories in the curriculum. Eight years later, when Cherry was asked about recent changes in the required readings, O'Connor's was still the first name cited. "That gets you into the 1950s," he said. "We also took out 'Prometheus Bound' (by Aeschylus), and put in Aristophanes' 'The Birds.'" Martin Luther was recently replaced by John Calvin, Cherry said, and he hinted that there is some serious talk of removing the "Rat Man" case history from the Sigmund Freud reading.

—Todd Sallo

Any alterations to St. John's "Great Books" curriculum are reviewed very carefully, with deliberations involving faculty and student committees. And the pace of change is glacial.

program. Forget about trophy cases: The school's two athletic trophies—representing its city league softball championships—are stashed away in a corner with some old newspapers.

St. John estimated that half of the students participate in one of the athletic extracurricular activities. The school prides itself, for instance, on its Santa Fe search and rescue team, which offers its services to the community. Across the hall from his office are mountain bikes, kayaks and canoes that students can check out for a small activity fee; students also can sign up for fencing, yoga or ballroom dance classes. Nonetheless, St. John said, some students consider the student activities office merely a source of “Pascalian diversions,” unworthy of their time.

“There is a kind of disdain for physical activity among some students,” St. John acknowledged. For an awful lot of students, physical activity means little more than walking to and from class. Sure, Johnnies may play “Spartan madball” (a kind of soccer/football/rugby free-for-all) at their spring festivals, but in reality they wouldn't make terribly good Spartans. “There are a couple of really weird people who do [athletic] stuff,” said sophomore Nicholas Alexandra, of New York City. “But the rest of us just sit around smoking cigarettes and thinking.” (The school does seem to have a preponderance of smokers, something students attribute to the intensity of the program.)

But eventually, those same students have to come down off the hill and deal with the real world. The prospect of leaving the insular community of St. John's makes them nervous, said Margaret Odell, director of placement. But they actually fare pretty well once they make the leap. About 80 percent of St. John's alumni wind up in graduate

school within five years of graduating. A 1993 survey of graduates revealed that 20 percent are in business or business-related occupations; another 18.5 percent are in teaching; 14.5 are in communication and the arts. The rest go on to a wide range of professions—in medicine, social services and law, among others.

“I honestly don't think there's anything our students can't do,” said Odell, who, like several other staff members, is enrolled in the school's graduate program. But at the same time, she worries that Johnnies are going to suffer from the school's—and the students'—aversion to technology. “It's like pulling teeth to get them to do research on the Internet,” she lamented.

“If they don't get a little smarter about using technology, the gap between what they learn here and in other places is going to get wider and wider,” Odell predicted. “I don't want



Students gather around a vacuum jar in Ralph Swentzell's physics class. Labs are deliberately kept bare-bones, like those of early scientists.

this curriculum to become obsolete, but I think we're going to have to make some changes.”

But if the past 60 years are any indication, St. John's isn't big on changes. School officials proclaim, without apology, that they offer the best liberal arts education in the country. They ask, Why fix something that's not broken?

Their students agree. Despite the theoretical nature of their education, most Johnnies profess confidence in their abilities to maneuver in the world beyond St. John's. Sure, there are the usual “Would you like fries with that?” jokes about the opportunities available to liberal arts graduates. But in general, Johnnies say they're optimistic about their futures. Given what they have accomplished, that's not surprising.

“After Einstein, Maxwell and Hegel,” noted senior Carisa Armendariz, who is looking for a job in journalism, “nothing seems all that hard.” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

About 80 percent of St. John's alumni wind up in graduate school within five years of graduating.

Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture

For outsiders, the school's unusual practices can be shocking

Photos by Rod Searcey for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

ON A CHILL AND CLEAR desert morning at Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's renowned Arizona landmark, several tour groups meandered through the main building, as they do every day, learning about Wright's "destruction of the box" through cantilevers and open floor plans. Meanwhile, a small group of students at Wright's namesake school of architecture there were getting a literal lesson in destruction. Using shovels and pickaxes, they demolished the roof of a small outbuilding, chipping through the light concrete and foam insulation, then tossing the debris over the rooftop, where it piled up near a large saguaro cactus.

The roof demolition was the first phase of an expansion project for a school computer laboratory. It also was considered an essential part of the students' education—a chance for them to obtain hands-on construction experience.

During a short break, Sarah Murphy, of Clearwater, Minnesota, who said she decided to pursue her Bachelor of Architectural Studies degree at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture because "it fit my personality better than the normal school," sipped lemonade and pointed out the blisters on her hands to fellow student Tony Walker. He was unsympathetic. After wiping the sweat from his forehead, he removed first one glove and then the other to tick off proof of his own efforts. "Blister, blister, blister," chanted the 32-year-old Master of Architecture candidate, jabbing at one palm before turning to the other and repeating the observation.

"Oh, I'm not complaining," responded Murphy cheerily.

It would be hard to overstate the influence Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife still hold over life at Taliesin.

In fact, the 19-year-old said that she considered them "battle scars": proof of her commitment to the school's philosophy of learning by doing—a philosophy that is every bit as important to the school today as it was when Frank Lloyd Wright was alive. Widely heralded as America's greatest architect, Wright's

innovative building design overshadowed his contribution to education: an architecture school so dedicated to the integration of life, learning and work as to make them virtually indistinguishable. Think of it as a 24-7 exercise in interdisciplinary studies, a place where "anything you do is an educational opportunity—even taking out the garbage," said Arnold Roy, who arrived at the school in 1952 and now lives, teaches and practices architecture there as one of 27 senior members of the so-called Taliesin Fellowship.



Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West, near Scottsdale, Arizona, houses a school, a community and a commercial architectural practice.

For outsiders, the school's unusual practices can come as a bit of a shock. When an evaluation team from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools visited Taliesin West in 1997, they were "blown away," said David O. Justice, who was a member of the team. "I suppose it's probably fair to say we were kind of appalled because there was nothing approaching what we had assumed to be the necessary components of a university," said Justice, vice president for Lifelong Learning and Suburban Campuses at Chicago's De Paul University. "There weren't classrooms and labs and the normal array of workstations... What we would associate with a normal university architectural school just wasn't there. And that raised all sorts of alarm bells."

But after three days of watching the school in action, the team was converted. "We became very sold on it," said Justice. In their subsequent report, the team not only recommended the school's accreditation be extended for seven years (which it subsequently was), they lauded it as one model for higher education, saying, "The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture offers an important alternative approach to the education of architects and to higher education in general. It has the potential to influence and shape both professional and general education."

Justice has since joined the board of trustees of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the umbrella organization that oversees the school, an architectural firm, the Fellowship, the campuses and the intellectual properties. "It's been wonderful," said Justice. "I've just learned more and more and gotten deeper into an understanding of the culture—which in some ways takes on an even larger life than the school."

That is by design. Wright believed that life and architecture



Students and professional architects work together on drafting projects.

were inextricably intertwined, that, in his words, “architecture is life; or at least it is life taking form.” So, in 1932, in an effort to teach that philosophy as well as raise some much-needed cash, he and his wife, Olgivanna, founded what they called the Taliesin Fellowship, a school and community for aspiring architects at his home in Spring Green, Wisconsin. The students, or apprentices, as the Wrights called them, were involved in nearly every aspect of what they envisioned as a self-sufficient community: from cooking and cleaning to growing food to quarrying the stone, mixing the mortar and cutting the trees used to build a new studio.

In 1937, Wright and the apprentices used native rock and sand to build Taliesin West, their winter camp outside of Scottsdale, which is now considered one of his finest architectural achievements, and they began to split their time

between the midwest and the desert. Critics compared the arrangement to a southern slave plantation, but the apprentices saw it as a golden opportunity to learn from a master.

Though Wright died in 1959, and his wife, who remained at Taliesin’s helm, died in 1985, the Fellowship lives on. There are about 20 apprentices, as the students are still known within the community. Roughly half of them are Bachelor of Architectural Studies degree candidates, and the rest are candidates for Master of Architecture degrees. They continue to travel back and forth between the two architectural landmarks, where they live with members of the Taliesin

Fellowship, 19 of whom studied with Wright himself. There are also about 120 employees—tour guides, architects, faculty and staff—who work, and in some cases live, at both Taliesins and a satellite architectural office in Madison, Wisconsin.

Just as their predecessors did, the apprentices continue to

immerse themselves in the three aspects of their education: construction, which provides practical training; studio work at Taliesin Architects, the on-site firm that descended from Wright’s practice, where they learn and apply theory and design skills; and community involvement, which, along with lectures, presentations and independent studies, is Taliesin’s answer to the liberal arts, and is considered a cornerstone of the school’s mission.

So, while Sarah Murphy might begin her day with a shovel in her hand, she might end it at a presentation about Frank Lloyd Wright’s residential homes, or a slide show about the future of office design, or huddled over a computer, learning how to use a computer-aided design program. In between, you might find her enjoying mid-morning coffee and egg-salad sandwiches with the rest of the Taliesin community at the apartment of Cornelia Brierly, who joined the Fellowship in 1934 and remains an active participant. Or, as part of Murphy’s maintenance duties, she might be cleaning and preparing a guest cottage for one of Taliesin’s frequent overnight visitors. At some point she’ll take a break to write in her journal, where, as part of the school’s emphasis on self-assessment, she’s expected to keep a list of her experiences and her sense of what she’s learning from each one. She will eat dinner—a simple buffet-style meal prepared with the help of an apprentice—with the entire Fellowship, then clear her dishes into the kitchen, where they will be washed by another apprentice.

And when she is ready for bed, she’ll brush her teeth in the women’s locker room, then venture a couple of hundred yards into the desert to her “shelter,” an eight-foot-square canvas shepherd’s tent where she’s meant to immerse herself in the desert environment. (At Taliesin West, all male apprentices are required to live in a shelter; women apprentices may choose to live in dormitory-style lodging.) After a year, Murphy can request to live in a more elaborate shelter that has been built by a previous apprentice and has since been abandoned. Or, if she chooses to pursue her master’s degree at the school, Murphy may design and build her own one-room shelter on Taliesin West’s 470-acre campus.

Originally a result of budgetary constraints, today these unusual living arrangements are a big draw for students as well as the public. Students say that being exposed to the elements of nature makes them better architects, and they love the challenge of designing their own environmentally sensitive space. Meanwhile, public tours of the innovative shelters have become so popular that proceeds have funded several school field trips.

Twice a month, Murphy will set aside her well-worn sweatshirt and jeans and put on a long gown for the school’s “Taliesin Evenings,” black-tie dinners that often include a theatrical or musical performance, either by apprentices or visiting guest artists. These Saturday night events are considered more than just a nod to a longstanding Taliesin tradition; they are yet another learning opportunity—in this case, for students to function in a formal setting—a skill they presumably will need if they are to be successful architects.

“What’s totally unique about Taliesin is it really does take experiential learning down to a life basis,” said Mark Hammons, an architectural historian, who is now assistant

The dilemma facing the school these days is how to retain the ideals and philosophies on which it was founded, while also answering to a host of changing cultural, professional and financial demands.

to the dean. “There is very little parallel in American or even European education.”

Dead now for more than 40 years, Frank Lloyd Wright is more popular today than ever. More than 120,000 architecture buffs toured Taliesin West in 1999, and 36,000 more toured the original Taliesin in Wisconsin. That same year, the licensing fees for Frank Lloyd Wright designs and the use of his name, image and archival materials reaped more than a million dollars for the Foundation. But Wright’s beloved school and Fellowship—the place where he integrated all his philosophies—remain relatively unknown.

“Frank Lloyd Wright is not recognized as an educator—or at least not as an educational innovator,” acknowledged Ari Georges, the school’s curriculum director. “His legacy in education is something we have yet to discover.”

For 26-year-old master’s degree student Fabian Mantel, that legacy meant a chance to help design and oversee the expansion of the computer lab. “At the beginning, all kinds of exotic pictures popped into our minds about what the studio could look like,” said Mantel, as he took off his dust mask and surveyed his colleagues’ progress on the roof. But then he and his co-designer realized that they had to respect the architecture of the entire campus—and that meant the new design had to tie in with the old one, he said.

“You want to respect the past, but you don’t want to copy it,” Mantel explained. “That’s really the challenge.”

And it’s the same dilemma facing the school these days: how to retain the ideals and philosophies on which it was founded, while also answering to a host of changing cultural, professional and financial demands so that the institution can remain viable.

For most of its existence, the school did not give degrees. Apprentices stayed as long as they chose, sometimes remaining permanently as members of the Fellowship. But as time went on, more and more states began to require a professional degree approved by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) before they would allow architects to obtain a license. So in the mid-1980s, Mrs. Wright decreed that the school should begin the accrediting process. The school has since earned North Central Association accreditation for both its bachelor’s and master’s degree programs and NAAB accreditation for its master’s degree.

Accreditation has helped legitimize the school, and has forced it to articulate measurable goals and evaluation processes for its students. But some members of the Fellowship lament a downside as well. Just as the suburban sprawl of Scottsdale has begun to encroach upon the organic architecture of Taliesin West, so the pragmatism of modern-day students has washed up against the idealism of the Taliesin community.

“The love for work as process is not as strong as it used to be,” said Effi Casey, a longtime senior member of the Fellowship and the school’s director of assessment and music. “People want things fast, and because of the demands of the profession, which demands an accredited degree, the focus is very much on the degree itself. And so our challenge is to really make learning by doing the main focus,” said Casey, who was instrumental in the accrediting process.

There are still no classes, credits or grades at the school.

But in order to satisfy accrediting organizations, the school has developed a list of 38 skills and concepts, plus two additional ones for undergraduates, that students are expected to master. These so-called Knowledge and Abilities, or “K/As,” range from the practical (things like drafting and rendering, civil engineering systems, construction documents, and cost estimating) to the abstract (ethics, creative spirit, and self-assessment).

Twice a year (three times the first year), each student meets with his or her review committee. Together they review the student’s portfolio, a collection of drawings, projects and written reflections that provides a record of the student’s progression. The portfolio forms the basis for ranking the student on each of the K/As.

How apprentices achieve mastery of the K/As is up to them and their advisors, who guide them through what becomes a customized education. The school has developed a complex learning model that illustrates how the curriculum ties together, but even people at the school realize that it’s tough to appreciate or even understand it at first blush. “Our program comes across at the early stages as totally chaotic,” admitted Pamela Stefansson, school registrar and director of admissions. “And that’s not the way it is.”

Students can set up tutorials or independent studies with faculty, Fellowship members or firm architects. They can attend optional Group Learning Opportunities—GLOs, in the school’s vernacular—which can range from a one-time lecture to twice-weekly meetings over the course of several months and are the school’s answer to classes. Like the K/As, GLOs sometimes are directly related to architecture, but often the relationship is murkier—a recent GLO, for instance, featured a modern dancer performing and discussing an upcoming site-specific piece she was tailoring to Taliesin West.

Often the learning opportunities are more spontaneous. After a recent performance at Taliesin West by a jazz pianist, Dean Arthur Dyson and a group of students met with the musician to discuss the elements of jazz—discord, resolution, etc.—then discussed how those same elements function not only in architecture, but in dance, in cinema, in theater, even in cooking.

“In essence, all of the arts are fundamentally related, and the basic elements of composition are common to all of the arts,” explained Dyson, a former apprentice who splits his time between his duties at Taliesin and at his own architectural firm in Fresno, California. “So when the apprentices can see what they are in another discipline from another perspective, it’s easier to apply it to their own art.”



Swiss graduate student Fabian Mantel came to the Wright School because it stresses holistic education.

There are still no classes, credits or grades at the school. But in order to satisfy accrediting organizations, the school has developed a list of skills and concepts that students are expected to master.

Master's students, and occasionally bachelor's candidates, are expected to apply those elements by working with the professionals at Taliesin Architects. Twenty-three-year-old bachelor's candidate Jahmai Ginden, for instance, recently put together a presentation for a \$20 million sports complex. "It's the most pressure I've ever felt," he recalled. But the presentation went well, he said, and afterwards he was asked to assist on a residential design for a client in Michigan.

"It seems silly to take a class and then you [supposedly] know something, because you could take classes forever and never really have the experience," said Ginden. "But here, when they say, 'We need you to fill out a roof plan,' you just do it."

Twice a year, apprentices also present a "box project," a fully rendered architectural design, to the community. Both the name and the tradition descend from Mr. Wright's time, when apprentices presented him a gift of an elaborate box that contained their designs.

Perhaps most importantly, apprentices are expected to participate fully in community life. That means not only helping with maintenance and construction, but also taking part in cultural events, such as the plays the community produces twice a year.

"There's more here than just the teaching of architecture," said Hammons, assistant to the dean. "There's a transmission

of a way of living. And that is embraced in community."

The North Central Association evaluation team was enthusiastic about the school's holistic approach to education. But it also suggested that the school update its facilities and develop a recruitment and long-range strategic plan. In the past five years, average enrollment has dropped from 35 to 20, a problem the administration ascribes to increased competition from other alternative architectural programs, from a sense that Taliesin hasn't kept up with changes in modern architectural practices, and a notion among potential students that Wright's philosophy of organic architecture is an historical anachronism.

The National Architectural Accrediting Board also expressed concerns about the school's physical resources, as well as what it characterized as "a perception by the team that insufficient time is given to the academic component when compared to the other two endeavors (work in the commercial architectural firm, and participation in the community)." The NAAB report also encouraged the school to address Western architectural traditions and specific architectural standards and designs such as life-safety systems and building-code compliance.

The school has developed a draft master plan that begins to address these concerns; it will be considered by the Foundation Board this month. Some steps already have been taken, with the expansion of the computer laboratory the first of numerous construction and renovation projects in the works. After running a deficit at the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, the architectural firm is once again making money. And the school is discussing how to ensure adequate and diverse enrollment (currently men outnumber women 17 to three) while continuing to offer rolling admissions and graduations.

UPDATE **Frank Lloyd Wright** **School of Architecture** **July 2007**

IN RECENT YEARS, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture has been engaged in a struggle for its survival. Although there was a hint of the troubles to come when *National CrossTalk* profiled the school in 2001, its accreditation seemed reasonably secure. But in 2005 the National Architectural Accrediting Board reduced the school's status to "on notice," and the Higher Learning Commission, an independent regional accrediting agency whose approval is necessary for accreditation by the national board, warned the school that it could lose its accreditation entirely.

The turmoil began in 2004 when a report became public saying that the school's two facilities—Taliesin West and a sister campus in Wisconsin—needed \$100 million for future development and restoration work (an estimate that later skyrocketed to more than \$200 million). The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, which operates the school, determined to make leadership changes, and fired the foundation's CEO. Dean John Wyatt resigned in protest, and most of the faculty subsequently left. Enrollment dropped from 22 to five.

In June 2005 the Higher Learning Commission issued its harsh

assessment, questioning the school's fulfillment of basic educational values, such as "acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry." The commission also leveled criticism at the school's governance and expressed doubt about its financial stability.

Big changes were needed.

The foundation hired Victor Sidy to be the new dean in August 2005. Sidy, who had studied at the school for five years in the 1990s and was well acquainted with its philosophy, said in an interview that he was hired "to help rebuild the organization." Sidy referred to the staff

resignations as "an event that really showed that the Frank Lloyd Wright organization was not healthy."

"What I did with my team was to evaluate the possibilities within the organization, to find ways of leveraging those possibilities to achieve success," Sidy said. "We streamlined the administration, we hired faculty, and we increased our enrollment. We clarified our admissions standards, developed strategic plans,

In June 2005 the Higher Learning Commission issued a harsh assessment, leveled criticism at the school's governance and expressed doubt about its financial stability.

A separate though equally difficult challenge is the aging of the original members of the Fellowship—those who received personal tutelage from Mr. and Mrs. Wright. That has created concern within the community about how their passing will affect the school's ability to fully grasp and live up to the Wrights' vision. "You don't have two charismatic leaders [anymore]," said Effi Casey. "So you have to rediscover what the basis of your intention is. You have to focus on your idea."

Still, it would be hard to overstate the influence Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife hold over life at Taliesin. Despite their public reputation as being difficult and autocratic, the couple remains so revered within the community that they are never referred to as anything other than "Mr. and Mrs. Wright." (To do so, even in jest, is to risk severe criticism from members of the Fellowship.)

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Wright's extensive archives, sometimes even going so far as to trace his drawings. Many, if not most, have read Wright's autobiography. They listen to his recorded talks, and occasionally read and discuss talks given by Olgivanna Wright, who oversaw the community's daily life and spiritual and moral development. And the students are educated in buildings and on furniture Wright designed, so they're literally surrounded by his architectural philosophy.

"It's really neat to be able to live in a place like this," said Sarah Murphy, as she helped a visitor negotiate Taliesin West's complex floor plan, a typical Wrightian maze of hidden doors and low-ceilinged passageways. "It makes you think about a lot of things—like how things are put together, where the windows are placed, how the walls are leaning."

Yet school officials insist that they are not interested in turning out Wright clones. Although there is a strong



Taliesin West student apprentices live in desert shelters of various sorts. They say being exposed to nature makes them better architects.

resurgence of interest in Wright's work, "This is not about Frank Lloyd Wright revivalism," said Mark Hammons. "The clients are attracted to Frank Lloyd Wright," he admitted. "But the apprentices are attracted to the opportunity to carry forward that work—as opposed to being little Frank Lloyd Wrights."

Apprentices are encouraged to apply Wright's concept of organic architecture; that is, to create designs that respect and mirror their environment the same way that Taliesin West does. Its desert masonry and low flat roofs complement rather than dominate the landscape. The school faculty,

and we revamped our curriculum. A lot of it was in response to some excellent recommendations from our institutional and professional accrediting bodies in 2005."

Many of the changes put in place could be seen as "mainstreaming," but Sidy resists the use of that term.

"There are so many opportunities that are available to us as a result of our increasing openness," he said. "I would not call it mainstreaming, but rather taking the core values of the institution and interpreting them in a contemporary way. That word, 'interpretation,' has become a touchstone for us."

This summer, there was an important "benchmark moment" with regard to accreditation, and the school performed well. "Our 'on-notice' status has been removed," Sidy said. The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture enjoys full accreditation once again.

The school currently has 19 students, five of whom are women, which represents a slightly more favorable ratio than in 2001. "We are now moving to a more balanced enrollment," Sidy said, noting that the gap between men and women in the architectural field is closing as well.

While the school still has no grades, there now are formal classes. And the 38 knowledge and ability areas (or "K/As") that students were

Annual tuition, which includes room and board, has grown from \$9,600 in 2001 to \$17,000 in 2007.

expected to master have been reduced in number to 33, and are now called "performance criteria."

And students (the term is now used interchangeably with "apprentices") are allowed to take off-campus jobs. "We are now encouraging our students to develop internships—to work as interns in the architectural community beyond the walls of Taliesin," Sidy said, adding that these changes have been well received.

"We are also embarking on an aggressive building assessment and conservation program at both campuses," Sidy said. "The Frank Lloyd Wright organization expanded its studios, which are really the classrooms, the drafting studios, and there was a restoration of living quarters in Arizona, which is peripheral to the school, but important for the organization."

Annual tuition, which includes room and board, has grown from \$9,600 in 2001 to \$17,000 in 2007. The Frank Lloyd Wright organization, which continues to derive the majority of its funding from visitors to Taliesin and Taliesin West, is also providing funding for a push to increase the size of the school's endowment, which is "in the high \$500,000s," according to Sidy. "At the moment we are in the process of engaging in a capital campaign which we hope will substantially enlarge that endowment for student scholarships, faculty fellowships, and program initiatives," Sidy said. "We are hoping to celebrate our endowment's million dollar mark within the next two to four years."

—Todd Sallo



As part of the “hands-on” educational approach at the Wright School, students wield a jackhammer in the early stages of expanding a computer lab.

Fellowship members and professionals at Taliesin Architects (positions that sometimes overlap) are expected to mentor the apprentices in much the same way, encouraging them to live up to their fullest creative and professional potential.

That’s a welcome relief, said Fabian Mantel, who came to the school after earning a degree in art and economics from the University of Zurich, where he said there was too much emphasis on grades and not enough on the education itself. So even though he didn’t necessarily agree with the earful of constructive criticism he received at his most recent review

committee meeting, Mantel appreciates the constant challenge to do better. “They want to see progress. They want to get the best out of you,” he said.

Students say they’re motivated not only by their own educational goals but by their desire for respect from the rest of the Fellowship. That is particularly important since neither the students nor the Fellowship members have many other social outlets, and students are prohibited from holding off-campus jobs.

“You really have to do your best, because it affects your standing in the community,” explained student Jahmai Ginden, who sometimes puts himself on a 36-hour day—staying awake for 24 hours, then sleeping for 12—to manage all his responsibilities.

“The more you know, the more they’ll teach you,” said Ginden. So although the program is described as self-paced, what that really means is “as fast as you can go!”

The school only receives about 20 completed applications annually, but the vast majority of those are from highly motivated individuals. They would have to be: Things have changed since the days when Mrs. Wright single-handedly decided whether to admit someone based only on an interview.

Today, prospective students have to send a statement of purpose, a biographical essay, a portfolio of sketches and architectural drawings, three personal references, a high school and college transcript (bachelor’s degree candidates have to complete at least one year of prerequisites at another college), and a medical report to prove they are healthy enough to participate in the school’s intensely physical program. They also have to visit either campus for two days, during which time they are expected to participate in whatever activities happen to be going on, and are interviewed by an admissions committee as well as admissions director

Stefansson. (Foreign students are exempt from the visit, but must have an interview.)

By the time they finish the process, both the student and school officials know whether it is a good fit. About half of those who apply, matriculate. And in the past five years, only three students have left before completing their degree or predetermined time at the school, said Stefansson. (The school sometimes allows non-degree students to spend a year or a term there; it also accepts visiting students from a Thai university for several months each year.)

If the measure of a school’s success is its employment rate, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture is a resounding triumph: Virtually 100 percent of its Master’s of Architecture graduates are employed in the architectural field. (The school’s Bachelor of Architectural Studies is a pre-professional degree which cannot lead to licensure.)

But unlike other institutions, the school needs to do more: It must provide graduates who will join the Fellowship and the architectural firm, since both are integral to the continued financial viability of the community and the school. (Proceeds from the school’s annual tuition of \$9,600, which includes room and board, cover only a small fraction of the cost of running it.)

Ironically, the same attributes that allow the apprentices to succeed at the school—a high level of motivation, tremendous talent and a strong sense of themselves—also lead many graduates to seek greater personal and professional freedom than Taliesin offers.

Frank Lloyd Wright was constantly renovating and changing the buildings at Taliesin and Taliesin West. So, too, the community he founded must continue to evolve or risk becoming an historical anachronism. There are debates within the community about what the Taliesin of the future should look like. But regardless of their vision for it, the people connected with the Fellowship remain dedicated to its educational, architectural and philosophical mission, and optimistic that it will survive in some form.

Perhaps that is because Taliesin’s appeal actually is much simpler than its high-minded and complex philosophy of holistic living might lead one to believe. Apprentice Tony Walker, for instance, hopes to remain at the Fellowship following his graduation in September. Why? Said Walker: “It’s just a fun life, doing what you really like to do.” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

More than 120,000 architecture buffs toured Taliesin West in 1999, and 36,000 more toured the original Taliesin in Wisconsin.

“Plain Living”

Berea College makes a commitment to the welfare of its students and its community

Photos by Stewart Bowman for CrossTalk

By Robert A. Jones

BEREA, KENTUCKY

THE LEAFY CAMPUS of Berea College, at the edge of Appalachia, has long been regarded as a place apart. It was founded, after all, by utopian visionaries who encouraged racial mixing in pre-Civil War Kentucky and, even today, Berea presents itself as the exception-to-the-rule in higher education, the debunker of academic myths, the reverser of trends.

Just how different is Berea? Plenty different.

Take, for example, the ominous trend in private college tuition, where the bill for a college education has been rising faster than house prices in California. At Berea, tuition is free for its 1,500 students, a generosity made possible by the college's stunning \$800 million endowment.

Or consider the fact that private colleges increasingly have become enclaves of the well-to-do. Some top private institutions now report median family incomes for entering freshmen in the range of \$150,000. A study by the Higher Education Research Institute found that, even at selective state universities, 40 percent of this year's freshmen come from families making more than \$100,000 per year.

At Berea, whose campus could be a movie set for an elite college, those demographics are nowhere to be found. In fact, Berea will not accept well-to-do students. It considers only students from the lowest economic strata, most of them from backward pockets of Appalachia. The average family income of incoming freshmen currently stands at \$28,000.

At Berea, tuition is free for its 1,500 students, a generosity made possible by the college's stunning \$800 million endowment.

Or take the current willingness to coddle students with dormitory spas, massage therapists, and parking garages for their BMWs. Berea students would smile at those indulgences. If anyone is providing maid service at Berea, it's the students themselves. Each works ten to 15 hours a week in a “labor position” that ranges from janitorial work to producing videotapes. And campus parking is a breeze

because most students can't have cars.

But the crux of the difference between Berea and many other private colleges is not the demographics or free tuition. Rather, it is the presence of a collective idea about the mission of the college, which is to transform the lives of poor but gifted students from Appalachia and then return them, as graduates, to their communities so they can improve the lives of others.

“We're educating our students to be engaged in a



Sreirath Khieu, a Cambodian student known on campus as “Chan,” makes early American brooms in her “labor position” at Berea College.

different vocational life and world than does a Stanford or a Swarthmore,” said President Larry Shinn. “Being a CEO of a major corporation is not really what we're about, although some of our students do that. The idea is for our graduates to leave Berea and be engaged in a life of service to their communities, to give something back.”

It sounds too sappy to be true: a private college in a bucolic setting that gives away ninety-thousand-dollar educations to poor kids, and so inspires those kids with a sense of mission that they return and rebuild their broke-down communities.

But talk to students and teachers here, and they all seem infused with that sense of commitment. “Most of us here wouldn't get the chance to go to college without Berea,” said Jami Garth, a junior from Monticello, Kentucky, who plans to take up family counseling when she graduates. “We all have something in common here, which is low income. We realize we are being given this great opportunity, and, frankly, we don't want to blow it.”

A few doors down, Academic Provost Dave Porter said, “I like to think of Berea as offering absolutely the best liberal arts education that money can't buy. This institution is a trust for the people of the region. When you come here, you just get caught up in the whole idea of the place.”

And the numbers suggest that Berea, by and large, succeeds in its goal of supplying Appalachia with new generations of leaders. More than half of Berea students go on to graduate school, but eventually about 58 percent enter public service or nonprofit careers, most of them in the Appalachian region. Recent Berea graduates have taken up projects ranging from food co-ops and environmental restoration to small-business counseling.

Take a walk around the Berea campus, and initially you

Unlike other colleges, Berea uses its endowment largely to provide free tuition.

will not sense any difference from a dozen other small, private colleges in the east. Students stroll down tree-lined walkways to academic buildings that harken back to the 19th century. Students loll on the manicured lawns, their laptops glowing.

But keep looking, and the differences start to emerge. In one corner of the campus sits a nondescript building with a sign that

simply says, “Broomcraft.” The sign on another building, close by, says, “Wrought Iron.”

It’s probably safe to say that no building at Swarthmore is labeled “Broomcraft.” That’s because Swarthmore students don’t make brooms. But Berea students do just that. Inside the Broomcraft building is a small factory where students learn how to craft a fine artisan broom from the best materials.

Sreirath Khieu, an international student from Cambodia who goes by the nickname “Chan” on campus, sat at one of the workplace benches, surrounded by sheaves of golden broomcorn. The fifth of seven children in Cambodia, she is the first person in her family to come to America or go to college. She seems to sense the irony of a newly arrived Cambodian turning out brooms that will be sold in nearby shops as replicas of American folk-craft. But she also loves it.

“In Cambodia, making brooms is kind of a low-class job, and I was surprised when they told me my labor position would be in broomcraft,” she said. “I found out that making good brooms is really hard.”

Khieu pauses and then comes to a Zen-like conclusion. “We are not only learning how to make brooms here,” she said. “We are learning what a person needs, inside, to be a good broom maker.”

But the work program is only part of Berea’s unusual approach to higher education. The college has no fraternities or sororities and requires students to live on-campus throughout their undergraduate careers. No alcohol is allowed on or off campus (Berea is in a dry county), and smoking is severely restricted. There is no football team, no funky college town next to the campus, and the car prohibition extends to all students except seniors.

It’s enough to cramp the style of any 19-year-old. “The truth is, you have to work at finding entertainment here,” said Andrew Hartl, a junior from Malta, Ohio. “Sometimes I think of it as the Berea bubble, a protected world that has its own rules. You either live with the rules and make peace with them,

or you struggle. I would guess about 80 percent of the kids make peace with it, and 20 percent struggle.”

Gail Wofford, vice president for labor and student life, agrees that some of the restrictions can be tough. But the rules do not flow from a mistrust of the students, she said. Rather, they are directed at maintaining the college’s strong sense of community.

“We’re saying to the students, ‘You’re going to be with us for four years. In that period, you can’t get away from us by living off campus or driving away in your car. You must stay interested in what Berea has to offer. You must live and learn together like a family, and, if you do that, you will benefit. You will become a better person,’” she said.

When Wofford mentions family, she is referring to the remarkably diverse population of white, black and foreign students that now fills the campus. Even though Berea was founded on Christian principles back in 1855, its attitude has always been inclusive of different races and religious backgrounds. At present 17 percent of students are African American and eight percent are international.

Much of this heritage stems from Berea’s 150-year history. When the founders arrived at their mountain-ridge site 35 miles south of Lexington in 1855, they first created the town of Berea, with the college following a few years later. And it was no mere town but a controversial utopian community that extended equal rights to all women and men, including African Americans. Within the community, blacks and whites were required to live next door to each other in a checkerboard pattern.

Not surprisingly, these ideals did not sit well in the southern Kentucky culture of the time. The community was attacked and driven away by pro-slavery thugs during the Civil War but returned in the following years and established the college expressly for “freedmen,” or former slaves, and the mountain populations of Appalachia.

During those early years the college leaders also developed eight principles, known as the “Great Commitments,” that continue to guide the college’s policies today. These principles are the source of the work program and the four-year residential policy as well as the more general approach to college life that the Great Commitments describe as “plain living.”

In spite of its spare lifestyle, this approach has proven remarkably resilient and successful. Berea’s retention and graduation rates remain high, especially for a college where the students are uniformly poor and must withstand the consequent economic pressures. At present, 80 percent of Berea’s first-year students return for their sophomore year, and 65 percent graduate within five years. Moreover, about 55 percent of its graduates earn advanced degrees.

And the college continues to attract high-level applicants. This fall’s incoming class has an average ACT score of 23 and 1,100 on the SATs. Sixty percent of entering freshmen ranked in the top 20 percent of their high school class, and the average grade point average of all first-year students is a “recalculated” 3.4—a figure used by Berea that excludes all non-academic courses. Pure GPAs were approximately 3.8.

Berea has also fared well in the world of college rankings. *U.S. News & World Report* rated Berea the best comprehensive



Most Berea students accept the strict campus rules, but about “20 percent struggle” with them, says junior Andrew Hartl.

college in the south in 2003, the eighth time the college was so rated. In these rankings, Berea generally has been applauded for the quality of its undergraduate teaching and its commitment to the welfare of its students.

Behind this success lies the weight of the college's \$800 million endowment and an improbable financial machine. Over the past two decades, Berea has emerged as one of the premier fundraising institutions in higher education. The size of its endowment puts it far ahead of many larger institutions, and the college currently is concluding a \$150 million campaign to augment the fund.

In addition, the college separately raises \$4 million a year to provide additional funds for ongoing operations. This stellar performance has been the hallmark of the presidency

of Shinn, a former religion scholar who now travels almost half the year on fundraising forays throughout the nation. During Shinn's presidency, which began in 1994, the endowment has grown by nearly half a billion dollars.

The growing wealth has allowed Berea to add new programs, increase salaries, and renovate

some of the college's 19th-century buildings with advanced electronics and maintenance systems. In addition, the college now equips its incoming students with laptop computers.

"Berea has had a remarkable recent history," said a former

"Sometimes I think of it as the Berea bubble, a protected world that has its own rules."

— Berea student Andrew Hartl



A student works in the college garden. Berea students pay no tuition but work ten to 15 hours a week in "labor positions."

higher education official in Kentucky who asked not to be identified. "The college has always been identified with the poor, but the fact is that Berea is not a poor institution anymore. They have joined the haves and departed from the have-nots."

Shinn and other college officials acknowledge their success, but they rigorously dispute the notion that Berea has arrived at fat city. First and foremost, they argue that Berea's endowment—as opposed to those of other colleges—is used largely to pay for the free tuition program.

"We refer to the endowment as the tuition fund, and that's what it is," said Shinn. "When other colleges charge tuition, they can use their endowment income to hire new faculty, to construct new buildings, or whatever else. We cannot. The great

UPDATE **Berea College** **July 2007**

WHEN NATIONAL CROSSTALK visited Berea College in 2004, we reported that the college was engaged in a campaign to augment its \$800 million endowment by \$150 million. "That's all over—our endowment is not what it was," said Communications Manager Jay Buckner. "It is now more than a billion dollars."

Buckner hastened to add that the fund is dedicated to a very specific purpose. "We have a pretty conservative policy about how to spend that money," he said. "This is very expensive. We're providing free education to 1,500 students."

Berea's enrollment has not changed, although the college is turning away more applicants than before. "Our enrollment has been capped at 1,500," Buckner explained. "Large enrollments don't help our bottom line at all, since we do not charge tuition."

There have been some significant renovation projects in recent years, including some geared toward giving the campus a smaller "ecological footprint." For instance, many of the buildings now have systems to collect rainwater. "It hits the roof and drains into a cistern," Buckner said. "That water is then reused. We are doing a lot on the sustainability front."

Berea College, like the City of Berea, is still "dry" with regard to

alcohol, although there is currently a resolution to make the city "moist," which would allow the sale and consumption of alcohol under certain circumstances. It is not clear how this might affect campus policy.

First-year students still receive free laptop computers, and they get another one when they become juniors. The students still work in a "labor position" ten to 15 hours per week, although it is a common misconception to imagine that they all work in areas such as broomcraft or wrought iron. "Here in the Public Relations office, for instance, I've got seven students working for me, doing everything from press releases to professional quality videos," Buckner explained.

Although Berea's endowment has grown, costs have increased as well. The college now spends more than \$23,000 per student, per year. So, according to Buckner, fundraising continues apace. "It's still full steam ahead," he said.

—Todd Sallo

Berea's enrollment of 1,500 students has not changed, although the college is turning away more applicants than before.

majority of our endowment income goes back to the students, and that single element makes our financial condition very different from most other colleges.”

This year, Berea will spend about \$22,000 for each student at the college. As a comparison, Shinn notes that colleges such as Bowdoin or Swarthmore spend between \$45,000 and \$65,000 per student per year while charging approximately \$35,000 for tuition.

“The free tuition program means that we can’t spend as much as these other colleges,” he said. “It means that our salaries are not as high as some others, that our faculty members teach more classes. People always ask, ‘Why not charge tuition and then you can have what these other colleges have?’ The answer is simple. We have a passion about serving these bright, capable students who otherwise could not afford a quality education. If we charged tuition, Berea would no longer be Berea.”

The policy of admitting only low-income students (this year the maximum allowable income for a family of three is \$47,000, and the college trustees are considering a proposal to lower it still further), and encouraging students into a life of public service rather than, say, investment banking, has created other financial obstacles for the college. Namely, it has eliminated the class of wealthy alumni that constitutes the primary source of donations for most colleges.

What’s worse, if a Berea alum does become wealthy, or even comfortably middle-class, his or her children cannot attend Berea. The family’s income will make them ineligible.

“Let’s say the circumstances force us to be creative,” said Ron Smith, vice president for finance. “We raise money from people we call ‘friends of Berea,’ people who are not alumni but relate to the story of Berea. We find that many people will connect with the mission of the college, and we look for those people constantly.”

The creative fundraising has led Berea to employ some unorthodox methods, at least for a college. Direct mail is used frequently. The college purchases lists of likely supporters and also develops lists of its own. Next to the campus, for example, the college operates a number of retail craft stores and even a hotel—the Boone Tavern Hotel, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places—and regularly harvests names and addresses of customers at those establishments.

Smith tells the story of a mysterious \$7 million bequest that came to the college from the estate of a couple from Iowa. No one could figure out why. Eventually, college officials discovered that the couple had stayed at the Boone Tavern Hotel several years earlier. It was the only connection they ever found between the couple and the college.

Bill Laramee, vice president for alumni and college relations, said Berea almost certainly will succeed in reaching its most recent \$150 million fundraising goal. “In this campaign, the largest gift was \$1.5 million,” he said. “We’re told there is no way we should raise \$150 million with only one gift of \$1.5 million, but we will do it. We do it by collecting many, many smaller donations.”



Berea College “is a trust for people of the region,” says Academic Provost Dave Porter. “When you come here, you just get caught up in the whole idea of the place.”

Smith offers one more reason for the impressive size of Berea’s endowment. “It comes from discipline,” he said. “When we raise money for the endowment, it stays in the endowment. We don’t spend it on a nice new building or something like that. We invest the money and use the income to provide a quality education.”

As for the future, Berea is likely to remain much the same as today, except more so. On the wall of virtually every administrator’s office at the college hangs a framed copy of the Great Commitments. At Berea these commitments are studied, like the Torah in a synagogue, for guidance in all decisions.

For example, some administrators expressed concerns in recent years that the college’s commitment to African American students had slipped below the level implied in the Great Commitments. Extensive discussions ensued, and a decision was made to rectify the situation. This fall the percentage of African Americans in the freshman class will be double that of previous years—about 25 percent.

Joe Bagnoli, associate provost for enrollment management, noted that the African American population in Appalachia amounts to only three percent. “So our student population already had a higher percentage of African Americans than the region we serve,” he said. “But that wasn’t the point. The college had made an early commitment to an interracial community on campus, and we felt we had strayed somewhat from that principle. So now we are returning to it.”

Otherwise, Berea likely will retain its timeless quality. This is not a campus where parking garages and bio-labs pop up overnight. The outside world of sharp elbows and upscale striving hardly seems to intrude, and most here seem to like it that way.

“I want it to stay just the way it is,” said Jami Garth, the junior. “Most of us are from small towns, not the big city, and Berea is the kind of place we need. When I graduate, I will think of Berea still being here, helping other kids the way it helped me.” ♦

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

Berea College will accept only students from the lowest economic strata, most of them from backward pockets of Appalachia.

An Experiment in Florida

Gulf Coast University tries faculty contracts, no tenure

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

FORT MYERS, FLORIDA

APRIL 30 WILL BE an important date in the brief history of Florida Gulf Coast University, where 85 percent of the faculty has been hired on multi-year contracts instead of tenure-track positions.

By then, about 50 professors with three-year contracts will know if these agreements have been renewed or if they should plan to look for jobs elsewhere. Although most expect to be renewed, an air of anxiety hangs over this small campus, built on swamplands at the edge of the Everglades.

"I'm a little nervous about it, to tell the truth," said Eric Strahorn, a young history professor who has taught at Florida Gulf Coast since the campus opened in August 1997. "Everybody says most of us will be renewed, but until I have it in my hand, I'm going to be nervous."

Maria Roca, an associate professor of communications who has a five-year contract and thus is not being evaluated for renewal this year, put it this way: "If we renew as many contracts as people think we will, this will allay a lot of the fears about multi-year contracts. It will show that this campus isn't going to be a revolving door."

The no-tenure policy is not the only unusual feature of this, the newest of Florida's ten state universities.

The very existence of the campus, in an area more hospitable to alligators than to humans, is surprising. It took

Although most professors expect their contracts to be renewed, an air of anxiety hangs over this small campus, built on swamplands at the edge of the Everglades.

more than 500,000 tons of landfill to provide a foundation for the first group of campus buildings. "We had to build the land up four and a half feet to get the campus above flood level," President Roy E. McTarnaghan explained.

On all sides there are tall, skinny Melaleuca trees, which were imported from Australia several decades ago to soak up swamp water but

which also have consumed much of the natural vegetation.

To end one of the many environmental skirmishes that were fought before the campus site was approved, the university promised the Army Corps of Engineers that it would eradicate the Melaleucas, a task one faculty member likened to "eradicating dirt." Periodically, groups of state

Photos by Cindy Karr, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Students at Florida Gulf Coast University are warned not to feed the many alligators who live on or near the swampy campus.

prisoners are bused onto campus to hack away at the trees, but progress is slow.

Signs warn students and others not to feed the alligators that live in several man-made lakes (the result of another environmental agreement) and that periodically can be seen sunning themselves on campus. There are also wild pigs and turkeys, fire ants with nasty dispositions, and a variety of snakes.

But there have been no sightings of the Florida Panther, an endangered species believed to roam the area. The Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service required the university to buy \$2 million worth of land for panther habitat, but so far none have dropped by for a snack.

Officials cheerily point out that all of this flora and fauna provide excellent material for a "collegium" called "A Sustainable Future," an interdisciplinary course, required of all undergraduates, that is intended to provide students with "an ecological perspective," to quote the campus catalogue.



The semi-tropical climate at Florida Gulf Coast University provides a suitable environment for a required undergraduate course on “A Sustainable Future.”

“The campus itself becomes a laboratory,” said Jack Crocker, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Crocker is a strong supporter of the interdisciplinary approach. All Arts and Sciences graduates earn the same degree—Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies, with a “concentration” in history or computer science or any one of a dozen other subjects. All must complete a 21-hour core of interdisciplinary courses—one-third of their upper-division work—organized around such themes as “Issues in Culture and Society” and “Issues in Science and Technology.”

“We want students to think on their own and relate one thing to

another, not just sit in lecture classes,” Crocker said. “We got some resistance in the beginning. Students arrive with the mindset that they have to ‘major’ in something, but now I think there’s a lot of acceptance.” However, some undergraduates still worry that their “liberal studies” degrees might not get them into top-flight graduate or professional schools. It is too soon to know if their fears are well founded.

The campus is heavily into “distance education.” Many of the 2,900 students (average age 33) have jobs and find that courses taught over the Internet or by two-way video are easier to fit into their schedules than classroom appearances.

More than 90 distance education courses have been developed. This spring 62 courses were offered and more than 20 percent of Florida Gulf Coast (FGCU) students took at least one.

The lecture halls have podiums and overhead projectors but no blackboards (or “whiteboards”) on which professors can scrawl. “We wanted this to be a different kind of place,” President McTarnaghan said.

The Florida Board of Regents hopes that lessons learned at FGCU can be applied at the state’s other universities. Like California, Texas and other “Sun Belt” states, Florida faces an explosion of postsecondary enrollments over the next decade. There won’t be room for all these students in traditional campus settings, and the likelihood of building many new campuses is slim, so the hope is that distance education can relieve the pressure. That is one reason McTarnaghan, a technology enthusiast, was picked to run

Florida Gulf Coast.

But McTarnaghan has announced he will leave at the end of this semester, and many on campus wonder if his successor, who will be named soon, will be equally enthusiastic about educational technology.

Peg Gray-Vickrey, associate professor of nursing in the College of Professional Studies, has taught several courses through distance education (or “distributive learning,” as she prefers to call it). “Many students are hesitant to speak up in class, and the Internet makes it easier for them to reflect and write,” she said.

But Maria Roca, who teaches communications, thinks this approach “is good for highly motivated students but not for many others,” who require face-to-face contact with faculty members and other students.

“I’m very cautious about the uses of electronic communication,” Roca said. “We’re supposed to be advancing student learning, and I wonder sometimes if we are so enamored of all these toys that we forget what this is all about.”

Many faculty members are finding that teaching online takes far more time and effort than traditional instruction—time to develop and test courses (one Public Administration professor said he spent more than 600 hours developing a single Internet course), time to communicate with students through e-mail.

Some love it. Roy Boggs, an associate professor of computer information systems in the business school, spends three or four hours a day answering e-mail queries from students, in addition to teaching classes and serving on university committees.

“I couldn’t believe, at the end of my career, that I’d have this opportunity,” said the 60-year-old Boggs. “Right now, this is a way of life for me—seven days a week, day and night. The kids are gone, the dog is dead and this is what I do. It’s been a kick. Of course, sometimes my wife wonders if I still live there.”

But Boggs’ feelings of jubilation are not shared by all.

“I don’t have the sense of being a mentor or an expert that I used to have,” one professor said during a videotaped discussion of distance learning. “Now I’m a manager trying to figure out what ‘downlinks’ I need. Instead of reading scholarly journals, I read Microsoft documents. What good will that do me when it comes to promotion?”

“They’re burning people out here,” said Edwin J. George, a 32-year-old assistant professor of educational technology. “I can’t remember ever working as hard as I did last year. I stressed myself out three or four times. But I think that’s what happens at a new place. It’s been a little better this year.”

George left a tenure-track position at the Cortland campus of the State University of New York, because “they couldn’t support me and my technology needs,” but he did

It took more than 500,000 tons of landfill to provide a foundation for the first group of campus buildings.

not anticipate the workload that awaited him in southwest Florida.

George has been developing and teaching both classroom and online courses, running a summer technology program for teachers, serving on university committees and trying to do some original work in his field.

“We’re not a research university but my supervisors have made it very clear to me that research is expected,” he said. “And I have to publish to be sure I can get a job elsewhere, if I have to.”

Many FGCU professors “are struggling with this issue in a very big way,” Maria Roca said. “To be credible, our people need to be engaged in scholarly activity but it’s hard to find the time for it.”

Suzanne L. Richter, vice president for academic affairs, agreed that “the first semester we were here, there was too much of everything for everybody to do.” But she said demands have lessened since then.

“Once faculty members get the (course) development work done, and learn to manage their time better, things improve,” Richter added. “You don’t have to answer every e-mail message the instant you get it.”

Richter said she was “insistent that we not abuse our junior faculty...I don’t want them penalized for teaching here.”

However, Chuck Lindsey, associate professor of mathematics and chair of the faculty senate, said, “everyone is pretty laden at this point.”



Demands on young faculty members at Florida Gulf Coast have been heavy, according to Ed George, an educational technology professor who said, “I stressed myself out three or four times last year.”

Lindsey said a faculty-administration taskforce is studying the possibility of offering higher pay or a reduced teaching schedule to professors who are developing new online courses.

Both Richter and Kathleen Davey, dean of instructional technology, have been somewhat taken aback by complaints about the demands of distance education. After all, they thought, faculty members knew about the technology plan when they were hired, and most expressed enthusiasm for the idea.

But last summer, more than half of the faculty surveyed said they did not think distance learning was an effective alternative to traditional instruction. “Where is this resistance coming from?” Davey wondered. “I thought I was back at Ohio State.” (Before coming to Florida, she was associate director of academic technology at Ohio State University, where faculty enthusiasm for distance learning was limited.)

But Davey has decided that “the resistance is healthy, the tension is good... We’re not having a revolution, but the future of distance learning here will depend somewhat on the new president.”

Community support for the new campus has been strong, although there has been some grumbling because FGCU does not plan to field a football team for at least a decade. President McTarnaghan and others have raised more than \$30 million in private gifts—a large sum for a new public campus.

McTarnaghan said one of his biggest problems has been trying to make rigid state funding formulas, as well as systemwide university rules, fit his experimental campus.

“We basically need less money for bricks and mortar and more for technology,” he said, “but our laws and rules so far do not permit that kind of flexibility.”

The president said he had to eliminate two buildings from the “first phase” of campus construction in order to

Florida Gulf Coast University by the Numbers

<i>Spring 1999 enrollment</i>	2,898
Freshmen	381
Sophomores	175
Juniors	586
Seniors	748
Graduate students	394
Non-degree students	614
<i>Racial/ethnic enrollment (fall 1998)</i>	
Hispanic	6.72 percent
African American	3.36 percent
White non-Hispanic	85.80 percent
Other	4.12 percent
Total faculty and staff	555
Full-time faculty	183
Part-time faculty	117
Value of campus facilities	\$51 million
(under construction)	\$15 million
Monthly payroll (approximate)	\$1.9 million

(Source: Florida Gulf Coast University)

have enough money to properly equip the rest.

McTarnaghan spends a lot of time in Tallahassee, the state capital, trying to persuade legislators to provide more flexibility for FGCU, but it has been a tough sell. “Most legislators graduated from the University of Florida or Florida State, where they do things the old way,” he said.

Confusion over Florida Gulf Coast’s accreditation has been a major headache in the first two years.

For many years the University of South Florida (whose main campus is in Tampa) maintained an upper-division branch in Fort Myers. That campus closed when FGCU opened, and many of its students transferred to the new campus, some thinking accreditation would be transferred automatically from one school to the other.

But the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the regional accrediting body, said the campus could only be a “candidate” for accreditation until its first cohort of students had graduated, an exhaustive self-study had been completed and there had been an evaluation by an SACS visiting committee.

Some transfer students told Florida newspaper reporters they had been assured by FGCU officials that the new campus already was accredited, a charge denied by Vice President Richter. Last spring, 237 of the 318 members of the first graduating class received University of South Florida degrees, while many others delayed their degrees until accreditation questions could be answered.

“This is one of the most frustrating experiences I’ve had here,” Richter said. “Neither the students nor the press seemed to understand the difference between ‘candidacy’ for accreditation and accreditation itself.”

Now the problem seems to have been solved. The self-study has been completed. The SACS team has made its visit, finding no major problems at Florida Gulf Coast University and issuing eight “commendations”—an unusually high number—in its report. Full accreditation is expected when the SACS “college commission” meets in June.

But the viability of multi-year faculty contracts remains in question.

Florida Gulf Coast is not alone in seeking alternatives to the tenure system. A few experimental campuses, like The Evergreen State College, in the state of Washington, and Hampshire College, a private liberal arts school in Massachusetts, have used contracts for years.



Kathleen Davey, dean of instructional technology, was surprised by faculty resistance to distance learning. “I thought I was back at Ohio State,” she said.

Post-tenure review has become almost routine on the nation’s campuses (although the number of faculty members eliminated by such a process remains small). Merit pay plans, rewarding professors who do not rest on their laurels after receiving tenure, have been adopted by the California State University system, among others.

A common tactic has been to stop hiring tenure-track faculty and to replace them with part-time professors who have no job security and few benefits. The proportion of tenured faculty at four-year institutions has changed only slightly over the last 20 years, from 52.3 percent in 1975 to 51.7 percent in 1995, the U.S. Department of Education has reported. But among new hires there is a strong movement away from tenure. The proportion of full-time faculty members working on contracts increased from 19 percent to 28 percent between 1975 and 1995, while the proportion of those with tenure-track jobs dropped from 29 percent to 20 percent.

College administrators and governing boards love no-tenure policies, which they believe enable them to eliminate faculty “deadwood” and to shift financial resources more easily from one academic area to another.

The Florida Board of Regents had hoped to impose multi-year contracts on all ten state universities, but the faculty union, the United Faculty of Florida (UFF), strenuously opposed the move. In a compromise, the union agreed to what UFF Executive Director Llona Geiger called “an experiment on one campus (Florida Gulf Coast), in which multi-year agreements would supplement, but not supplant, tenure appointments and promotions.”

Now, Geiger said, “it is clear that ‘supplement’ is not the right word—they are simply waiting for all the dinosaurs to die, and then they will be replaced by contract people.”

Twenty-eight professors gave up tenured or tenure-track positions at other institutions to teach at FGCU, according to an article in *Change Magazine* by Richard Chait, professor of higher education at the Harvard Graduate School of

The Florida Board of Regents hopes that lessons learned at Florida Gulf Coast can be applied at the state’s other universities.

Education, and C. Ann Trower, a senior researcher there.

One of these professors was Peg Gray-Vickrey, who left a tenured job at Lycoming College in Pennsylvania. “I was kind of interested in trying a non-tenured system,” she said in an interview. “There are some good things about tenure, and I would never say it should be abolished, but there are some problems with it as well. Some professors, once they get tenure, just really aren’t active participants in the college anymore.”

The attempt to make multi-year contracts work at FGCU has been complicated by the fact that about 30 professors, with tenure or in tenure-track jobs, transferred from the local University of South Florida branch to the new campus, creating an awkward two-tier system.

“This seemed to be a place where everyone was starting on the same page,” said Gray-Vickrey, who was not told she would have tenured colleagues when she accepted the Florida Gulf Coast offer. “But then the South Florida people turned up and, incredibly, we had a kind of caste system.”

“We’ve tried very hard not to have two classes of faculty,”

said Chuck Lindsey, the faculty senate chair.

But Maria Roca called the mixed faculty—some who have a lifetime job guarantee, or the prospect of one, and some who face contract renewal every few years—“our biggest problem.”

“They have to look for some other way to hold the contract people—with more money or reduced teaching assignments or something else,” Roca said. “Otherwise, we’re going to lose a lot of our best people, and we’re not going to attract people who are as good.”

In their *Change Magazine* article, Chait and Trower reported that the overall quality of the initial faculty “as gauged by degrees, diversity and academic experience, compares quite favorably with similar regional universities in the state and beyond.”

Last summer, more than half of the faculty surveyed said they did not think distance learning was an effective alternative to traditional instruction.

UPDATE **“Rolling Contracts”** **Instead of Tenure** **March 2008**

ALLIGATORS STILL BASK occasionally on the sunny campus of Florida Gulf Coast University, just as they did when *National CrossTalk* first reported on the new school in its spring 1999 issue. But just about everything else has changed.

Enrollment has soared, from fewer than 3,000 students in spring 1999 to more than 9,300 in fall 2007. The faculty has grown from 161 to 370. Class size has increased, and the only two lecture halls on campus “are booked for every hour,” a dean said. Half a dozen new academic programs have been added each year, along with 20 new

Enrollment at Florida Gulf Coast University has soared, from fewer than 3,000 students in spring 1999 to more than 9,300 in fall 2007.

faculty positions, according to Interim Provost Peg Gray-Vickrey.

The original emphasis on interdisciplinary studies has given way to a traditional structure of separate departments, each offering its own major.

“We’re still creative, we still have many innovative faculty, but rapid growth tends to dull the edges” of non-traditional approaches, said Jack Crocker,

who was dean of the College of Arts and Sciences when the campus opened in 1997 and has since retired.

Growth slowed somewhat in 2007-08, when a state budget deficit forced legislators to trim higher education spending by four percent. Florida Gulf Coast lost \$1.8 million in state support. As a consequence, the campus was ordered to hold fall 2008 freshman enrollment at the same level as the year before.

In addition, the campus imposed a hiring freeze, restricted faculty and staff travel, and delayed the start of master’s degree programs in engineering, environmental studies and mathematics.

One innovation that has survived is a no-tenure policy for faculty. Instead of tenure, faculty members sign “rolling contracts” for three to six years. Each instructor is reviewed each year, and if he or she is judged to have performed satisfactorily, another year is added to the contract.

Florida Gulf Coast “has not faced any particular challenges in hiring, without a tenure system,” Gray-Vickrey said, although she acknowledged that occasionally a prospective faculty member turns down an offer in favor of a campus with a tenure system.

The rolling contracts approach “really does make us feel pretty secure, but it creates recruiting problems,” said Maria Roca, dean of the Department of Philosophy and Communications. “If a candidate has a choice between our policy and tenure, most often they’ll choose tenure.”

Although rolling contracts have been around for some years, Florida Gulf Coast is one of the few colleges or universities to adopt this approach. Others include Hampshire College, in Massachusetts, and Georgia Gwinnett College, the newest campus in the Georgia State University system. The Evergreen State College, in the state of Washington, began with fixed eight-year contracts but shifted to “continuing contracts for life,” which Provost Don Bantz called “pretty much the same as tenure.”

—William Trombley

One innovation that has survived is a no-tenure policy for faculty. Instead of tenure, faculty members sign “rolling contracts” for three to six years.

Said Chuck Lindsey, “We were able to hire very good people because we were new and different. Now the question is, can we keep them? Can that level of quality be sustained?”

So far, 20 professors, more than ten percent of the full-time faculty, have resigned, a far higher defection rate than other faculty contract schools, like Evergreen State or Hampshire College, have experienced.

Vice President Richter said many of the resignations have been in the business school, “where faculty are very mobile because of high demand” for their services.

But others suggested that the combination of a heavy workload, doubts about faculty evaluation procedures and the “two tier” mix of tenured and contract professors, among other reasons, have made FGCU a less attractive alternative than some expected.

Academic freedom, presumably a major advantage of the tenure system, seldom was mentioned during interviews with FGCU faculty members. However, several said they were reluctant to criticize campus administrators because they feared reprisals.

“Since I learned that our collective bargaining agreement does not guarantee the right to speak out on campus issues, I’ve found I had much less to say about things like university governance,” said historian Eric Strahorn, whose contract is up for renewal.

“There’s an orthodoxy here, and you have to repeat it even if it isn’t true and you don’t believe it,” said a professor who does not expect contract renewal but still was reluctant to be identified.

But others disagreed.

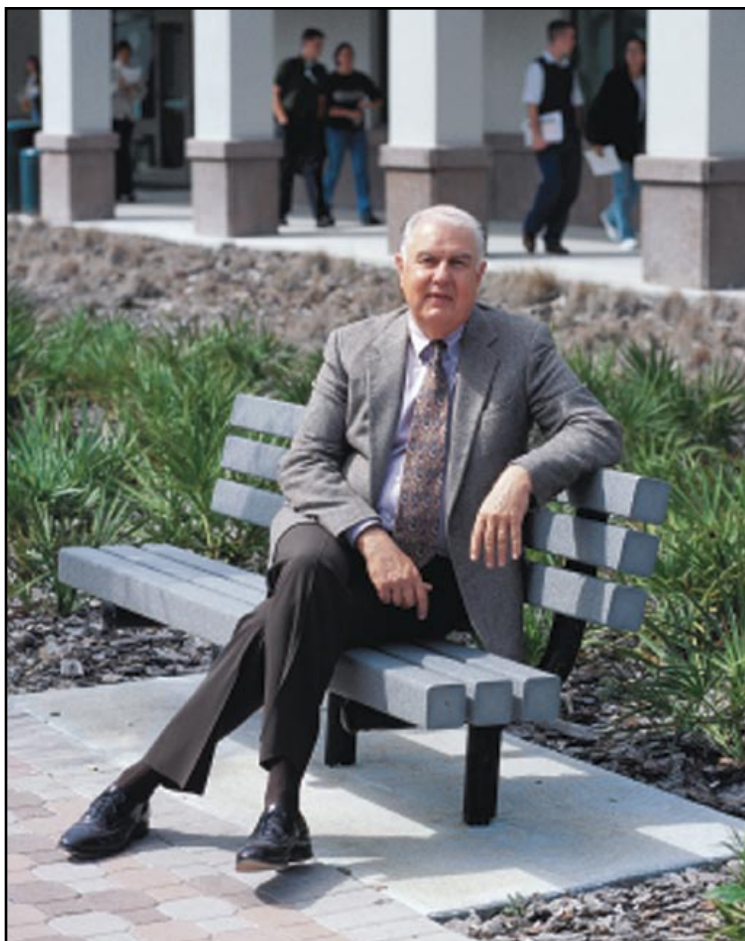
“Our faculty senate meetings are open, and I haven’t seen any reluctance to speak up,” said Chuck Lindsey, the senate chair. “I know some people feel that way, and the only way to deal with it is to establish a solid track record.”

President McTarnaghan brushed aside suggestions that complaining faculty members might not have their contracts renewed. He said these were the comments of those who “want to blow up bridges, not build them.”

“We have had very good luck in our staffing, and I expect most of the contracts will be renewed,” McTarnaghan said. “The union said we were going to hire a bunch of people on contracts and then fire most of them. Why would we do that, after spending hundreds of

thousands of dollars to hire and train them?

“If I had listened to the union, the world would have ended several times by now,” he continued. “In 1993, when we were planning this campus (McTarnaghan was then a



Roy E. McTarnaghan, founding president of Florida Gulf Coast University, will leave the job at the end of May.

systemwide university official), the union president said, “We will bury you! You will never open! No faculty will apply!”

But faculty members did apply, in large numbers, and the doors opened on time, despite environmental battles, construction delays, the accreditation furor, the inflexibility of state laws and university regulations and a host of other problems.

“I’d say 95 percent of what we planned to do has worked out,” said McTarnaghan, now nearing the end of his six years as the campus’ founding president. “I feel like I brought home a new child to a family that was waiting for one.”

A somewhat more measured estimate of campus prospects was offered by Jack Crocker, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences: “Much will depend on how we handle the research issue, how we treat faculty, how we handle academic freedom. And it’s going to be a few years before we will know any of that.” ♦

The combination of a heavy workload, doubts about faculty evaluation procedures and the “two tier” mix of tenured and contract professors has made FGCU a less attractive alternative than some expected.

An Unknown Quantity

Olin College students, faculty and administrators create an innovative new university from scratch

Photos by Rick Friedman, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Jon Marcus

NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

THE STUDENTS MINGLE shyly, carefully turned out to look as if they don't care how they look. Their parents, anxious to appear as if they aren't watching, stare like hawks. The administrators smile and make speeches in the shade of a yellow-and-white-striped tent, where there is a buffet with tofu burgers for the vegetarians. "This is the first day of an extraordinary journey," one reads from his notes. It is, in short, a typical opening of the academic year at a small New England college.

But this particular small college is far from typical, and these are not typical students, and this is not just another academic year. It is the first day not only of an extraordinary journey, but of an audacious and staggeringly expensive experiment: the creation of the first new freestanding undergraduate engineering college in the United States in nearly a century, and one of the few new private U.S. universities of any kind in decades.

Beyond the yellow-and-white-striped tent, construction crews are scrambling to finish the modular buildings that will temporarily house the faculty and these first 30 students until work is completed on the campus, which so far consists mainly of steel beams sprouting from a suburban Boston hillside. This opening

day begins a year of collaboration between students, faculty and administrators to achieve the singular goal of starting a brand-new university from scratch.

When finished, these buildings will stand as a physical symbol, an implicit rebuke of the way higher education is provided in America today—and of the snail's pace at which it seems able to change. Paid for by what could ultimately amount to the entire financial assets of the Franklin W. Olin Foundation, Olin College

Olin College is meant to hasten the laggard reform of engineering education, but also challenges many long-held practices of traditional higher education in general.

is meant not only to hasten the laggard reform of engineering education, but also to challenge many long-held practices of traditional higher education in general.

Built next to Babson College, which specializes in



Olin College's first buildings rise behind college President Richard Miller (second from left) and students Susan Fredholm, Matt Hill and Julianna Connelly.

management and business, Olin aims to turn out business-savvy engineers. It has a vice president of innovation and improvement. And to avoid the male-dominated "geek" culture of other engineering programs, at least half its students will be women. In an attempt to remove barriers to interdisciplinary cooperation, there will be no academic departments ("We don't want the chemists only to talk to the chemists," spokesman Joseph Hunter said). There is no tenure. And Olin doesn't charge tuition; each accepted student will receive a full four-year scholarship covering tuition and accommodations.

"If you look at tuition alone (at other universities), how much more can they increase it? The whole system is a house of cards that's bound to collapse," said Lawrence Milas, the outspoken president of the Olin Foundation. "We want to be the college that is constantly innovative, and we're trying to organize ourselves and develop the kind of culture that will support that kind of innovation. And we can do it, because we don't have people dug into their turf afraid or resistant to change. We can be risk-takers."

There was enormous competition for 32 slots in the inaugural class. The school attracted more than 3,000 inquiries and 664 applicants; barely one in 20 was accepted. That made Olin one of the most difficult colleges in America to get into, even before it had a campus or a faculty or a library or a curriculum. All of these accepted students posted standardized test scores in the top three percent nationally, and had nearly

perfect grades. Seventeen play at least one musical instrument. There are actors, athletes, dancers and debaters. One helped his parents build a geodesic dome-shaped house, and restored a vintage Volkswagen Bug while he was still in high school. They have enough computer knowledge to run a large company.

Their academic performance was so good, in fact, that the incentive of free tuition probably was not a factor in the decision of these students to apply, since most were offered full scholarships to engineering programs at some of the nation's top universities and colleges. Nor were they necessarily swayed by the fanciful self-deprecating promotional campaign that used the genre of 1950s horror movie posters to advertise "The College That Doesn't Exist!" They had other reasons for selecting Olin.

"Before I came, there was a slight bit of doubt, but that's true no matter where you go to college," said Jessica Anderson of Albuquerque, one of these first students. "When I came to the candidate weekend and I met the faculty, the administration, I realized they could be anywhere else doing anything, and also saw how passionate they were about making this place amazing. And I realized it couldn't fail."

Still, by the time of the scheduled opening day in late August 2001, things had not gone entirely as planned. Conceived by Milas in 1993, the school had received its charter from the state of Massachusetts in 1997 and had picked a 70-acre site on the wooded 370-acre Babson campus 12 miles outside of Boston. (Milas is a Babson graduate). The land was purchased from Babson for \$15 million. The foundation had hired the college's first employee in 1999: Richard Miller, who was lured away from his job as engineering dean at the University of Iowa to become president.

By March of 2000, however, construction had yet to begin because of design and permit problems, threatening plans to start classes in the fall of 2001; the first shovels-full of dirt wouldn't be dug until August of 2000. Miller and his tiny group

of administrators were working in the former bedrooms, and even attics and closets, of a few old Colonial-style homes that had come with the Babson property, looking out over the mud that was supposed to become their innovative campus.

But faculty already had been hired, and student recruiting had begun. Miller convened a meeting of what he called his SWOT team, which stood for "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats." (If Olin has adopted one thing from traditional higher education, it is a fondness for acronyms, although it uses them with something of a sense of humor.) The group decided that opening on time was probably impossible, and agreed that the buildings weren't the only things that would not be ready. It would take another year to test the curriculum.

So the SWOT team proposed that the inaugural class of students not take classes, but spend a year helping to design the classes they would eventually take. The students would be housed in temporary accommodations at no charge, and serve on committees with the faculty to plan the school's curriculum. And they wouldn't be called students. They would be called "Olin partners." Miller said: "Nearly everyone who thoroughly thought about this was easily persuaded by the logic of it. It turns out to have been a major defining moment. We were doing something that was not in the plan. And let's not overlook the fact that involving students in the design of the curriculum is itself heretical" in higher education.

It was these Olin "partners" who were milling around on the first day under the yellow-and-white-striped tent set up on the lawn of the wooden Colonial where the president's office occupies an upstairs bedroom. They would spend five years here, not four, returning in their second year as freshmen. Some sported brightly hued hair, others conservative crew cuts. One, Matthew Hill, showed off his Frisbee skills, balancing a disk on a finger and tossing it beneath his leg. Another, Julianna Connelly, sang a song she wrote for the occasion; yet another performed a ballet solo. The wife of the vice president of external affairs sold commemorative T-shirts for \$10 at a folding table. Balloons were anchored from cinderblocks, and there was the din of a bulldozer sculpting some dirt into what will become the entrance to the campus. Unlike similar scenes at other private colleges, there was no sense of history—except for history about to be made.

"Every one of these kids turned down a full ride to someplace else," said Jim Poisel, whose daughter, Joy, was the valedictorian of her Indiana high school class and scored in the top one percent on her SATs before deciding to enroll at Olin. "If this doesn't work out, she's only 18 years old. I doubt her life will be over. There are a lot worse things you can do with your life than to come out here and be involved with this. We raised her this way." Poisel, a firefighter in Indiana, added:

To avoid the male-dominated "geek" culture of other engineering programs, at least half of Olin's students will be women.



Prospective Olin College student Frances Haugen, shown participating in an engineering game during a campus visit, already has been accepted by MIT and CalTech.

“We told her life is a risk.”

How much of a risk is there really? “We have no alumni network, no campus, no track record,” said college spokesman Hunter. “There are going to be challenges. Failure is a possibility, if a remote one.” Very remote, considering the fact that the Olin Foundation has pledged its entire substantial financial support to making the school a success.

Another pair of parents, Nancy and Ken Fredholm of Hudson, New Hampshire, bubbled over with enthusiasm. “My worst professor in college was tenured,” Nancy Fredholm said in a not-so-subtle nod to Olin’s system of five-year faculty contracts instead of tenure. “I’m so envious,” said Ken Fredholm, himself an engineer who remembers being educated in “large lecture halls, not like the kind of one-on-one experience they’re going to have here. If they had had this back then, I wouldn’t have had any hesitation about enrolling here.”

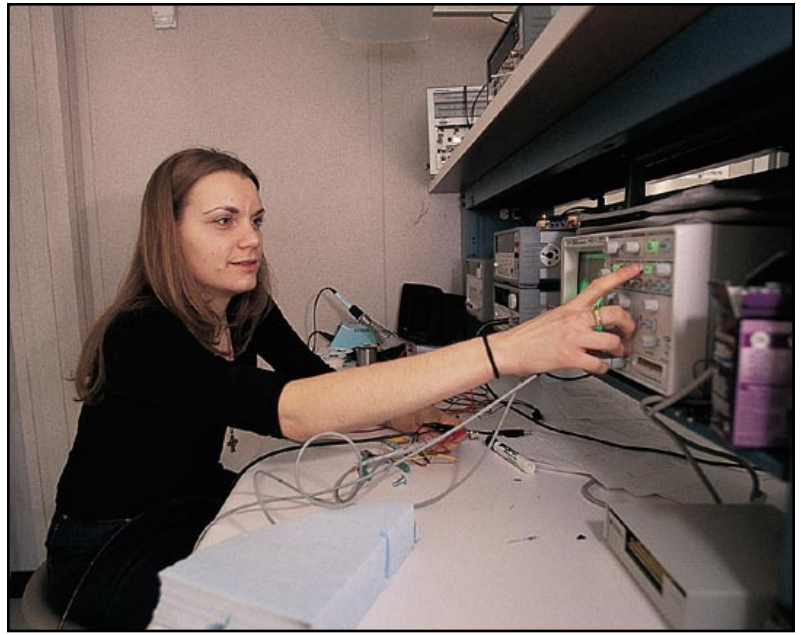
The modular buildings that will serve as temporary housing and offices were also behind schedule, and the students settled into temporary space at Babson. It would be two weeks before they could move their things into what they quickly dubbed the “Olin trailer park”: a parking lot and two flat-roofed buildings—bigger on the inside than they looked—which included reception areas, laboratories, classrooms, kitchens with perpetually brewing coffee, and folding chairs and tables, all connected through a maze of hallways.

The students attended the usual round of orientation mixers. At Olin this included a visit to the New Hampshire home and office of entrepreneur and engineer Dean Kamen, the inventor of the scooter-like Segway Human Transporter, who showed them his collection of antique technological artifacts. From the college itself, each student got a Franklin W. Olin “baseball card” encased in Lucite as a keepsake.

Raised in Vermont, Franklin Olin had only one term of formal schooling after the age of 13, but was accepted by Cornell, where he majored in civil engineering and was captain of the baseball team. The founder of the Olin Corporation, he used his personal fortune in 1938 to establish a foundation, which has since given more than \$300 million to build and equip 72 buildings on 57 campuses. Building and endowing Olin College is likely to eat up the remaining \$500 million. “We said, If this thing succeeds, that’s exactly what’s going to happen,” said Milas, the foundation’s president. “And right now it looks as if it’s going to succeed.”

The school’s governing board, or President’s Council, came to the campus for a routine meeting the same weekend that the college opened. It is an impressive and influential group that includes John Abele, founder and director of the medical device company Boston Scientific; Stephen Director, dean of engineering at the University of Michigan and chairman of the National Academy of Engineering Committee on Engineering Education; Gregory Shelton, vice president for engineering and technology at Raytheon; Sheri Sheppard, professor of engineering at Stanford and an advocate for reforming engineering education; Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; and William Wulf, president of the National Academy of Engineering.

Choosing to establish an engineering college, of all things,



Jessica Anderson, one of Olin’s first students, chose Olin because of “how passionate they (the faculty) were about making this place amazing.”

was a particularly risky proposition for the Olin Foundation. The number of accredited engineering programs has grown steadily, from 1,410 in 1990 to 1,602 in 2000. Yet since 1985, the number of engineering majors has declined by nearly 20 percent. “It came this way,” Milas said: “Okay, let’s start a college. And if we’re going to do that, why not an engineering college? Does America or the world need another engineering college? We discovered that there was an opportunity for a brand-new engineering college because, unlike the humanities and maybe some other fields of knowledge, science and engineering is a body of knowledge that is always growing and expanding.”

It is also true that the National Science Foundation, accrediting agencies, and other groups have been urging the reform of engineering education since the close of the Cold War by requiring instruction in team-building, communication and entrepreneurship, and by increasing the number of minority and women engineers. But at existing engineering schools, such reforms have been slow to be adopted. “Major business leaders have been asking for changes in what engineering grads know when they leave school,” said Miller. “And they’re making progress, but the progress is really slow. It has been disappointing.”

Not that Olin has yet realized all its goals. Participants at an NSF-sponsored workshop for women academic engineers complained that it was likely to simply reflect the existing white male-dominated culture of engineering. And while nearly half of the students are women, Olin has been less successful in attracting a broad representation of minorities. Among the first group of 62 students (the 30 original

When completed, the distinctive collection of buildings on a hilltop will have 500,000 square feet of space, with 27 fully networked labs and classrooms.

There will be no academic departments. There is no tenure. And Olin doesn't charge tuition; each accepted student will receive a full four-year scholarship covering tuition and accommodations.

"partners," plus 32 more who will join them as freshmen next fall), there are 12 Asians, five Hispanics and one African American.

As Olin students and faculty fell into a routine, a supermarket-style newsletter began to circulate called OVAL, for "oddly verifiable approximations and leaks"—more engineering humor. It predicted that "the official opening of Olin College will prompt an earthquake that will cause large cracks in the

engineering education establishment. There will be no serious injuries, only a few bruised egos."

The first of a succession of five-week "modules" began next. It included the start of work to design the curriculum, plus student-faculty research projects and something called the Olin Challenge—the idea of a professor who believes in hands-on collaboration as an integral part of engineering education. The professor wanted the group to build the

world's smallest working bicycle; the students overruled him, pointing out it would be hard for more than just a few of them to take part in creating something so tiny. They chose instead to build the world's biggest Rube Goldberg device, designed to hit the snooze button on an alarm clock in 130 steps; the previous record was 113 steps. In the end, the project became a lesson not only in collaboration, but in Murphy's Law, when only 124 of the 130 steps actually worked.

Construction of the campus, on the other hand, was going smoothly, helped by unseasonably warm weather. When completed, the distinctive collection of buildings on a hilltop will have 500,000 square feet of space, with 27 fully networked labs and classrooms. Each seat will have data and power ports, and two of the classrooms and most of the labs will have complete computer workstations for every student. Dorm rooms will be doubles with private baths and connections for power and cable television, telephone and data, plus fiber-optic outlets at each desk.

About 300,000 square feet will be completed in the long-awaited first phase, now scheduled to be finished this summer, including dormitory space for 195 students. It will take ten years for the school to reach its planned final enrollment of 600 to 650 students.

Olin College had 38 faculty and staff late last fall, but was

UPDATE **Olin College** **April 2009**

THE PLANS for Olin College were ambitious from the start, anticipating a student body that would grow from an initial class of 32 to more than 600, along with about 60 faculty, in its first ten years. Those projections turned out to be overly optimistic. However, the college has maintained its core founding principles, and continues to provide each student with a full four-year scholarship covering tuition.

After the first two years of operation, during which accommodations were included in the scholarship, the college did begin charging students for room and board. (For the 2009-10 academic year, the cost of tuition is \$36,400; room and board is \$13,230, along with about \$2,600 for health insurance, a laptop computer and student fees.) Of the estimated "total student budget" of \$54,523 for the current year, \$18,123 is not covered by the Olin scholarship.

National CrossTalk visited Olin College in 2001 when it was admitting its first class of students, or "partners," who would share in the creation of the college—from the dorms to the curriculum. "Things have developed a lot since that time," said Joseph Hunter, assistant vice president for external relations and director of communication, in an interview. "We still don't have traditional academic departments; we don't charge tuition; faculty are on five-year contracts, and there is no tenure."

The college has also completed the task of developing its curriculum, and has won accreditation from both its regional accreditor, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology.

There are currently about 300 students at Olin—a substantial increase, but only half of what was originally envisioned. "The idea of an enrollment of 600 had been discussed when we started recruiting students, but now we have built the curriculum and have a sense of the

cost per student," Hunter explained. "And so we settled in around 300 students—probably where we will stay for a while, at least until the stock market recovers."

Because Olin provides such generous support to its students, and relies on the return from a large endowment for its funding, tough economic times can be especially treacherous. "We are vulnerable,"

Hunter said, adding that there are advantages to Olin's position as well. "We have some strengths coming out of that also, because part of the idea of Olin, and the full-tuition scholarship, was that we would have such a large endowment that we could weather these storms. We still have one of the largest endowments per student in the country, and that helps us out a lot."

Still, the question remains: Will Olin be forced to begin charging tuition? "Somewhere out there, there is the possibility that we will charge tuition, or give a partial scholarship," Hunter acknowledged. "That gives us an advantage compared to others that are already maxing out on those—and private schools that are already charging high tuitions." Hunter emphasized that Olin would only charge tuition "as a last resort," and is not considering such a move at this time. "That is not something that is currently being planned," he said. "Not charging tuition has been such a signature thing for us."

An economic downturn does not affect Olin immediately, because the value of its endowment is averaged over a three-year period, and the college's budget is based on this three-year average. This accounting

Because Olin College provides such generous support to its students, and relies on the return from a large endowment for its funding, tough economic times can be especially treacherous.

adding more. The faculty will eventually number about 60. Three thousand people applied for the first 15 advertised positions. Only three of those who were offered jobs declined them, two after being promoted by their current universities to discourage them from leaving, according to Miller. Olin has hired faculty away from MIT, Cornell and Vanderbilt; one, Stephen Holt, was director of space science at the NASA-Goddard Space Flight Center. Another faculty member was a professor of mechanical engineering and director of the new products program at MIT, and former host of the PBS series *Scientific American Frontiers*.

Many faculty gave up substantial seniority to come here, and most agree with the idea that doing away with tenure is “a bulwark against mediocrity,” as one put it. The dean of the faculty is Michael Moody, who came from Harvey Mudd College, where he chaired the math department. Provost David Kerns was lured away from Vanderbilt, along with his wife, Sherra, vice president of innovation and research. Duncan Murdoch, vice president for external relations and enrollment, came from the University of Southern California.

When the second five-week module began, students were encouraged to undertake community service projects. Some collected used computers and refurbished them for low-income families. Others went to a nursing home for



Olin College will occupy a 70-acre site next door to Babson College, which specializes in business and management. The first permanent buildings will be finished this summer.

patients with multiple sclerosis and devised a way to install inline-skate wheels on the corners of their wheelchairs to help prevent them from becoming stuck against the walls. Two students were cast in the Babson College theatrical

practice serves to “iron out the peaks and valleys,” Hunter explained. “The 12-quarter average works for us in bad times, and a little bit again in good times. We feel that we are going to ride this out pretty well.”

Another advantage Olin enjoys is an unusually committed group of alumni. “The students see themselves as the co-founders of the institution,” Hunter said. “They are the most involved alumni that you’ll find anywhere. They were pioneers, and now they are our ambassadors in the world, getting good positions in companies, going to graduate schools. We are counting on them to talk up the Olin experience.”

Matthew Hill was a member of that pioneering first class (which graduated in 2006), and is now pursuing a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering at Stanford. “The fact that I went on to Stanford and won a fellowship there sort of puts the stamp of approval on Olin,” Hill said. “Having the Stanford name also opens a lot of doors.”

The decision to participate in the first class at Olin “was definitely a risk,” Hill said. “At first it was like going into the deep end, not knowing if your feet will touch the bottom. But by my second year I was getting offers for internships, and I was feeling a little better about it. I’m glad I took the risk of going to a small school that was so engineering focused—not like going to Stanford, were you can take anything you want. I think for almost everyone in our first class it turned out well!”

Two of Hill’s fellow Olin alumni, Kate Blazek and Polina Segalova, are also at Stanford. They were awarded National Science Foundation graduate research fellowships, along with Susan Fredholm and Que

About one-third of Olin’s first class of students went on to graduate school, while most of the rest found positions in engineering or related fields.

Anh Nguyen. Two other graduates, Jay Gantz and Joy Poisel, accepted Fulbright Scholarships for study in Europe.

About one-third of the class went on to graduate school, while the rest found positions in engineering or related fields. A few pursued other interests as varied as the Peace Corps and an acting career.

“We’re extremely pleased at the exciting postgraduate plans of our first class of students,” said Olin President Richard Miller, in the summer 2006 issue of *Innovation*, the campus magazine. “The prestigious offers our graduates are receiving exceed our expectations—and our expectations were high.”

Perhaps because of the influence of students at Olin, the college has been rated very high in national surveys of campus amenities. In recent rankings by the *Princeton Review*, Olin placed seventh on the list for best food, and second in the category of “dorms like palaces,” just behind Loyola College in Maryland. “When they built the new dorm, we pushed to have the rooms be suites—so everybody had a little bit of privacy, but shared common amenities,” Hill said.

“In that first year, we learned the value of involving students,” Hunter said. “They are very smart. They are on all the important committees, and we feel like it is very important to get their voice on things.”

Currently about 40 percent of the students at Olin are women—less than the target of 50 percent, but still considered a favorable ratio for an engineering program. “The national average for women in engineering programs is about 20 percent, so we are about twice that,” Hunter said. The college’s faculty-student ratio is admirable as well. “We have about 35 faculty members—about nine-to-one. We feel that that’s about right for the kind of faculty-intensive program we have here.”

Hill has no regrets about his choice to attend Olin. “It was somewhat limited in terms of some opportunities that you would have at other schools,” he said. “But I felt that they did things really well... I left with a good skill set and a job offer.”

—Todd Sallo



Student Matthew Hill, shown working on his art project, looks forward to Olin's first year of "real" courses.

production of "The Real Inspector Hound." Jessica Anderson and another student made the Babson Dance Ensemble, and two others joined Babson's *a cappella* singing group. (Olin students also started their own outing, bowling, film, yoga and CD listening clubs.)

Olin's relationship with Babson is closely tied to its mission. "It's an ideal place to partner with because of our entrepreneurial experience," said Babson spokesman Mike Chmura. "Babson business students will learn early how to work with the people who will create the products they will later help to market, develop, produce and sell. Likewise, Olin students can bring Babson students on board to plan the business aspects of selling the products they design."

As a practical matter, Olin doesn't have to build an athletic complex; its students will use Babson's. And Olin students will use the Babson library for non-engineering materials. Olin also pays Babson to provide dining, security and healthcare services. Olin President Richard Miller serves on Babson's board of trustees, and Babson administrators are members of Olin's governing committees.

Holt encouraged a dozen students to enter a NASA competition to design a greenhouse that could operate on Mars. Matt Hill, the Frisbee fanatic, served as design team leader. The Olin proposal was named one of six finalists, beating out upperclassmen from Cornell and other large established universities. Olin's team also created a tongue-in-cheek online radio show it called *The History and Mystery of Mars*.

Around this time, students and faculty started to become disenchanted with one of the innovations Olin had proposed to make: shortening the segments of the academic calendar. The modules were proving frustratingly short, and there was a consensus that half-semesters (called "quamesters") also wouldn't necessarily work. It was agreed that the curriculum would be taught in sets of three linked courses—calculus, physics and engineering design, for

instance. A group of, say, 25 students would take all three of those courses together, and the instructors would jointly design the curriculum and projects to be complementary. Students would work on engineering projects that bring together the basic concepts of calculus and physics.

After the winter holiday break, students and faculty tested this idea. Their project: building a cannon that could fire a golf ball far and accurately, with a budget of \$300. The two student teams were bested by the faculty cannon, the "Silver Bullet," which drove a ball more than 500 yards with greater accuracy.

The curriculum also will include art, philosophy, psychology, language, and other electives, most of them provided by Babson, Brandeis, Wellesley and other nearby schools. Students proposed, and administrators agreed, that credits should also be awarded for "passionate pursuits" like dance or music.

"They really are walking the walk of saying engineers need to be much more well-rounded," Jessica Anderson said, returning to the "trailer park" one morning after boning up on her French with fellow students over breakfast. The entire class was preparing to spend a month at the Georgia Tech campus in Metz, France—part of Olin's philosophy of exposing its students to other cultures in an era of globalization.

Anderson was on a restructuring committee at the high school she attended. "I had been allowed a little bit to express my opinion," she said. "I wouldn't say it's a shock, but it's been a relief. I envisioned college as a place where you could have nerdy conversations about random things, and that's what we get to do here. We've gotten so used to being able to express our opinions and having them listened to for the most part."

It was the students, for example, who polled the faculty about what math prerequisites were necessary for their disciplines. As a result, the subject of statistics will be introduced far earlier at Olin than at other engineering schools. Students also comprised most of the residential life, honor code, orientation and student government committees. They voted on a mascot, rejecting a dragon, a sprocket, a resistor and other suggestions in favor of a phoenix—because, they said, the intention of the college is to continually reinvent itself. They even shared their opinions about the menu with the school's food service company. "We joke about asking for featherbed mattresses," Anderson said. "We're awed at how spoiled we are."

But students also admitted to some exasperation. Accustomed to being at the top of their classes, they were being used as guinea pigs to test new courses, some of which were based on material they had not yet studied. "It's like building an airplane while you're flying it," said Anderson. "A lot of this year has been testing out balances and testing out limits."

Julianna Connelly added: "At times it has been frustrating when a faculty member gives an assignment to do something I've never done before and don't know how to do." Matt Hill said Olin felt more like a corporation than a college. "We don't feel like students at all." But he admitted: "I'm looking forward to the structure" of the coming academic year, when the courses will be for real. He is also looking forward to seeing

The Franklin W. Olin Foundation has pledged its entire substantial financial support to making the school a success.

the school's enrollment grow from its initial size of only 30 students. "It's nice knowing everybody, but it would be nice to still have people that you haven't met," he said.

Hill admitted to having gone to bed at five o'clock that morning. Student burnout and lack of sleep became significant concerns among administrators. The dean of student life even arranged a seminar in time management. "It's been a baptism by fire," said Connelly, who earned a perfect 1600 on her SATs and got all A's at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Fairfax, Virginia.

Connelly took several "test courses," including "Lepidoptera of Nabokov," which scrutinized the author's moth and butterfly references, and "What Is I," a humanities course that looked at self-perception and pondered whether a computer can be an "I." Every class ended with a post-mortem, and every Friday at noon students sent what they called "minute papers" to their professors by e-mail, evaluating their classes. (They recommended jettisoning the textbook used in "What Is I"). "The big difference next year will be that we won't be able to say, 'I didn't like this

Other Olin partners walked around dispensing advice and encouragement—and looking like they own the place. "The whole point is to introduce them to what Olin's going to be: very project-based," said Anderson. "We do own the place," she added. "We have pride of ownership." Another partner, Adam Horton—the student who built the geodesic dome in high school—said, "We love this place. This is our baby. We are taking a risk by coming here, so it has to be."

An audience of onlookers—mostly beaming parents—grew on a balcony. The drama intensified. It was probably the first time in this gym that the cheers of the crowd were for an engineering competition.

"Everything we have found so far is exactly what our son has been asking us to find for him in an institution," said

Jaime Cabezas of San Jose, Costa Rica, whose son Luis was hard at work below him. Luis had also been accepted by MIT; his father was not concerned that Olin College is far less well known. "Does that really count for so much? If Olin College becomes famous, he will have been in the starting class."

Tom Haugen, whose daughter Frances was also accepted by MIT and CalTech, was not entirely convinced. A professor of pathology at the University of Iowa who went to UC Berkeley, he said: "I've heard many times about higher education being reinvented. Just what effect that all has in the long term, I don't know. It's clear that it's a very good faculty. It's just an unknown quantity."

But Frances, whose mother is also a professor at the University of Iowa, said she already knew she wanted to come here. Those other schools, she said, "don't stress the integrated approach, the application-based process. They stress learning, rather than applying what you learn. Part of the fun is that we're engaged in an act of creation here." Just then, a fellow student asked her to take a picture of their team with a tiny lens connected to his Palm Pilot. "You know you're in nerd country," she said, obviously delighted. ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Many faculty gave up substantial seniority to come here, and most agree with the idea that doing away with tenure is "a bulwark against mediocrity," as one put it.



Potential Olin students competed in an engineering exercise as parents and others watched from the gym balcony.

assignment, so I didn't do it," Connelly said.

By that time, more than 5,000 people had inquired about enrolling among the next class of students. There were 536 applicants for 32 spots, even though the application deadline was moved up a month to January 1. Once again, all were at or near the top of their classes, with nearly perfect SAT scores. They had built robots, translated books from Czech into English, and created computer-generated music. Seventy-six were invited to the campus with their parents for a weekend to see the still-unfinished buildings, meet each other, and work on a massive problem-solving project in a Babson gym.

"Olin College?" asked the baffled Babson student at the desk in the athletic center. But teams of high school seniors in plastic safety glasses were already at work just ahead, trying to find a way to build the longest cantilever, or projecting structure anchored at one end, out of Styrofoam, unsharpened pencils, crepe paper, five-gallon water jugs, and file boxes. ("We didn't have a box when we did it," said Joelle Arnold, a member of the Olin partners class.)



New Campus Still Faces Obstacles

After being postponed for a year, UC Merced hopes to open in fall 2005

Photos by Rod Searcey for CrossTalk

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

MERCED, CALIFORNIA

MARIA PALLAVACINI SMILED with pleasure as she showed her visitor a newly arrived, \$950,000 mass spectrometer that she and her research team at the University of California, Merced, will use in their work on cancer cells.

In addition to her administrative duties as dean of the School of Natural Sciences, Pallavacini expects to continue the cancer research that she carried on at UC San Francisco for 12 years before coming to Merced. The new machine, purchased partly with state funds and partly with Pallavacini's federal research grants, will make that possible.

Because of California's financial crisis—the worst in state history—some critics have proposed that Merced, the tenth campus in the UC system, should be postponed or even cancelled. State support for the University of California's budget has been cut by about \$520 million in the last four years and freshman enrollment has been capped for the first time at both UC and the 23-campus California State University system.

But the arrival of the mass spectrometer, and other expensive research equipment, is a strong sign that, for better or worse, UC Merced is likely to open in fall 2005. It would be the first major new U.S. research university of the 21st century.

The first buildings are rising on a former golf course two miles northeast of the city of Merced, 100 miles south of Sacramento, in the heavily agricultural San Joaquin Valley. Twenty-four faculty members have been hired so far. A staff of more than 200 is working at the temporary campus, housed in buildings that once were part of Castle Air Force Base. The state has invested more than \$300 million in the campus to date—about \$70 million in operating funds, the rest in construction contracts that are financed by general obligation bonds.

"We have passed the point of no return," said Peter Berck, professor of agricultural and resource economics at UC Berkeley and chairman of a university-wide faculty task force that has been overseeing the birth of the new campus.

But obstacles remain.

Because the UC Board of Regents chose to locate the campus in an area of environmentally sensitive vernal pools, several federal and state agencies must approve campus plans to expand from the present 200-acre golf course location to a 910-acre site that one day might accommodate as many as 25,000 students. A 1,240-acre "university community," with eventual housing for 30,000 people, is to be built on university land adjacent to the campus.



The first buildings are rising at UC Merced, where Carol Tomlinson-Keasey has been chancellor since 1999.

After the winter rains, vernal pools are alive with several varieties of fairy shrimp—microscopic creatures that float on their backs, waving their 11 pairs of delicate legs in the air to filter bacteria, algae and protozoa. The shrimp are an important part of the diet of migratory waterfowl and local animals. Several of these species are endangered, which means the university must obtain a "clean water" permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has jurisdiction over U.S. wetlands, including these vernal pools.

It will take the Corps of Engineers, and the state and federal agencies that advise them, at least another year to decide whether or not to issue the permit, said Nancy Haley, chief of the Corps' San Joaquin regulatory office. "They're taking a risk" by building the first structures on the golf course land, Haley said, because the rest of the campus might have to be located elsewhere.

Without the permit, "we'd have to go back to the drawing board and develop a new campus plan," said Bob Smith, the Merced County planner who is working with the university

Because of California's financial crisis, some critics have proposed that Merced, the tenth campus in the UC system, should be postponed or even cancelled.



María Pallavacini, a cancer researcher at UC San Francisco for 18 years, will continue her work at UC Merced, where she is dean of the School of Natural Sciences.

on the project.

UC's strategy appears to be to start as many buildings as it can, and hire as many people as possible, as soon as possible, hoping the campus would be seen as too far along to be stopped. Lindsay Desrochers, vice chancellor for administration, said the university decided to go ahead without the key permit because "it was the only way to get this thing started."

Although UC Merced has strong support from local politicians and business leaders, there is less enthusiasm for the project in the state legislature, especially among Democrats.

During last year's budget discussions, Senate President Pro Tem John Burton called the proposed campus the "biggest boondoggle ever." State Senator Jack Scott, chairman of the Senate higher education budget subcommittee, has expressed doubts about proceeding with the campus in the face of a huge state budget deficit.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger included \$20 million in operating budget support for UC Merced (\$10 million less than the campus requested) in his proposed 2004-05 budget. Although the legislature might nibble away at this request, most of it is likely to be approved, and the campus will at last open in fall 2005, with 1,000 students—600 first-time freshmen, 300 community college transfers and 100 graduate students.

The advance guard will be a group of about 25 graduate students who will arrive this fall, to pursue advanced degrees in environmental sciences, molecular science and engineering, and quantitative and systems biology.

The first undergraduate students will find an academic program heavily slanted toward science and engineering.

Sixteen of the first 24 faculty hires are in these fields. "We have invested early in science and engineering," said Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost David B. Ashley, former dean of the engineering school at Ohio State. "We think this is an important capability for this campus."

Campus officials had hoped to have 100 faculty on hand when the first students arrived, but budget cuts, last year and this, have reduced that number to 60. "We think we can make that work," Ashley said. However, Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey warned, "I will not open with less than 60."

At first, there will be six undergraduate majors and six areas of concentration for graduate students—again, mostly in science and engineering.

Some faculty prospects were bothered by "all this uncertainty about the budget," Ashley said. "It's taken a lot of hard work, but in the end we've made some outstanding hires." He noted that the new faculty members are bringing along more than \$7.6 million in research grants.

Jeff Wright, dean of the School of Engineering, said "some of the more junior people were a bit gun shy," about accepting job offers, especially after the campus opening was postponed from this year to next, "but the more senior people know that things like budget crises come and go."

"Most of the people we're interested in haven't asked questions about the budget," said Kenji Hakuta, dean of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. "They're committed to the adventure of starting a new campus." But he added, "Until we have students here, we're on pins and needles... Once the students are here, we'll all feel better."

Dean Pallavacini of the School of Natural Sciences hopes to build cooperative programs among the sciences and also with the School of Engineering. "Everyone understands you can't work alone anymore," she said, but it is hard to get rid of "academic silos" on an established campus. "There aren't many places where scientists, humanists and engineers work together—we hope this will be one."

In biology, "mapping the genome has changed instruction in fundamental ways," the dean said. "We have to find ways to train students to be at the cutting edge of this new biology."

There will be undergraduate majors in Earth Systems Biology and Human Biology, and the first graduate program will be in Quantitative and Systems Biology. Pallavacini also hopes students will work on local problems, like the high incidence of asthma in the San Joaquin Valley, especially among Hispanics.

She talks to local groups about current issues in science

During last year's budget discussions, Senate President Pro Tem John Burton called the proposed UC Merced campus the "biggest boondoggle ever."

and encourages her new faculty members to do the same. “Our community has got to know what we’re about,” Pallavacini said. “We can’t be isolated, we can’t be seen as an Ivory Tower.”

Dean Wright of the engineering school also hopes to involve students in “hands-on problem solving.”

“One of the problems in engineering education is a low retention rate,” said Wright, who was associate dean of engineering at Purdue University before coming to UC Merced. “Even the good schools retain only about half of the students who start out to be engineers.” Wright believes this is because the first two years are filled with classes like calculus and physics, and students “don’t see the connections” between this classroom work and the real world.

With a program he calls “service learning,” the dean hopes students “right from the start will be getting their hands dirty,” working on practical engineering problems, along with the required course work. For example, students might build information systems for United Way agencies that cannot afford to hire engineers.

“I want them to understand that engineering is a lot more than solving equations,” Wright said.

Dean Hakuta of the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts—“breathed a sigh of relief” when the campus opening was delayed a year.

Newly-arrived from Stanford University, where he spent 14 years as an experimental psychologist and professor of education, Hakuta faced the task of hiring faculty and establishing academic programs in a few short months. “I don’t know how I could have opened (this year) without compromising quality and making some really bad decisions,” he said.

Then came the news that the campus debut would be postponed for a year. Now Hakuta has time to plan for two broad undergraduate majors—World Cultures and Social and Behavioral Sciences—and graduate work in history and perhaps one other field. He also hopes to start a World Cultures Institute and an undergraduate major in business management.

Historian Gregg Herken, who has written books about nuclear history and the Cold War, decided to accept an offer from UC Merced because “it’s something new and exciting and different.” For the last 15 years Herken was Senior Historian and Curator of Military Space at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum, in Washington, D.C.

A 1969 graduate of UC Santa Cruz, Herken hopes the interdisciplinary spirit which characterized that campus in its early years can be repeated at Merced, though he suspects “that kind of cooperation will break down as we grow larger,” just as it has at Santa Cruz.

Provost Ashley said a fourth academic unit—a school of management—will be added soon, because of strong student interest in that field.

The Sierra Nevada Research Institute, based on the campus, will “work on the environmental problems of this region,” said Director Samuel J. Traina, who came to UC Merced from Ohio State. These include water

problems, climate change and the pressures exerted on San Joaquin Valley agriculture by increasing urbanization.

Traina said the institute expects to operate a field station in Yosemite National Park, 80 miles away, in conjunction with the National Park Service.

But all of these academic plans and aspirations are at the mercy of budget discussions now under way in Sacramento.

Despite recent passage of a \$15 billion bond issue, California still faces a budget deficit of at least \$14 billion, which Governor Schwarzenegger hopes to reduce or eliminate without raising taxes. That means big cuts in many state programs, including higher education.

The 2004-05 Schwarzenegger budget proposes cuts of nine percent for the California State University system, 7.9 percent for the University of California, and a slight increase for the state’s 109 community colleges. Tuition would be increased substantially in all three segments. Student financial aid would be reduced and funding would be eliminated for “outreach” programs, which seek to recruit low-income and minority students and prepare them for admission to UC or Cal State.

Schwarzenegger also wants freshman enrollment at both UC and Cal State to be reduced by ten percent, with 7,000 students diverted to community colleges instead.

In the face of such stringent measures, does it make sense to open UC Merced? Some think not.

Supporters of the new campus argue that it will provide an economic lift to one of the poorest areas in the state.



Historian Gregg Herken joined the UC Merced faculty because “it’s something new and exciting and different.”

Governor Schwarzenegger's budget proposes cuts of nine percent for the California State University system, 7.9 percent for the University of California.

"Many Democrats are asking, 'Why are we doing this when we can't support the existing campuses adequately?'" said a legislative staff member who is close to the budget talks but did not want to be identified.

"The state doesn't need new research facilities, it needs more seats for undergraduates," said a California State University official, who also asked for anonymity.

Some have suggested that the Merced campus opening should be postponed for at least another year, and a few have proposed that it be abandoned altogether. Naturally, University of California administrators disagree.

"We've put so much money into it, it makes no sense not to go ahead and open," said Lawrence C. Hershman, UC vice president for budget. "We've spent hundreds of millions

of dollars on buildings and faculty and equipment, and it just makes no sense to stop the project or mothball it."

Hershman said UC expects 66,000 additional students (in addition to the 208,000 now enrolled) by the year 2010 and that plans call for UC Merced to take 5,000 of those. "It would be stupid for the state to mothball this campus... and then put up buildings on other campuses to accommodate the enrollment increase," he said.

"Promises were made to these people (in the San Joaquin Valley), going back to the '60s, that there would be a UC campus, and it never happened," Hershman added. "Now we're finally delivering on the promise... It's the right thing to do."

Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey argues that the San Joaquin Valley is "terribly underserved" by public higher education. In the 11-county area around Merced, only a "pathetically low" 14.2 percent of the population has college degrees, she said. Only 4.6 percent hold graduate or professional degrees. More than 30 percent of San Joaquin Valley adults do not have a high school diploma.

UPDATE

June 2008

University of California, Merced

SINCE 1994, most recently in the spring 2004 issue, *National CrossTalk* has reported on problems that have plagued the University of California's newest campus, near the San Joaquin Valley city of Merced. Now some of those problems appear to be headed toward resolution.

Enrollment has picked up; some environmental issues have been resolved; and heated political opposition to the campus (the majority leader of the California State Senate once called it "the biggest boondoggle ever") has cooled.

An attitude of inevitability has settled in among critics of the campus. "It is what it is," said a one-time opponent. "Now, how are we going to help it succeed?"

Many of the environmental problems were created when the UC Board of Regents decided to locate the new campus in an area of vernal pools several miles east of downtown Merced. The pools, dry most of the year, come alive after the winter rains and are home to two endangered species—fairy shrimp and the California Tiger Salamander.

This required the campus to seek a "clean water" permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has jurisdiction over U.S. wetlands, as well as approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which protects endangered species.

For several contentious years the university stuck to its plan to build a 910-acre campus, with a large adjacent "University Community" of housing for 31,000 people, as well as retail stores and a performing arts center, despite clear signs that this would not be acceptable to the federal agencies.

But late in 2006 the university changed course and began more constructive talks with the federal agencies and with environmental organizations that were opposed to the campus-University Community plan.

"Eighteen months ago we decided to take a fresh look, a good businesslike look," said Associate Chancellor Janet Young in a 2008

interview. "We began fresh exchanges with the agencies" and with environmental critics. Chancellor Sung-Mo (Steve) Kang, who took office in early 2007, gave his enthusiastic support to the new approach.

The result was a new plan that reduced the campus "footprint" from 910 to 810 acres and moved it slightly, to avoid some of the wetlands areas. In March 2008, the plan was submitted to the Corps of Engineers, which said it would take at least a year to review the proposal.

The groups continue to meet regularly. "I am cautiously optimistic," said Carol Witham, a leading environmental critic of the original plan.

There are still plans for the University Community, next door to the campus, although in spring 2008, a large number of homes that were built on speculation in and around Merced stood empty, and the foreclosure rate was one of the highest in the nation.

"We think the market will correct," Young said.

In Fall 2007, enrollment was 1,871 (1,750 undergraduates and 121 graduate students). This was well short of the expected 2,600, the state Legislative Analyst's Office reported. The original target of 5,000 students by 2010 clearly will not be met.

"That was a very aggressive plan," Kang said. "No other new (UC) campus has done that."

Applications have increased as the existence of the Merced campus has become better known and as other UC general campuses have become more selective.

A main selling point for the Merced campus was that it would serve California's Central Valley (from Redding in the north to Bakersfield in the south), which sends fewer students to the University of California than do other regions of the state. About one-third of the current students come from the valley, where the campus recruits energetically at high schools with heavy Hispanic and other minority enrollments.

"We think that's very good," said Jane Lawrence, vice chancellor for student affairs. "No UC campus is regional. We are

“One of the reasons the campus came here was to try to make a difference with low-income, especially Hispanic students,” said Director of Admissions Encarnacion Ruiz.

In fall 2002, the last year for which figures are available, only 1,414 out of almost 41,000 high school graduates in the 11 counties enrolled at a UC campus, according to the California Postsecondary Education Commission. About half of those who qualify for admission to UC do not apply, Ruiz said. Of those who are admitted, half do not enroll.

“This really is a cultural thing,” Tomlinson-Keasey said. “For some, cost is a barrier, but for many families, they just don’t want their children to go away to college,” even if the campus is not very far away.

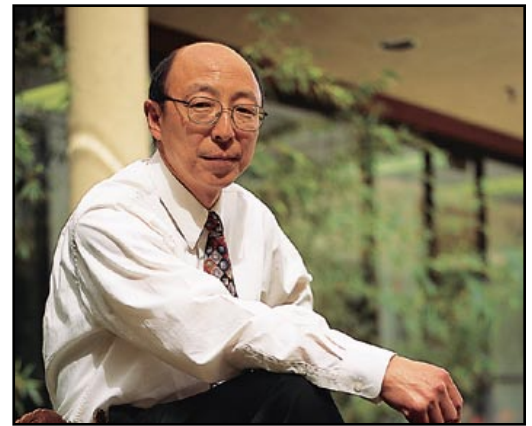
Benjamin T. Duran, president of Merced College, the local two-year community college, agreed. “If you’re a non-English-speaking parent, and your son or daughter comes to you and says, ‘Dad, I’ve been accepted at Berkeley,’ you’re probably going to say, ‘no, I don’t think so,’” Duran said.

Duran grew up in Merced, one of eight children of farm worker parents and the first in his family to attend college.

In the 1980s he was superintendent of a high school district where most of the students were Hispanic.

“I was frustrated,” he said. “I had some really talented students who didn’t even apply” to the University of California. A few went to nearby Fresno State or Stanislaus State and did well, but many did not go to college at all. Duran believes the presence of a research campus like UC Merced will lift the aspirations of many such students.

Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey hopes that one-third to one-half of UC Merced undergraduates will come from the



Kenji Hakuta came to UC Merced as dean of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, after 14 years at Stanford University.

meeting the needs of the whole state.”

Applications have increased as the existence of the Merced campus has become better known and as other UC general campuses have reached capacity and have become more selective. (In fall 2007, UCLA admitted only 23.6 percent of 43,724 freshman applicants, UC Berkeley 24.7 percent of 36,083 applicants; but UC Merced admitted 79.6 percent of the 8,114 who applied.)

For fall 2008, UC Merced received more than 10,000 applications from first-year students. Freshman enrollment was 925, exceeding the 700 that had been planned, and the total enrollment was 2,718.

The campus opened during a time of chronic state budget deficits and curtailment of California’s postsecondary education spending. There were sharp reductions in the 2005-06 academic year, with another series of cuts scheduled for 2008-09.

“Our operations are very, very sensitive to fluctuations in the budget,” Chancellor Kang said. “It determines how many students we can take, how many faculty we can hire, how much classroom and lab space we will have.”

In the 2007-08 academic year UC Merced employed about 100 full-time faculty members, 78 lecturers and a staff of about 580. The campus budget for that year was about \$100 million. Of that, \$40 million came from the state, including \$14 million in “startup” money that will phase out in 2011-12. Student fees (the University of California quaintly refuses to use the term “tuition”) generated another \$13 million.

In addition to operating funds, the campus has received about \$300

Because the state budget included no money for enrollment growth in 2008-09, other UC campuses agreed to contribute \$6 million to pay for new students at UC Merced—an unprecedented step.

million from the state for buildings and equipment, according to the Legislative Analyst’s Office.

Because the state budget included no money for enrollment growth in 2008-09, other UC campuses agreed to contribute \$6 million to pay for new students at UC Merced—an unprecedented step, UC statewide officials said.

Despite the budget problems, the UC Board of Regents has authorized planning for a medical school at UC Merced. “The need is great in the Central Valley,” said Keith Alley, provost and executive vice president, but “planning will take the better part of a decade.”

Undergraduates enjoy many small classes. The student-faculty ratio is 15 to one, smaller than other UC general campuses. There is a heavy emphasis on science and engineering. Half of the undergraduates, and 40 percent of the graduate students, are enrolled in those subjects.

The campus awarded its first doctorate in 2008.

“Where we’re really hurting is in terms of space, especially research space,” said Shawn Kantor, professor of economics and chairman of the academic senate. “We aren’t being funded as a new campus should be,” he said. “There are many things we’d like to do, but the money isn’t there.”

There are three main academic buildings on the campus, with a fourth scheduled to open in early 2010. Some faculty and administrative staff (including Chancellor Kang’s microchip research group) are housed at the former Castle Air Force Base, about six miles north of Merced.

Faculty members also complain about a lack of staff support and about a heavy faculty workload.

“There are not enough senior faculty here, so junior faculty have to bear a disproportionate burden,” said Gregg Herken, professor of history, who was one of the first faculty members hired. “They have to teach their classes, do their research, serve on committees, even recruit new faculty,” all while doing enough original work to gain tenure.

But Herken retains “tempered enthusiasm” for UC Merced’s accomplishments to date. “I was a student at UC Santa Cruz when that campus was new,” he said. “Things were ragged at the edges in the early years, but now things have settled down. I’m sure the same will be true here.”

—William Trombley

San Joaquin Valley, but some doubt that goal can be met. They point out that many small high schools in the area do not offer the kind of instruction, especially in mathematics and science, that would prepare students for the university.

UC Merced has mounted a large-scale “outreach” effort, sending teams to area high schools to make sure students take the courses needed to be eligible for UC. They also help students and their families with financial aid forms, loan applications and other paperwork.

They have even organized visits to other UC campuses, to show parents the campus medical facilities and police station, in an effort to reassure them that their sons and daughters would be safe. They call these groups “Unwilling Parents of Willing Students.”

These efforts have met with some success, even before UC Merced opens. The number of students admitted to UC campuses from 18 targeted high schools has increased from 293 in fall 2000 to 415 last fall, said Jorge Aguilar, director of the Center for Educational Partnerships at UC Merced.

“If it hadn’t been for them (the UC Merced recruiters), I probably wouldn’t have taken the right classes and probably wouldn’t have gotten in,” said Alicia Quintero, from the small town of Caruthers, south of Fresno. Alicia is now a sophomore at UC Riverside, with a 3.4 grade point average, and is thinking about a teaching career.

But the UC Merced program lost \$1.2 million as a result of last year’s budget crisis, and the 2004-05 Schwarzenegger budget proposes to eliminate all outreach efforts in both the UC and Cal State systems.

“That was not a rational decision,” said Allen Carden, executive director of the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, which includes 24 two- and four-year schools in the area.

Supporters of the new campus argue that it will provide an economic lift to one of the poorest areas in the state and will help to diversify an economy that has been heavily

dependent on agriculture alone.

“There will be economic spin-offs from the research that is done at UC Merced,” said Carol Whiteside, president of the Great Valley Center, a public policy support group. “And this will be an indication of the region’s emergence as a comprehensive economy, not one just devoted to ‘the farm.’”

Whiteside also said the campus “will provide a visible connection between kids in this area and a research education and atmosphere, something that’s simply not available now.”

These, then, are the arguments the University of



Benjamin Duran, president of the local community college, thinks the UC Merced campus will lift educational aspirations in the area.

California is making as budget talks continue in the state capital: The Merced campus would help to relieve UC’s enrollment crunch, it would provide more opportunity for San Joaquin Valley students, and it would boost the area economy.

The main counter-arguments are that the state, which already has nine research-oriented UC campuses, cannot afford another at this time of financial emergency, and the money would be better spent providing additional space for undergraduates at the less costly California State University and the community colleges.

Sacramento budget watchers say the outcome will not be determined until negotiations conclude, probably in late spring or early summer. In the meantime, UC Merced officials continue to plan and hope, aware that they are only small players in the Great Budget Game.

“There are a lot of people with an interest in the outcome,” Vice Chancellor Lindsay Desrochers said. “We’re just a chit in the game.” ♦

UC Merced has mounted a large-scale “outreach” effort, sending teams to area high schools to make sure students take the courses needed to be eligible for UC.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Newly established University of Minnesota Rochester has a radically different approach to higher education

Photos by Tom Roster, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL to see student artwork displayed in the halls of universities. But student science projects? To highlight his institution's unusual interdisciplinary approach to health sciences, that's what Stephen Lehmkuhle, chancellor of the newly established University of Minnesota Rochester, chose to hang in the reception area next to his office. The informational posters explore specific health issues, their causes and their possible solutions. Designed last year by students enrolled in UMR's first-ever freshman class, the two framed examples—one on malaria, the other on melanoma—resulted from a joint assignment in biology, organic chemistry and writing, all required courses. As they often do at UMR, students worked on the project in small groups, which provides an interactive learning experience and teaches them how to function as part of a team. Then they had to present their findings to faculty—because public speaking is another key life skill.

"It really epitomizes what we're trying to do," said Lehmkuhle, who has set out to create what he calls "the university of the future": one that, as he puts it, "prepares students for jobs that don't yet exist, to solve problems that aren't yet known, using technologies that have not yet been invented." Indeed, he says, the world is changing so quickly that much of what freshmen learn will be outdated by the time they are juniors. So rather than

stuffing students full of knowledge, universities should increase their capacity, as well as their desire, to learn.

That's not a new goal for educators. But because he was hired to start UMR from scratch, Lehmkuhle (pronounced "lem-cool") has been able to go about achieving it in a

Students at the University of Minnesota Rochester often work on projects in small groups, which teaches them how to function as part of a team.

very intentional way. "What attracted me here was the opportunity to create the change rather than manage the change," said Lehmkuhle, who left the University of Missouri to take the job as UMR chancellor.

What Lehmkuhle and his vice chancellor, Claudia Neuhauser, have created is an undergraduate curriculum focused exclusively on the health sciences, with a strong

liberal arts component. More crucially, it is also based around, and tracks, a set of student learning outcomes and objectives, rather than faculty interests; it employs state-of-the-art technology and best-teaching practices to account for different learning styles; and it rewards tenure-track faculty for effective teaching as well as research—research in both their areas of expertise and on their students' learning.

With just one undergraduate program—a bachelor of science in health sciences (in the fall, it will add a second undergraduate degree, a bachelor of science in health professions)—UMR also turns the

traditional approach to higher education on its head by mandating a rigorous, tightly prescribed curriculum for its students' first two years, then allowing them to broaden into other areas as juniors and seniors, rather than the other way around. That gives the school the ability to ensure that all its students have the academic background and skills they need before they focus on their so-called "capstone" experience that will mark their final two years: up to 30 credit hours of research, internships, study abroad or other type of exploration in their chosen field.

It also means that UMR can coordinate its curriculum so that concepts are picked up and reinforced throughout a student's education, combating what Lehmkuhle calls the "Las Vegas" approach to learning that dominates at traditional institutions, where "what goes on in the classroom, stays in the classroom." Too often, he says, students study disparate ideas and concepts—and subsequently forget them—because it's not clear how those concepts connect to other disciplines or are otherwise relevant to their lives. Professors design courses they want to teach, and academic departments are financially rewarded based on course enrollments



Stephen Lehmkuhle, chancellor of the University of Minnesota Rochester, has set out to create a "university of the future" that "prepares students for jobs that don't yet exist, to solve problems that aren't yet known."



“Obviously, building a totally new program is a challenge,” says Claudia Neuhauser, vice chancellor of the University of Minnesota Rochester. “We want to make sure we actually build a curriculum, and not just individual courses.”

rather than student progress.

UMR has taken a radically different approach. “We want to make sure we actually build a curriculum, and not just individual courses,” said Neuhauser. “A new campus is such an opportunity to do things that are hard to do at an established university.” Its small size is also a distinct advantage: With a current enrollment of 140 students and just 20 faculty members, UMR is

able to be far more flexible and innovative than larger institutions.

A mathematician by training, Neuhauser began focusing on interdisciplinary instruction after she had her own “Las Vegas”-style experience in education in the mid-1990s, when she was teaching calculus at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. The students didn’t seem to appreciate why they should bother with the subject. “I knew it was important, but it wasn’t reflected in the course I was teaching,” said Neuhauser. Recognizing that students learn better when they learn in context, she went on to write a calculus textbook specifically designed for biology majors.

At UMR, interdisciplinary assignments ensure that concepts don’t get lost in one course, but are picked up repeatedly. For instance, freshmen enrolled in both sociology and statistics have tried to figure out how much a pack of cigarettes would have to cost to cut the number of smokers in half; chemistry students have made glucose, then studied its effects in biology; students in bioethics have examined issues surrounding animal testing, specifically how big the animals’ cages should be and yet still be efficient, then designed and built cages in their statistics class.

“What we want to get them to do is understand that what they’re learning has practical applications in the world they’re going to be in,” said assistant professor Rebecca Bamford, who teaches bioethics. Bamford came to UMR from Hunter College, where, she said, she rarely had an opportunity to interact with faculty in different disciplines; her only conversation with a chemistry professor, for instance, was on a bus on

the way to a graduation ceremony. At UMR, by contrast, the professor who teaches chemistry is just down the hall, and Bamford has attended his classes to figure out ways they can collaborate. Faculty often sit in on each other’s classes; in some ways, Bamford said, it feels like “we’re actually taking the courses ourselves.”

Interdepartmental rivalries are non-existent because there are no academic departments. Instead, UMR has divided the traditional duties of a professor into separate jobs. There are tenure-track “design-based” faculty, who are responsible for designing the curriculum they teach as well as continuing research in their field of expertise; and “student-based” faculty, instructors who help implement the curriculum and are available outside of class to answer any questions the students have. Classes are team-taught between them. The school also has hired student “success coaches” who function as academic and career-path advisers throughout the students’ time at UMR.

Because it’s so new, there are few data by which to judge UMR, which will not graduate its first class until 2013. But students said that they like its highly structured curriculum and interdisciplinary approach. “It makes me more interested because then I can see [a subject] from all perspectives,” said Mary McCoy, a sophomore who helped research and design the poster about malaria that hangs outside Chancellor Lehmkuhle’s office.

Lehmkuhle was hired to take the helm of UMR in 2007, after many years at the University of Missouri, where he served in several senior administrative positions, including vice president for academic affairs. With a Ph.D. in experimental psychology, his interest in learning goes back to his days as a graduate student. Specifically, he studied how the brain processes visual information. Isolated brain cells, he notes, are ineffective at encoding information; the brain’s tremendous abilities derive from interconnectivity among many cells. Lehmkuhle believes that is an appropriate metaphor for an effective university as well.

So at UMR, connections are the name of the game. Connections between faculty, who coordinate teaching modules and assignments; connections between faculty and students, who are continually called upon to provide feedback about teaching methods (the faculty through research, the students through evaluations); and connections between the school and the Rochester community, especially with its renowned Mayo Clinic, which provides guest speakers and other opportunities for students (such as job shadowing and observing surgeries) as they explore careers in the health sciences.

Those connections are reinforced by the school’s location and layout: It occupies the third and fourth floors of University Square, a high-end mall that connects with much of downtown Rochester, including the Mayo Clinic, through a series of skywalks and underground passageways. Classrooms, known in UMR parlance as “learning labs,” are designed so students face each other to optimize interaction and small-group work. All students are issued Lenovo ThinkPad laptop computers that they lease from the school, so they can network with

With a current enrollment of 140 students and just 20 faculty members, UMR is able to be far more flexible and innovative than larger institutions.

Interdepartmental rivalries are non-existent because there are no academic departments. Instead, UMR has divided the traditional duties of a professor into separate jobs.

each other and broadcast onto central classroom monitors. Private study rooms, administrative offices and a number of the classrooms surround a student commons area that contains a cluster of comfortable chairs and sofas and tables where

students—and often faculty as well—hang out when they are not in class.

UMR has quickly earned the respect and support of the Rochester business community, said John Wade, president of the Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce, which is hoping to see 8,000 to 10,000 new jobs created over the next decade. The school's innovative, collaborative model is exactly what Rochester needed, according to Wade. "It's absolutely essential to the growth and development of this community," he said.

But the modest setting wasn't necessarily what folks in the Rochester community had in mind as they lobbied for years to get the University of Minnesota to locate a branch campus there. "People think of universities in terms of infrastructure and sports. They wanted a lot of students. They wanted to be big. They wanted a football stadium," said Lehmkuhle.

But Lehmkuhle believed that economic realities required him to develop a niche-based, tuition-driven school. So what the community got instead when UMR welcomed its first 57 undergraduates in 2009 was a lean, highly focused academic institution, a place where the library, called the "information commons," consists of a couple of shelves of reference books, a dozen computers and an interlibrary loan program; a university that has a mascot—the raptor—but no sports teams; and where the local YMCA functions as the student gym.

None of which seems to bother the students much. Sophomore Evan Doyle, who's from Canton, South Dakota, and is president of UMR's newly created student government—the Rochester Student Association—said that what the school lacks in traditional extracurricular activities it more than makes up for in the opportunity to help build UMR from the ground up, to create new student clubs and activities, and to contribute feedback for the development of the curriculum. In fact, Doyle joked, "The hardest part about going here is convincing your friends that it's a school—because it's above a mall."

There are no plans for a football team or stadium, but UMR is involved in a private-public partnership that will provide student housing and additional classroom and office space in a downtown building next year. The new building will be a complete living-learning environment,

and will accommodate enrollment growth: UMR plans to increase its freshman class by 50 students each year, Lehmkuhle said, until total enrollment hits 1,000, not including another 400 to 500 students enrolled in joint programs UMR operates in conjunction with other institutions.

Long-range, the school does intend to have its own campus on the edge of downtown, but it will be limited in scope; the school is likely to retain its current space above the mall as well. "Bigger is not necessarily better. So I don't want to measure our success on how big we are, but rather on how good we are," Lehmkuhle said.

That's fine with sophomore Hannah Salk, of St. Cloud. "I don't feel like I'm missing out at all on the things a large school has," said Salk, the great granddaughter of Jonas Salk, who developed the polio vaccine. On the contrary, she prefers the small environs of UMR. "I like that professors know my name and where I'm from, and that they can gear their classes to the students," she said.

With their encouragement, she has also starting to explore and value her own learning style. After struggling to understand and remember biological processes—such as aerobic and anaerobic respiration, calcium absorption and DNA replication—Salk, an enthusiastic artist in high school, took to sketching them on paper bags. When her professor, Robert Dunbar, saw the drawings, he suggested she use them for an independent study project. Now she is working with him and a professor of literature to turn those drawings into an instructional book for kids. That's something that probably would not have happened at another university, she said. "Anywhere else, they don't care how you learn as long as you learn. Whereas here, they focus a lot on different styles of learning," she said.

But that was a secondary reason for enrolling. A former patient at Mayo, Salk decided to attend UMR



Mary McCoy, a sophomore at the University of Minnesota Rochester (posing next to a poster about malaria that she helped to research and design), appreciates the campus' highly structured curriculum and interdisciplinary approach.

in large part because of its ties to the medical clinic—a connection that she said has paid off. On three different days during March, for instance, she and her classmates from anatomy and physiology descended the escalator and walked through a passageway to Mayo Clinic lab where, supervised by their UMR professor as well as two professors from Mayo's department of anatomy, they were able to dissect and examine human cadavers.

"It was a huge learning experience. And not just in an anatomical sense—in a tactile way," Salk said afterward. She was struck by how spongy the heart is, and by the size of the aortic valve and esophagus. And she was excited to feel how tight tendons really are, and to learn where the nerves innervate the muscles.

It was an unusual opportunity for underclassmen, and Salk was thrilled. She had originally wanted to be a dentist, but now, after being exposed to other options at UMR, she plans to become a doctor. "Studying from a book gets old," she said. "Going to a lab like this just reignites the passion." She said that she felt completely prepared on both an emotional and intellectual level, thanks to numerous discussions she'd had in different classes.

"Pretty much since the get-go, we've been talking about using cadavers," Salk said. During the first semester of her freshman year, her humanities class discussed different cultural attitudes toward death. In her second semester, her ethics class addressed questions associated with the use of cadavers, while her biology class had the option of attending a lab where Mayo Clinic faculty, staff and medical students pointed out anatomical features in cadavers that had already been dissected. (Salk was fascinated, but the experience prompted some of her classmates to realize they needed to rethink their career goals—an equally useful result.) Prior to that lab, the students had a presentation by Mayo Clinic faculty and staff on what to expect in the lab.

When Salk returned to school as a sophomore this past fall, a UMR literature professor with expertise in historical medical texts visited her anatomy and physiology class, where she tried to get them to think about the human body as a learning tool without completely objectifying it. As part of that discussion, students partnered up and identified superficial anatomical structures such as muscles and tendons on each other's bodies—in the process, learning how to be personally and culturally sensitive. And just prior to the three cadaver labs this spring semester, the director of anatomical services at Mayo came to Salk's class and gave a presentation explaining how the cadavers are procured (most die from natural causes, and all have chosen to donate their bodies) and about appropriate behavior in the lab.

"I had all the tools that I needed," Salk said. "So I knew what to expect."

True to UMR form, her professor, Robert Dunbar, administered a survey of the students before and after the labs. What he discovered was encouraging, he said: After the lab, more students said they would be willing to donate their bodies to science. "They really saw the value in the experience," Dunbar said.

Like his UMR colleagues, Dunbar, an associate professor who earned a Ph.D. in neuroscience, was hired because he has a passion for teaching as well as research. So he often checks in with his students to get their reactions. Based on student feedback, he adjusts exam dates, assignment due dates—even assignments themselves. Now Dunbar, who has an interest in learning and memory, is studying the dynamics of group learning, by having his students take exams twice: once as individuals, and once in small groups. He has discovered that the group scores are consistently 15 to 20 percent higher, and he is trying to figure out why.

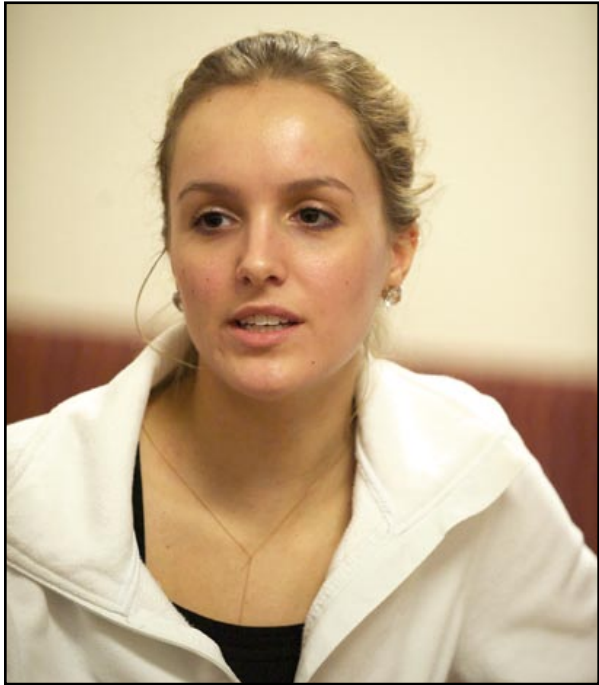
As for the interdisciplinary nature of UMR's program,

Classrooms, known in UMR parlance as "learning labs," are designed so students face each other to optimize interaction and small-group work.

Student "success coaches" function as academic and career-path advisers throughout the students' time at UMR.



"Students want to impact the success of the program as much as the faculty do," says sophomore Evan Doyle, who is president of UMR's newly created student government.



“I don’t feel like I’m missing out at all on the things a large school has,” says Hannah Salk, a sophomore who decided to attend UMR in large part because of its ties to the Mayo Clinic.

“it’s just incredible,” Dunbar said. “The depth of my understanding of a topic is improved tremendously by engaging with people outside my discipline. And that manifests itself in the classroom.”

Also like his colleagues, Dunbar acknowledged that the interdisciplinary approach is a lot of work. “It can be a pain,” he said. “It can be much more labor intensive than doing it on your own.” Just as the students sometimes struggle with working in groups, so, too, do the professors, he said.

In fact, it has been more challenging than anticipated to coordinate the curriculum, said Vice Chancellor Neuhauser. Initially the plan was to have all students take the same courses for the first two years, and for learning modules or units to be taught across all the classes students were taking. That has proven to be unwieldy, because some students—transfers, for instance—might not need some of the required courses. And it is too difficult for faculty to coordinate subjects across the entire curriculum. Classes are still designed and taught in modules, and faculty still endeavor to know and reiterate what their colleagues are teaching. And they continue to design interdisciplinary assignments—just not in every course that students are taking. “Obviously, building a totally new program is a challenge,” Neuhauser said. “But overall I think it’s working quite well.”

At this point, Neuhauser’s conclusion is based on anecdotal evidence and retention rates. Only 43 of 57 students who enrolled at UMR in the fall of 2009 returned the next fall; the sophomore class is now down to 35. But this year, 98 of 102 freshmen who started in the fall returned to campus for the spring semester, where they were joined by seven new students, for a net gain of three

students. Chancellor Lehmkuhle said he believes that the retention rates have improved, in part, because UMR is getting better at identifying and recruiting students whose interests and academic abilities are suited to the program.

Soon, UMR hopes to have more sophisticated means to assist its students. Typically, an institution records only student grades. UMR is capturing not only grades but all of its students’ assignments, which are preserved electronically, in essence saving a portfolio of work that the entire faculty can analyze, the same way doctors look over a patient’s entire medical record to diagnose them and prescribe a course of treatment. “Over time, we will begin to mine that data to look for relationships between how students perform in different concepts in different courses,” said Lehmkuhle. That, in turn, will enable UMR’s administration and faculty to adapt its teaching techniques to be more responsive to the needs of individual students, he explained.

Both students and faculty appear acutely aware that they are involved in what could be an important experiment. “I feel a little bit of responsibility to this university,” said student government president Doyle, who plans to become a doctor. “I feel if I don’t succeed, then this university won’t succeed.” So while the constant course evaluations students are asked to fill out can sometimes be “annoying,” Doyle and his peers take them seriously. “Students want to impact the success of the program as much as the faculty do,” he said.

“What really attracted me to this job was that they were trying so many unique and creative things with teaching,” said Molly Dingel, an associate professor who teaches sociology. Not everything has been successful, she said. But, she added, “When you’re trying new things, not everything is going to be successful.”

Chancellor Lehmkuhle agrees. “We’re building and flying the plane at the same time,” he said. He does hope that as higher education is redesigned, as he believes it will have to be, UMR will be able to serve as a model for other institutions looking to deliver education tailored to the needs of the modern world. But to be effective, higher education must continue to adapt. So ideally, UMR will be a constant work in progress. Said Lehmkuhle: “Once we think we have it figured out, we’re doomed.” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

UMR is capturing all of its students’ assignments, which are preserved electronically, in essence saving a portfolio of work that the entire faculty can analyze.



Remote Access

Western Governors University offers “competency-based” higher education, at a distance

Photos by Patrick Cone, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

SALT LAKE CITY

IN A RECENT installment of the popular comic strip Dilbert, the pointy-haired office boss announces that he has enrolled in a distance-learning class to obtain his master’s degree. “Is the online degree hard?” someone asks. “Not so much,” the boss replies nonchalantly, coffee cup in hand. “I’m taking my midterm exam as we speak.”

Funny? Not to students at Western Governors University, a private, nonprofit distance-learning institution based in Salt Lake City. Western Governors University (WGU) opened its virtual doors in 1999 with much fanfare and, as its name suggests, the political backing of 18 western governors plus the governor of Guam, each of whose states contributed \$100,000 in startup funding. What the name does not convey is the institution’s lofty goal: to create a new model for higher education, one that not only harnesses technology to increase access and reduce costs, but maintains quality by measuring learning outcomes rather than credit hours.

“We wanted a university that was available through modern communications, and we wanted it based upon performance. And that was the essence of the experiment,” recalled former Colorado Governor Roy Romer, who, together with former Utah Governor Michael Leavitt, had the initial vision for WGU. Leavitt was most excited by the flexibility that new technologies could provide, while Romer was focused on the competency-based curriculum. “We

wanted to be sure that we created a system in which you didn’t get credit for a degree based just upon hours of exposure but based upon proven competence that you demonstrated,” Romer said.

Since WGU’s inception, online programs have become commonplace, and their widely varying standards have made them easy targets for comedians and

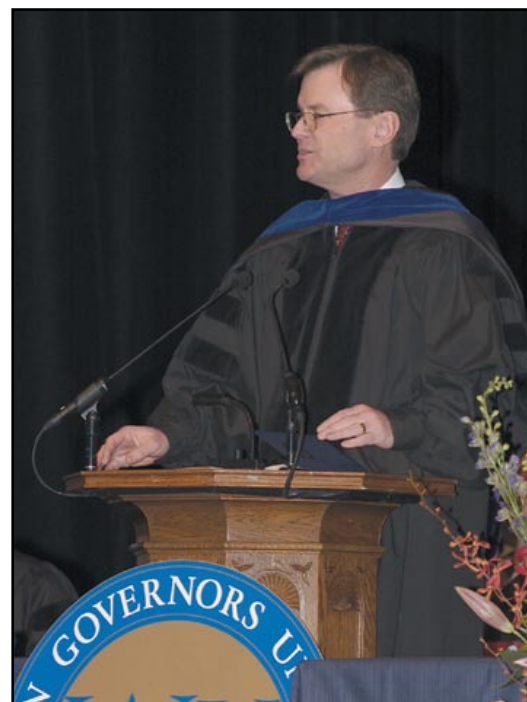
These come in different forms: written assignments completed online; objective and essay exams administered at secure testing centers; and, in the case of student teachers enrolled in WGU’s teachers college, supervised observations in local schools. Bachelor’s and master’s degree candidates must also complete a final project and defend it orally.

The school doesn’t care where or how students learn the material. They might already know it, or they might have to learn it from one of the 200 learning resources—a mix of online courses, CDs with website components, and self-paced “e-learning” modules—that WGU licenses. The important thing is that they prove their mastery of the subject.

“Just because it’s online doesn’t mean it’s easy. There was a lot of work involved,” said Amanda Clark, 25, of Dallas, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. In January, Clark was one of 44 ecstatic graduates to attend WGU’s most recent commencement ceremonies, which were held in a rented hall at the University of Utah, about seven miles from the sleek, eight-story office building where WGU is headquartered. (Another 199 graduates were able to watch the ceremonies on a webcast.)

There to cheer Clark on as she received her bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies from WGU’s teachers college were her husband, two children and parents. The occasion marked not one but two important milestones: They had flown on an airplane for the first time to be in Salt Lake City; and Clark, an honors student who had dropped out of high school shortly after getting married and giving birth, went through her first graduation ceremony. It probably won’t be her last: She has since enrolled in another distance institution’s master’s degree program, which she plans to continue when she starts a new job teaching first grade next year.

Also in attendance was former Governor Romer, who was



WGU President Robert Mendenhall says the largely online university is small but influential: “Demonstrating a different model is more important than our size or enrollment growth.”

Contrary to early predictions that tens of thousands of students would rush to enroll in Western Governors University, for the first four years enrollment remained in the hundreds.

comic strips. But WGU students and administrators say the school’s unusual competency-based approach ensures that the institution is no joke.

Instead of earning credits based on the number of courses they take, students progress by successfully completing required competency assessments related to their degrees.



Western Governors University Provost and Academic Vice President Douglas “Chip” Johnstone came to WGU after 18 years at Empire State, the distance learning arm of the State University of New York.

awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the institution he helped to conceive. “It is really fun to have an idea that works,” Romer said in his commencement address. It wasn’t always clear that this one would. Said Romer, who is now superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, “This has been a steep hill, sometimes a rocky road.”

In part, that was because of the western governors themselves, who had created enormous expectations for the institution, said David Longanecker, executive director of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). “Governors are people who think big and talk big,” Longanecker said. “So the hype was going to be big.”

“There was a lot of hype about it,” agreed Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Ewell was instrumental in designing WGU’s first curriculum, and he serves on the university’s assessment committee, which is meant to ensure the integrity

of the testing process. “It became a huge political symbol of a threat to higher education.”

That was never the intention, according to Romer. “The objective was not to change higher education but to expand the outreach,” he said.

“We saw it as filling in the gaps more than anything,” said former Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, now chairman of WGU’s board of trustees. “But other higher education institutions saw it as direct competition for dollars,” he said. “If we didn’t intend to shake up higher ed, we did anyways.”

That became painfully clear when Geringer met with the provost and faculty senate at the University of Wyoming to explain the concept of WGU. “They were very defensive and even disparaging about it,” Geringer said. “We didn’t view it as a diversion of existing funds from higher education, but they

certainly did. They saw it as a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.”

Even people who liked the concept were skeptical. “I thought it was an interesting and novel and bold approach, so I was hopeful that it would work. But frankly, I wasn’t optimistic,” Longanecker said.

To some extent, Longanecker’s skepticism proved justified. Predictions that tens of thousands of students would rush to enroll turned out to be off by a long shot; for the first four years, enrollment remained in the hundreds. An idea that WGU would generate money by acting as a broker, maintaining a vast catalog of distance courses offered by institutions throughout the west, quickly proved unrealistic. And it took far longer than the governors anticipated for the school to gain accreditation and secure additional funding to come up with programs that would attract more students.

One major turning point came in 2001, when the school was awarded a \$10 million, five-year U.S. Department of Education grant to develop a teachers college, which opened two years later and now accounts for two-thirds of enrollment. Another came in 2003, when WGU, which was already accredited by the Distance Education Training Council, was awarded regional accreditation. “We had no concept for how much it took to get something like this off the ground,” admitted Geringer.

In the intervening years, WGU largely fell off the educational radar screen. In fact, said Longanecker, “I think a lot of people presume that it failed.”

They are wrong.

It is true that WGU has not lived up to its early hype. “You don’t hear people talking about it anymore. Whereas, when it first started, that was all people talked about,” said Carol Twigg, president and CEO of the National Center for Academic Transformation, a nonprofit organization that focuses on the use of technology to improve student outcomes and reduce educational costs. WGU may be doing a fine job for the small population it serves, Twigg said, but because it has remained so small in the face of an explosion in online and adult learning, she added, “I don’t think it’s having much of an impact on the landscape of higher education.”

What WGU has done, said Longanecker, is provide evidence in favor of competency-based education. “I don’t think it’s the wave of the future, but I do think it provides a way we can say: You can do this. You can focus on competency,” he said.

“It didn’t fulfill all of the dreams we had,” Peter Ewell acknowledged. “But it’s in pretty solid shape now. I’m just sorry that it took so long.”

Since receiving regional accreditation three years ago, WGU’s enrollment has skyrocketed, growing more than tenfold to 5,200 students from all 50 states and ten foreign countries. And enrollment is projected to double to 10,000 within the next two to four years, increasing to 15,000 by 2013, said WGU President Robert Mendenhall.

The school has awarded nearly 700 associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and it has expanded its initial offering of four degree programs to 29 degree programs in education, information technology and business, as well as seven post-baccalaureate programs for educators. This fall, it will open a

Instead of earning credits based on the number of courses they take, students progress by successfully completing required competency assessments related to their degrees.

Since receiving regional accreditation three years ago, WGU's enrollment has skyrocketed, growing more than tenfold to 5,200 students from all 50 states and ten foreign countries.

new college of health professions, its fourth degree area. Student surveys have been overwhelmingly positive. And Mendenhall has been appointed to the U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education.

WGU's 5,200 students constitute just a tiny percentage of the estimated 1.2 million students

enrolled nationally in online programs. But the numbers are only part of the story, said Mendenhall, who came to WGU in 1999 with a background in technology-based education. (He co-founded and was president and CEO of a computer-based education and training company, and he later ran IBM's K-12 education division.) "Demonstrating a different model is more important than our size or enrollment growth," Mendenhall said.

"We'll always have a lot of people who have never heard of us," said Douglas "Chip" Johnstone, WGU provost and academic vice president, who also arrived at WGU in 1999, after 18 years at Empire State College, a distance-learning institution that is part of the State University of New York. But already, said Johnstone, "We have changed the nature of the discussion and the nature of the results."

"I think it's a model that many of us will have to learn from as student outcomes become more critical," said WICHE's Longanecker. "They aren't *the* model. But they are *a* model."

Margaret Miller, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Virginia, was more circumspect. "I would say the jury's still out. But I'm very glad someone's trying to do this," she said. "There is no challenge more important than how we get more people better educated in the world." Combining online learning with competency-based assessments, she said, seems to be the most promising strategy. "If they have found a way to do this, then we all owe them a huge debt."

They have, and we do, according to Sandra Elman, president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

"A lot of people wanted to be very cynical about this institution," said Elman, who chaired the Interregional Accrediting Council that was formed specifically to accredit WGU. (The council, which brought together four of the nation's regional accrediting associations, disbanded after awarding WGU accreditation in 2003; the Northwest Commission has since taken over sole accrediting responsibility for the institution.)

Elman was not one of the cynics. But, she said, "I was very, very cautious and very conscious of the fact that anything that we did with a fairly experimental, innovative university

should not in any way compromise the integrity or principles of regional accreditation." And she was concerned that the governors might tire of the long and arduous accreditation process. According to board chairman Geringer, Elman's concern was justified. "There were a few of us who just hung on by our fingernails," he said.

To its credit, Elman said, the leadership of WGU stayed the course. And today, she considers WGU "a success story," that "is affording access to quality programs through its competency-based virtual delivery programs."

Each of those programs has been designed by one of three "program councils"—one for each degree area WGU offers—of industry experts and faculty from WGU and other institutions. They identify the skills and knowledge a student needs in order to graduate. Then a separate council of outside experts (the "assessment council") identifies or develops ways to check those competencies, which are graded, either by computer or hired graders, on a pass/fail basis.

Exams are administered at authorized testing centers. In order to pass, students must achieve the equivalent of a B grade or better; where possible, WGU also uses accepted standardized national exams. Students can attempt each assessment twice before incurring additional tuition charges.

WGU does not develop its own courses or materials, but instead licenses them from about 30 sources. These include courses from traditional educational institutions such as Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska, and Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon; online learning modules produced by for-profit educational providers such as Teachscape; and corporate training in information technology from NETg. Students may also learn from textbooks or other independent study materials; WGU contracts with the University of New Mexico for the use of its library services.

It is the job of the WGU faculty to help students figure out which of these resources meet their individual needs. These so-called "faculty mentors" are academically qualified experts, most of whom hold a terminal degree in their field. But they don't actually teach. Instead, their job is to guide each of their students—80 is considered a full load—through a custom-made academic process.

The average age of a WGU student is 37, and 70 percent work full-time, often in their fields of study. Most programs



A January graduate of Western Governors University, 47-year-old Angie Lambert says WGU "didn't waste any of my time like other college classes have."

WGU does not develop its own courses or materials, but instead licenses them from about 30 sources.

do not require a minimum grade point average or a specific score on aptitude tests for admission, but the majority of students come to their programs with at least some proficiency in their degree area. WGU recognizes that their skills often have outpaced their educational credentials.

“We fill a hole that they don’t have the knowledge in, and we let them succeed and fly in the areas that they have already mastered,” explained Jennifer Smolka of Waxahachie, Texas, a WGU mentor since 2004 who is also the program coordinator for the master’s degree in education.

WGU administrators say that the system is not only more efficient, it is also more economical. Students can matriculate at the beginning of any month; they pay a flat fee of just under \$2,790 every six months, during which time they can progress as rapidly as they are able to pass assessments. (WGU will accept some transfer credits but none from upper-division courses.) Theoretically, it is possible to earn a degree from WGU without ever taking a single course or learning module through the school—with the exception of the required introduction, “Education Without Boundaries.” That has never happened, but some students have graduated in as little as six months.

“One of the great things we can demonstrate is [higher

education] doesn’t have to cost \$15,000 a year, and it doesn’t have to go up by eight percent a year,” said WGU President Mendenhall. The school would not release its current annual budget, but officials said that total revenues for the last fiscal year were \$19.3 million. This year, 85 to 90 percent of revenues will come from student tuition, which covers the entire cost of a WGU education; corporate donations and grants—which total about \$40 million to date—are used to develop new programs.

WGU can keep its costs down because it doesn’t have to build or maintain a physical campus or support athletic and other expensive activities that students at bricks-and-mortar institutions have come to expect. Nor does it have to pay its faculty to develop new courses, conduct research or grade students’ work. That frees up the school’s mentors to focus exclusively on their students. There are currently about 100 mentors; three to eight new ones are hired each month to keep up with enrollment growth.

Mentors are key to the WGU model, because they are more than just academic advisers. “We are a counselor, a tutor, a guide,” Smolka said. “We are the shoulder to lean on and the hand to pull you up out of the hole and to push you when you’re going. It’s a little bit of everything.”

WGU’s administrative and technical staff, which now numbers about 150, works out of the Salt Lake City headquarters, but like WGU students, mentors are spread across the country. So it is rare that Smolka has the

UPDATE **Western Governors University** **July 2008**

IN JANUARY 1998, Western Governors University was completing its initial planning phase, and was preparing to begin a “pilot” period, when *National CrossTalk* published the first of two articles about the fledgling university. The champions of WGU promised that “distance education” methods emphasizing computer and television instruction would provide a new and less expensive alternative to traditional campuses.

The big predictions that were offered risked making a more modest success look like a failure, and that is arguably what happened.

At the beginning, there were concerns that political realities were creating pressure for a “fast start.” Some planners feared that WGU was making a mistake by promising more than it could deliver, at least initially.

Distance education was a relatively new phenomenon, and WGU was acknowledged as a trailblazer. Still, the university’s pilot program in 1998 was very small. There were 200 students, only one faculty “mentor,” and a lot of questions. One of the doubters who was quoted in the 1998 article said, “The hype is out in front of the infrastructure. There is a substantial disconnect between the PR about WGU and what is actually there.”

By 2006, when *National CrossTalk* reported on WGU again, the university had grown to an enrollment of 5,200 students from all 50 states and ten foreign countries, and had gained accreditation. Its novel “competency-based” approach to awarding degrees, although one that did not spread to other institutions, continued to offer a challenging alternative to traditional credit-hour programs.

But at the same time, other online education programs became commonplace, surpassing WGU in their size and impact.

In a 2008 interview, WGU President Robert Mendenhall said the perception that the university has failed to meet expectations is based on a misunderstanding of how the institution developed. “When the governors started this, the view was that this could be the online university that all the states would utilize—that all the states would deliver their online courses through WGU,” he said. “If you count up all the students in the western states, that would be tens of thousands, but that never happened. It never even started to happen.” Instead, according to Mendenhall, “the model fundamentally changed.”

“I think there are a number of ways to measure impact,” Mendenhall added. “One of our clear missions was to establish a new model for higher education—in essence, one that measures learning as opposed to time, measuring what students know, and graduating them based on that, rather than on the number of credit hours they have accumulated.”

The big predictions that were offered for Western Governors University risked making a more modest success look like a failure, and that is arguably what happened.

In 2008, WGU’s enrollment reached 10,000, and is projected to increase to 15,000 by 2011. Mendenhall pointed out that these figures are two years ahead of the projections offered in the 2006 article. “It’s a little faster than we had anticipated,” he said. WGU has awarded more than 700 degrees, and there are now more than 3,000 graduates of the university.

opportunity to meet her charges in person. Still, she said, they develop close relationships through regular e-mails and phone conversations. "Instead of getting a new professor every 16 weeks, you have somebody who's there throughout the whole program with you," said Smolka, who has a Ph.D. in educational computing with an emphasis in distance learning, and formerly taught at the University of North Texas. "I know and have a better relationship with my students in this model than I have had in ten years of other higher education experience."

Beyond the personal satisfaction of helping students gain an education, there are monetary incentives. WGU does not offer tenure, and WGU officials declined to provide salary figures or even a range of salaries. But compensation—not only for mentors but also for all employees, including senior administrators—is based primarily on the success of the school's students: their progress, retention, satisfaction and graduation rate.

So far, WGU appears to be doing well in all of these areas. The school has not been offering bachelor's degrees long enough to be able to calculate a six-year graduation rate, but the one-year retention rate is more than 70 percent. Compared to their peers, WGU students do well on national standardized exams, school officials say. For instance, WGU students graduating with a bachelor's degree in human resources management have a 91 percent pass rate on the Society for Human Resources Management certification exam, compared

to a national pass rate of 67 percent.

In a 2005 survey of 1,771 students, 92.5 percent said that overall they were satisfied with their studies at WGU. About 85 percent of the 693 degrees WGU has granted were conferred within the past two years, so the school has not yet conducted a longitudinal study of its graduates, though it plans to launch one within the next year. But a preliminary follow-up study of two groups of 32 graduates found that 80 percent said they had been promoted within two years after earning their degree. "Overwhelmingly, they expressed great satisfaction with the degree and what it had done for their careers," said WGU Provost Johnstone.

That was certainly true of the students who attended the graduation commencement in January, WGU's tenth.

Angie Lambert of Evanston, Wyoming, enrolled at WGU's teachers college because the closest four-year institution was



Amanda Clark and her daughter Aubrey came from a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, to attend the January graduation ceremony in Salt Lake City.

"We graduated 2,300 students in the last two years," Mendenhall said. "We had 5,200 students two years ago, so more than half of those students have graduated already, and those numbers will get bigger every year."

In late 2006, WGU won accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, making it the only online teachers college to be accredited by the organization. The teachers college accounts for nearly two-thirds of WGU's enrollment.

There are now 36 degree programs, plus several post-baccalaureate programs at WGU. "We have introduced new degrees in the health college," Mendenhall said, referring to the College of Health Professions, which the university launched in fall 2006. "There is an M.B.A. in healthcare management, an MS in health education, two master's degrees in nursing, and a bachelor's in nursing for existing RNs." The university also has new programs in special education and educational leadership.

But WGU is no longer at the forefront of distance education. "Everyone's doing it now," Mendenhall said. "Most of it isn't very good. Most of it is just putting the classroom on the computer, a mode of distribution," he said, adding that WGU has a different emphasis.

In 2008, enrollment at WGU reached 10,000, and is projected to increase to 15,000 by 2011. There are now 36 degree programs, plus several post-baccalaureate programs.

"We are at the vanguard of the national focus on affordability and accessibility," he said. "Over 75 percent of WGU students are underserved, coming from one of four categories: low income, minority, rural, or first-generation (college student). In the key parameters in the national debate on access, affordability and accountability, WGU is a leading example of how a new model can address those concerns."

Tuition at WGU increased by \$100 in September 2008, to \$2,890 per six-month term. "It is the first increase in three years," Mendenhall said. "We are quite focused on delivering higher education cost-effectively and without double-digit tuition increases."

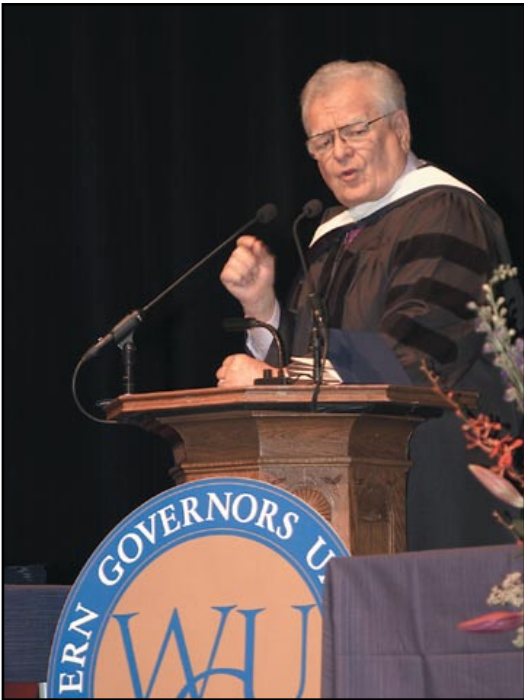
When Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act in 2007, distance education was made eligible for full financial aid. "That's a huge national impact," Mendenhall said. "We can't take all the credit for it, because online ed has grown significantly in the last ten years. But we were one of the earlier ones, and instrumental in getting financial aid for distance education."

Congress has also made competency programs eligible for financial aid. "In essence, they said that programs that utilize direct assessment of learning, in lieu of clock hours or credit hours, are eligible for federal financial aid," Mendenhall said.

The competency-based approach is in step with a larger national emphasis on outcomes in education, but Mendenhall is hard-pressed to cite examples of such programs elsewhere in higher education. "This has made it much easier for other institutions to adopt this type of model, but we cannot point to another institution that does it that way," he said.

"That's the reason we started as a new institution," Mendenhall added. "It's very difficult to start a higher education institution. But that's easier than changing one."

—Todd Sallo



Former Colorado Governor Roy Romer spoke at the Western Governors University graduation in January. Romer and former Utah Governor Mike Leavitt were instrumental in starting WGU.

in Salt Lake City, and she couldn't afford to spare the hour it would have taken to commute each way. "I loved the WGU program," said Lambert, who already had earned an associate's degree from Western Wyoming Community College before she enrolled at WGU in September 2003. "It didn't waste any of my time like other college classes have."

And the WGU degree paid off. Even before she formally graduated in January with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, Lambert had been offered—and had started—a new job teaching fourth grade.

WGU also serves

urban residents who need the convenience of anytime, anyplace learning. "What we've discovered is that access is just as much an issue for working adults as rural residents," said Mendenhall.

That was the case for Brian Taylor of Salt Lake City, who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in business with an emphasis in information technology management. "College was a dream I had as long as I could remember," said the 39-year-old Taylor. But after graduating from high school in 1985, Taylor had to go to work to help support his parents and siblings, and he later had to continue working to support his wife and daughter.

For years, Taylor worked in information technology without a degree. But in the late '90s he began to realize it might be holding him back. "More and more, I was finding clients who would say, 'Well, do you have a degree?'" said Taylor. "There was business that I was not able to do because I didn't have a degree."

So he was thrilled to discover WGU. "I was looking for something that would allow me to take the experience I already had in the workplace and apply that street-smart knowledge to my studies," he said.

Now that he is armed with that college degree, said Taylor, "I am confident that I can go into any business. And I have the credential to say my services are worth X, and my clients will have no qualms about paying for it, because they'll know they're getting a quality service."

Not every student is so wildly enthusiastic. One said that while he was pleased that WGU is allowing him to finish up his degree in marketing management both quickly and efficiently, supports its competency-based model, and has an excellent relationship with his mentor, he also has a litany of complaints. His admissions counselor was "abysmal," he

said, adding that he found some of WGU's software systems to be "unreasonably slow and poorly designed," and that he has been disturbed by an overall lack of attention to detail. "I routinely find spelling and grammar errors in all manner of communication from WGU, including course materials, and even in assessments," e-mailed the student, who asked not to be identified. "Is no one editing these documents?"

The same student also wrote, "They've really got something to prove, which I would expect would push them to strive for a high level of competence in everything they do. But unfortunately, I don't think they've risen sufficiently to those challenges, and it leaves them open to a lot of criticism."

WGU is well aware of this student's concerns, which it has taken seriously. So seriously, in fact, that Johnstone offered to waive the student's tuition in exchange for ongoing, regular reports. Some of the student's concerns have already been addressed, Johnstone said, and probably would have been even without the student's input, though perhaps not as quickly. "I consider him to be a really valuable resource to us," Johnstone said.

That willingness to engage in serious self-reflection is one of the things about WGU that impressed Sandra Elman, who led the accrediting team. It is one of the reasons she is so optimistic about the school's future. "It engages as an institution in its own self-examination as to what it needs to do," Elman said.

"I think that it will continue to offer quality programs," Elman added. "Through its own ongoing assessment of its student base and societal needs—because it's very conscious of societal needs—it will shape and reshape its programs to best meet the needs of students who partake in this kind of higher education."

And there are more and more of them. Because of that, WGU officials said their next challenge is twofold: to find qualified, good mentors; and to keep up with technological advances. If they continue to do so, Mendenhall said, there's no practical limit to the number of students they can eventually enroll. "I don't think we have aspirations to grow and grow and grow," he explained. "But on the other hand, we don't have any caps in mind." ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

The WGU faculty don't actually teach. Instead, their job is to guide each of their students through a custom-made academic process.

Indiana's "Eighth University"

Western Governors University brings its "competency-based" approach to the Hoosier state

Photos by Mary Ann Carter, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

INDIANAPOLIS

LAST NOVEMBER, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels sat down in his office with Western Governors University President Robert Mendenhall; former Utah Governor Mike Leavitt was on the phone. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether Daniels might consider joining WGU's board of trustees. At the time, Daniels knew next to nothing about WGU, a nonprofit, online institution founded in 1997 by 19 governors, including Leavitt and then-Indiana Governor Frank O'Bannon. Each of them contributed \$100,000 in state funds for startup costs. WGU now has 20 member governors, and sustains itself on tuition. Daniels had agreed to the meeting purely out of respect for Leavitt, an old friend and one of the key players in WGU's inception.

"I'd never heard of WGU, let alone that Indiana had actually put its name and money into the thing," Daniels said in a recent interview. Nor did he realize that there were already nearly 250 Indiana residents enrolled in WGU, which offers more than 50 accredited degree programs in four high-demand areas—teaching, healthcare, information technology and business—and claims 21,000 students from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. But it didn't take long for Daniels to appreciate WGU's "competency-based" approach, which measures and rewards what students know, without regard to where or when they learned it. Think of it as digital versus analog learning—a way to focus only on

WGU Indiana, a wholly owned subsidiary of WGU, was established by Governor Daniels without any legislative action, state funding, or substantial political pushback.

the educational gaps, rather than having to follow a prescribed series of courses from start to finish. "We hold the learning constant and let the time vary, as opposed to the traditional approach, which holds the time constant and lets the learning vary," said Mendenhall. That's particularly appealing to working adults, because it means they don't have to waste time or money reviewing material they've already mastered: WGU charges just under \$2,900 tuition (\$3,250 for its nursing and M.B.A. programs) for six months enrollment; the average time to a bachelor's degree from WGU is 30 months, roughly half the national average.

It was appealing to Governor Daniels, too, who saw that

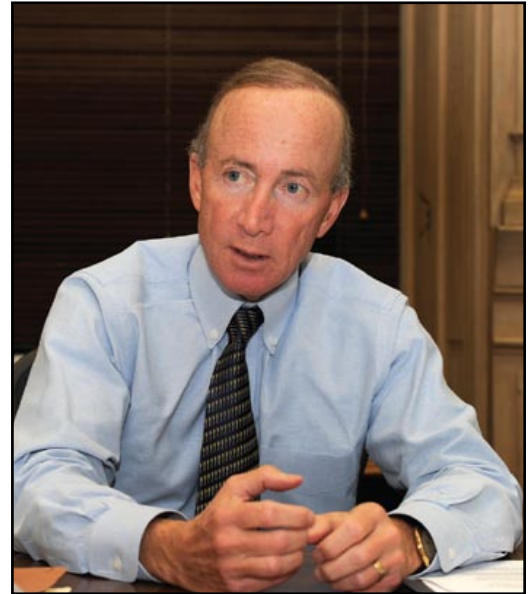
with the right kind of marketing, the model could help Indiana climb out of the higher education pit that it's in. The state ranks 45th in the nation in terms of the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher, a statistic that troubles the governor. "Left unattended, it'll be a real problem for Indiana," Daniels said.

Historically, Indiana's heavy manufacturing base provided decent incomes even for those with only a high school diploma. But many of those jobs no longer exist. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education says the state will need to increase

annual production of postsecondary degrees and certificates by more than 6,000 through the year 2025 to meet workforce needs.

So by the end of the meeting that November, Daniels had not only agreed to join the board of WGU, he was also asking whether the school had ever considered re-branding or "private labeling" itself as a state program. Thus was born the idea for what Daniels now refers to as Indiana's "eighth university": WGU Indiana, a wholly owned subsidiary of WGU, which Daniels established by executive order in June, without any legislative action, state funding, or substantial political pushback.

By then, WGU Indiana had rented office space in a downtown Indianapolis high-rise and hired a chancellor—Allison Barber, a former teacher and native Hoosier (see page X) with public relations and communications expertise—to oversee its branding and marketing. To date, WGU has stuck mainly with Internet advertising. But armed with \$1.75 million in seed money from the Lumina, Lilly, and Bill & Melinda Gates foundations, WGU Indiana has rolled out a million dollar marketing campaign that extends well beyond the Internet, to billboard, bus, print, radio and television advertising. The governor appears in the school's materials and on its website, and was featured in its first radio and television ads. "Indiana needs more college grads. And you deserve the greater opportunities that a college degree can bring," Daniels said in the television spot, before encouraging



"WGU fits Indiana like a tailored suit," says Governor Mitch Daniels, who convinced Western Governors University to consider re-branding itself as a state program.



Robert Mendenhall, president of Western Governors University, reminded the small crowd at WGU Indiana's first graduation ceremony that there was only one graduate at WGU's first commencement.

viewers to “check out WGU Indiana today.”

Daniels wasn't the first person to suggest private labeling WGU. The school has been looking at ways to expand and export its educational model, which is markedly different than traditional online programs.

WGU has been in conversations with a half dozen states, but Governor Daniels was “unique,” said Mendenhall: “He got it immediately, wanted to do it, and invested a significant amount of his own time and effort in making it happen.”

Fast forward to an unseasonably warm, windy day in late October of 2010. Inside an airy atrium of the Indiana state capitol, about 100 smiling onlookers enjoyed a classical string trio before Daniels delivered the commencement address to the first graduates of WGU Indiana. Because the school just started enrolling students in July, all the graduates were

former WGU students who, by virtue of their Indiana residency, had automatically been transferred to WGU Indiana once the school was established.

The commencement was designed in part for the graduates and their families, and in part to generate “earned media coverage”—essentially unpaid advertising for the fledgling institution. “Everything I do better have some media visibility, because it's the only way I'm going to educate the state about the

opportunities for higher education with WGU Indiana,” said Chancellor Barber.

That there were only 16 graduates—only seven of whom were in attendance—didn't discourage Barber in the slightest. After all, as Mendenhall reminded the crowd, there was only one graduate at WGU's first commencement a decade ago;

this fiscal year, the school expects to graduate between 3,300 and 3,400 students.

“Today is a one-of-a-kind occasion, to be followed by many more,” Daniels told the crowd. He had good reason to be optimistic. Already, WGU Indiana has enrolled more than 450 students, who now represent about ten percent of all new WGU students. With enrollment increasing a whopping 30 percent annually, WGU is predicting it will grow from 21,000 students to 30,000 within the next few years. About 5,000 of those students are expected to be enrolled at WGU Indiana. Said Daniels: “WGU fits Indiana like a tailored suit.”

What the governor means is this: Only about a third of the state's adults hold an associate's degree or higher. But 22 percent of the state's adult population—about 730,000 people—have some college under their belt. And that's exactly the population that WGU—and now WGU Indiana—targets. Those adult students, many of whom have families and other ties to the state, are far more likely than younger, traditional-age college-goers to remain in the state once they've completed their degrees, said Scott Jenkins, the governor's senior policy director for education. With startup and future marketing costs covered by foundation grants, and operational costs covered by tuition, “the profits are returned to the state in terms of degrees,” Jenkins explained.

WGU Indiana functions exactly like WGU. It charges the same tuition; carries the same course offerings; uses the same faculty “mentors,” who follow students through their programs, maintaining a one-on-one relationship with them throughout their educational career; and offers the same opportunities to complete programs at a pace that would be impossible at a more traditional institution. Dawn Hanson of Greenfield, Indiana, for instance, received her bachelor's degree in nursing in August—just four months after she enrolled in WGU with an associate's degree from Ivy Tech, Indiana's statewide community college.

“I'm grateful to WGU for providing the opportunity for me, a working wife and mom, to finish her education without sacrificing precious time with my family,” the 39-year-old Hanson said during her commencement address, which followed the governor's. She shared a quotation by George Washington Carver, “When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world,” and then expressed her hope that, “in years to come, this graduation ceremony will be full of fellow Hoosiers, ready for their time to shine, their time to command the attention of the world.”

Among those moved by her words was Kara Tanner, 47, of Noblesville, Indiana, a new WGU Indiana student who has been using her associate's degree in information technology in her current job as a software analyst. With her daughter, whom she raised as a single parent, about to finish high school, Tanner decided to finally pursue her lifelong dream of teaching.

“The time had come to lead by example and show her that you can live your dream,” said Tanner. But at the same time, she said, “The idea of going to school for eight years in the evenings part-time was just overwhelming.” She is hoping that she can leverage her knowledge of literature and history to get through WGU Indiana's program in just three years.

Historically, Indiana's heavy manufacturing base provided decent incomes even for those with only a high school diploma. But many of those jobs no longer exist.

Western Governors University offers more than 50 accredited degree programs in four high-demand areas—teaching, healthcare, information technology and business.

The graduation ceremony, she wrote in a follow-up e-mail, “really inspired me to continue to reach toward my goal, knowing that others have achieved their dreams, and so can I.”

Had she known about the school, Tanner, like other Indiana residents, could have enrolled at WGU in the past. By branding it as a

state institution, Indiana has made it possible for students to use state financial aid to help pay for tuition, although so far that does not appear to be a large factor in attracting students: Only ten percent of those enrolled have done so. Many working adults, like Tanner, don't qualify for aid. But if they do, federal Pell grants often cover most of the cost of WGU's tuition.

More importantly, the state version of WGU raises its profile and its credibility, and creates a local presence. WGU Indiana has hired 70 mentors and counselors who work out of the downtown offices; they won't necessarily work exclusively with Indiana students, and WGU Indiana students may wind up with out-of-state mentors, but it's good to have in-state employees. “People want to be connected to their neighbor,” noted Barber. WGU Indiana appeals to that desire.

“It's the '57 Chevy that's been sitting in someone's garage for a while until someone realizes you can make it work,” said Jenkins.

And Daniels wanted to get that car on the road in a hurry. “We always say here we like to move at the speed of business, not the speed of government,” he said.

When it came to getting WGU Indiana up and running, it helped that Daniels happened to be located in the same city as the Lumina Foundation for Education, which focuses on access and success in higher education; its “big goal” is to increase the percentage of U.S. adults with a college degree or credential from 39 percent to 60 percent by 2025. “If we're going to get to that goal, we need to expand the understanding of what higher education is,” said Jamie Merisotis, president and CEO of the foundation.

As founding president of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Merisotis was familiar with WGU even before he took the helm of the Lumina Foundation for Education in 2008, and he had wondered why it hadn't gotten to a bigger scale. He had even discussed a state-by-state model with WGU President Mendenhall. So it wasn't difficult to convince Lumina, which previously had funded research to look at the effectiveness of WGU, to provide \$500,000 in startup funding for WGU Indiana. (At about the same time, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which focuses on low-income young adult students, agreed to provide \$750,000.

Some months later, WGU Indiana received an additional \$500,000 from the Lilly Foundation, which, like the Lumina Foundation, is based in Indianapolis and often funds projects there.) “From Lumina's perspective, this is testing whether it can be a model,” Merisotis said, adding that it was nice to do so in Lumina's home state.

In part, WGU Indiana is being used as a tool to put pressure on the state's other institutions to find ways to both increase degree production and shorten the time it takes to complete degrees. “A little competition is healthy,” said Daniels, who has encouraged those institutions to offer accelerated programs that allow students to earn an associate's degree in just one year and a bachelor's degree in just three. Over the past few years, the state has also adopted performance funding that rewards its institutions for degree production, on-time degrees, low-income degrees and completed credit hours.

But mostly, WGU Indiana is being promoted, and perceived, as a complementary educational offering, and a way to increase Indiana's educational attainment—without the use of taxpayer money.

“They're not competing for scarce dollars,” pointed out Indiana Commissioner of Higher Education Teresa Lubbers. “They're competing for growing numbers of students. So that made it easier to roll this out.” At its June meeting, the Commission for Higher Education unanimously approved a resolution in support of the governor's executive order that recognized WGU Indiana and instructed the commission to integrate the school's programs into the state's higher education policy and strategy.

More recently, Lubbers penned an opinion piece for Indiana newspapers in which she highlighted WGU Indiana as a flexible approach that “allows motivated students to earn their degrees faster and cheaper than they could otherwise.”

WGU Indiana is also receiving a boost from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD), which Daniels' executive order directed to “explore methods for promoting online competency-based educational opportunities like WGU Indiana” for the dislocated workers and others it serves. In accordance with that order, the department is trying to ensure that its counselors know about WGU Indiana, and why it might be appropriate for their clientele, thousands of whom are eligible for federal Trade Adjustment Assistance



Dawn Hanson received her bachelor's degree in nursing just four months after she enrolled in WGU with an associate's degree from Ivy Tech, Indiana's statewide community college.

Allison Barber

WGU Indiana's chancellor leads a public relations campaign

ALLISON BARBER is back in her home state of Indiana after 18 years in Washington, D.C., and she's fired up about her position as the first chancellor of WGU Indiana, which the governor has dubbed the state's "eighth university."

Her job description is as non-traditional as Western Governors University, the nonprofit, online, competency-based institution she's working for, which administers WGU Indiana's programs. She doesn't deal with academics. She's meant to market WGU Indiana to potential students, academic partners and employers, in the process transforming it into a major player within the state's educational landscape.

So Barber's speech is peppered with phrases that most chancellors have never uttered: force multipliers; earned media; and of course, "campaign"—not a political campaign, but a public relations one.

"I am on a campaign to help Hoosiers get educated," Barber explained. In particular, she's trying to convince adults with some postsecondary education to return to school and complete their degrees, or earn new ones. "We're selling a life-changing experience," she said. "That's not an easy sell."

But it's the sort of challenge that Barber embraces. A former teacher who has run her own public relations firm, served as deputy assistant secretary of defense for internal communications as well as Department of Defense public liaison, and helped the White House establish communications in Iraq, there's not much that Barber likes more than work.

"I love trying to make a difference," said Barber. She was slightly baffled when she first returned to the midwest, where people take the weekends off, waiting until Monday to return calls. "I thought my iPhone was broken," she recalled, laughing.

The pace of life may be slower in Indiana, but Barber, who started as chancellor at the end of May, does not appear to have adjusted her speedometer. She uses her iPhone plus two Macintosh laptop computers, which sit side by side on her desk in her tenth-floor

Allison Barber's job is to market WGU Indiana to potential students, academic partners and employers, transforming it into a major player within the state's educational landscape.

downtown Indianapolis office, to keep tabs on WGU Indiana's million-dollar marketing campaign, which includes online, bus, radio, billboard, print and television ads.

"Eyeballs matter," Barber said. So she has made sure that WGU Indiana has been visible in the community, with tables at the Indiana State Fair, the Gary South Shore Air Show, the Black Expo, the TechPoint Innovation Summit, and on the

community college and hospital campuses. Barber has spoken at the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns and met with the Indiana congressional delegation, and plans to speak at chambers of commerce and Rotary Club meetings. "We're trying to figure out where the force

multipliers are," she said—in other words, who is most likely to pass the word about WGU Indiana.

Then there's generating "earned media"—coverage due to an event. On the day that this reporter visited, for instance, Barber was on the phone with WGU Indiana's public relations representative, hammering out details of the school's upcoming graduation commencement. She wanted to make sure the Indianapolis news bureaus got a press release, that the Associated Press received a photo, and that local radio stations were alerted about graduates from their areas. How about a post-

commencement e-newsletter? And had there been any "bounce" from the radio interview she did last week? The school now has 125 friends on Facebook, she mentioned, adding ruefully, "That's pathetic."

Then she was on to an e-mail from the vice president of workforce development at Vincennes University, letting her know that both

WGU Indiana's million-dollar marketing campaign includes online, bus, radio, billboard, print and television ads.

the school's president and provost liked her idea to partner with Vincennes, which was founded in 1801, to offer tuition discounts and an application fee waiver to their graduates who want to earn more advanced degrees through WGU Indiana. "That rocks!" Barber exclaimed, delighted. Her plan is to promote the relationship as Indiana's newest university partnering with Indiana's oldest.

Also on her agenda that day: finishing up paperwork sealing a deal with Dollars for Scholars, which provides money to college-bound high school seniors, to promote WGU Indiana to their parents. Through this new sponsorship, parents of Dollars for Scholars recipients who want to return to college are eligible for scholarships from WGU Indiana. The idea is to tap into families that obviously already value education, Barber said.

Meanwhile, she was preparing for a web-seminar with Indiana's Department of Workforce Development, so that their employees could promote the school to the thousands of displaced and unemployed workers they counsel. Barber is also crafting a pledge for a coalition of Indiana companies who would help promote WGU Indiana to their employees, and promise to consider hiring WGU Indiana graduates.

"We're going deep with our relationships with leaders of the state," Barber said. "And that is the advantage we have as a state model."

—Kathy Witkowsky



"I am on a campaign to help Hoosiers get educated," says Allison Barber, chancellor of WGU Indiana. "We're selling a life-changing experience."

money, which could conceivably cover the entire cost of a WGU degree. “In this business of a transforming economy, you’ve got to constantly adjust your portfolio of tools,” said DWD Commissioner Mark Everson. “So we’re delighted we’re going to give this an emphasis.”

Also happy is Tom Snyder, president of Ivy Tech, which earlier this year had approved an articulation agreement with WGU, prior to the establishment of WGU Indiana. Ivy Tech’s enrollment has doubled in the past five years, to 110,000, and it transfers 10,000 students annually; the hope is to double that number. “We’re going to do everything we can to

encourage students to pursue this,” Snyder said. One way the schools are working together: WGU Indiana will waive the \$65 application fee and give a five percent tuition discount to Ivy Tech transfers.

“It’s a great option for our students,” said Sandy Ward, director of the transfer center at Ivy Tech-Central

With enrollment increasing a whopping 30 percent annually, WGU is predicting it will grow from 21,000 students to 30,000 within the next few years.

Indiana, in Indianapolis, where WGU Indiana promotional materials are prominently displayed. And it helps that WGU Indiana has a local recruiter who’s often on campus, she said, because many of Ivy Tech’s students are first-generation college-goers who aren’t always comfortable negotiating a path to higher education. “Our students want that one-on-one contact,” Ward said.

Ward’s ties to WGU may soon go beyond the students that come into her office seeking to transfer. Although she had never heard of WGU until WGU Indiana was established, she quickly became so enamored with its approach that she recommended it to her 29-year-old son, who attended but never graduated from Ivy Tech; now he’s planning to enroll as soon as January. Ward also said she’d heard of some Ivy Tech instructors who were planning to enroll at WGU Indiana to earn their master’s degrees. “There’s a lot of interest,” she said.

But within the halls of the state’s other institutions, there hasn’t been much buzz about WGU Indiana, said Jo Ann Gora, president of Ball State University, which has a significant online presence, with 20 online degree programs and 6,600 students. The governor advised the state’s institutional leaders about his plans for WGU Indiana prior to announcing them, but since then, “there really hasn’t been much conversation about it,” Gora said. “I think everybody is used to the idea that there will be alternate providers.” And if more providers mean more degrees, then that’s a good thing, she said.

Still, the governor’s public endorsement of WGU Indiana did raise a few eyebrows. “Some people have questioned why he would tape a commercial for one public university

and not another,” Gora said. Given his role on WGU’s board of directors, and his commitment to providing more online options within the state, she doesn’t see his actions as inappropriate. But, she added, “I’d love the governor to come on the air and promote our program.”

Some legislators were also taken off guard by the governor’s press conference announcing the establishment of the state’s “eighth university.”

“People were like, ‘Huh?’” said state Representative Peggy Welch, a Democrat from Bloomington who serves on the bipartisan budget committee that oversees state expenditures. At the committee’s September meeting, members from both parties expressed concerns, she said. They wanted to know whether any state dollars were being used for this online university “that’s called Western Governors University,” Welch added (with emphasis on “western”), and whether WGU Indiana would compete with the state’s existing institutions. Those questions and concerns were addressed in the October

meeting, Welch said, when Barber gave a presentation explaining that no state dollars were used to create or sustain WGU Indiana, and that the school is meant to complement, not compete with, the state’s existing institutions.

“I still have questions about limited resources and how we’re using those, but I don’t know that I have a problem with WGU,” Welch said. “If it’s helping people achieve the education and training they need to get a job and rise up the ladder, so be it.”

That is WGU’s overarching goal. WGU is, first and foremost, “about demonstrating a new model of higher education that is more efficient and more effective,” said Mendenhall, who has been with WGU since 1999, and whose leadership there recently earned him the prestigious Harold W. McGraw Prize in Education. “We’d love to have [this model] serve millions of students,” he said. That’s far more than WGU alone can handle, but however it’s done, Mendenhall said, “I do think other states will adopt this model, or something like it, because it makes so much sense.” ♦



Kara Tanner is hoping that she can leverage her knowledge of literature and history to get through WGU Indiana’s program in just three years.

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.



A Collaborative for Academic Excellence

El Paso's partnership program boasts impressive gains in student performance

Photos by Scott Weaver, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

EL PASO, TEXAS

AT THE H.D. HILLEY Elementary School, close to the U.S.-Mexico border, more than 70 percent of the students enter first grade speaking little or no English, and more than 90 percent are poor enough to qualify for the federal lunch program.

Many of the children live in "colonias"—groups of shacks and trailer shells which often have no electricity, running water, trash pickup or sewer lines. These settlements are illegal but they exist in ever-increasing numbers, according to school officials.

Yet test scores at H.D. Hilley have shot up in the last three years. For instance, in 1996 only 60 percent of Hilley's fifth graders passed the reading portion of the state-mandated Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), but this year 94 percent passed. In mathematics, the pass rate for fifth graders jumped from 74 percent to 92 percent.

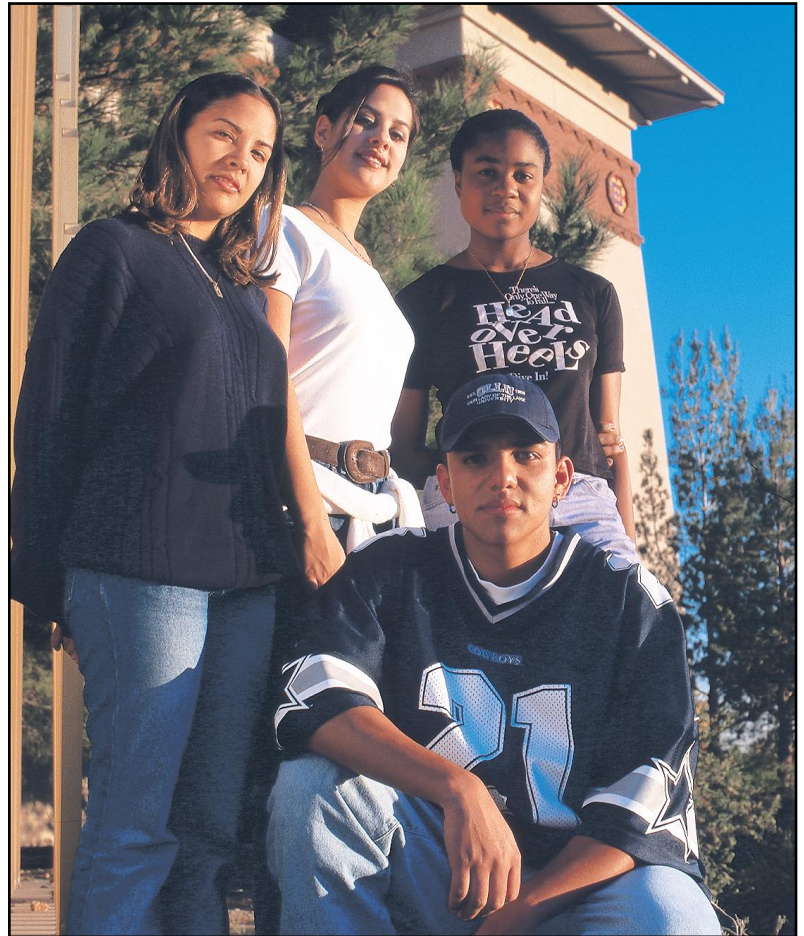
"I'm in seventh heaven, seeing what the children can do," Principal Ivonne Durant said.

Durant gives much of the credit for this improvement to the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, a partnership that includes the University of Texas-El Paso, El Paso Community College, the three largest school districts in the area, and local business and civic leaders.

"There is no question in my mind that we have made some huge gains and that much of it has been due to the Collaborative," Durant said.

Because of the partnership, Hilley has a math and science "mentor," Freddie Vasquez, an experienced teacher who helps the school's 35 classroom teachers with math instruction. Vasquez is one of 39 mentors who work in the three school districts—El Paso, Socorro and Ysleta—that are part of the Collaborative. The money to pay the mentors comes from a five-year, \$15 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

Hilley, which is in the Socorro School District, also has a "literacy leader," a teacher who has been freed from regular classroom duties to help other teachers find ways to improve student reading and writing.



Two-thirds of the students at the University of Texas-El Paso are Hispanic. Many of them will teach in area schools after graduation.

All of Hilley's classrooms are connected to the Internet, allowing youngsters who might come from homes without telephones or electricity to learn about modern communication. Beginning with first graders, each student has an e-mail account. Last fall, fourth graders worked on a joint project with a school in a remote area of western Australia.

Money for the computers, Internet connections and other technology comes from a \$10 million U.S. Department of Education grant.

A prominent feature of every classroom at H.D. Hilley, as in every other Collaborative school, is a huge wall chart titled "El Paso Standards for Academic Excellence," spelling out the skills that each student should have mastered by fourth, eighth and 12th grade, in seven subject areas. The chart was developed over a two-year period by teachers, parents, school administrators and university faculty members.

The school has a "parent center," offering everything from

A prominent feature of every classroom in every Collaborative school is a huge wall chart titled "El Paso Standards for Academic Excellence."



“All students can learn at higher levels, given the opportunity,” says M. Susana Navarro, who runs the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence.

computer instruction to classes on healthcare and stress management for parents, mostly mothers, of Hilley students.

“This is not just a school effort, it’s a community effort,” Durant said, explaining the importance of involving parents in the school’s work.

The special programs and extra equipment are important, but perhaps equally important to H.D. Hilley’s success is the belief that every student in the school is capable of learning, if provided with encouragement and the tools to do so.

That is the basic message of the El Paso Collaborative.

“We believe all students can learn at higher levels, given the opportunity,” said M. Susana Navarro, executive director of the Collaborative. “We put it in moral terms—all of us

are morally obligated to teach all students.”

That is also the belief of President Diana S. Natalicio of the University of Texas-El Paso, whose strong commitment to the Collaborative is a major reason for its success.

“This is a very critical piece of our mission because our student population is primarily drawn from this region,” Natalicio said in an interview. “Eighty-five percent of our students come from El Paso County schools.” (Another eight or nine percent cross the border every day from Juarez, paying the same tuition as Texas students.)

“Some years ago, I came to the conclusion that there was very little sense in pointing a finger of blame at anybody for the inadequacy of the preparation of students coming out of the high schools when, in fact, we were preparing a majority of the teachers who were teaching in those schools,” she continued. “It made a lot more sense for us to try to take ownership and be a stakeholder in educational achievement at all levels. That’s what we set out to do, and we were very fortunate that Susana Navarro entered the picture here about that time.”

After several years as director of the Achievement Council, a California organization that works to improve educational opportunities for minorities, Navarro returned to her native El Paso in 1991 when her husband, Arturo Pacheco, was named dean of the College of Education at Texas-El Paso.

At first, Navarro thought of starting an independent, community-based organization similar to the Achievement Council, but she was persuaded by President Natalicio to base the effort on the Texas-El Paso campus. Today the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence has a staff of 25 and an annual budget of about \$5 million, with most of the money coming from the federal government and from the Pew Charitable Trusts and other private foundations.

Natalicio chairs the organization’s board of directors, which includes superintendents of the three participating school districts, the president of El Paso Community College, the mayor of El Paso and other business, civic and religious leaders.

In the three participating school districts, two-thirds of the children come from low-income families and half enter the first grade speaking only limited English. The Collaborative works with 142 schools in the three districts, intensively with about 80.

An early task was to organize “leadership teams” in the first group of schools that agreed to join, and lead them through three-day seminars, during which the message was pounded home that “all children can learn, given the chance,” said Alicia Parra, deputy director of the Collaborative.

The teams included teachers, counselors and administrators but no school could participate if its principal were not part of the team. “The principal has to be on board if the school is going to make real change,” Parra said.

“I think these seminars were a turning point,” she added. “We were able to personalize education in the minds of teachers and principals. We told them, ‘This is your opportunity to create a school you would send your own child to.’”

The Collaborative continued the leadership team seminars for three years and also added “subject matter institutes,” at which Texas-El Paso faculty members and outside experts worked with school teams to improve instruction in math, science, reading and writing.

The Collaborative does not promote any particular curriculum materials but does insist that these be “standards-based,” and the standards are spelled out in the detailed wall charts that hang in every participating classroom.

For instance, in science, one of nine competencies that fourth graders are expected to master is the ability to “use hand lenses, binoculars, microscopes, thermometers, cameras, computers and other instruments for scientific investigations, observations and experiments.”

In mathematics, one of six fourth-grade standards is to be able to “recognize typical patterns in number relationships and begin to express them symbolically” and “apply these algebraic skills to analyze problems, using developmentally appropriate mathematical representations.”

“This is not just a school effort, it’s a community effort.”

**—H.D. Hilley Elementary School Principal
Ivonne Durant**

In addition to providing schools with math and science mentors (at a cost of well over \$1 million per year), the Collaborative has launched a campaign to improve student reading and writing skills in its member schools.

The mentors usually are welcomed with open arms by elementary and middle schools but they get a mixed reception in the high schools.

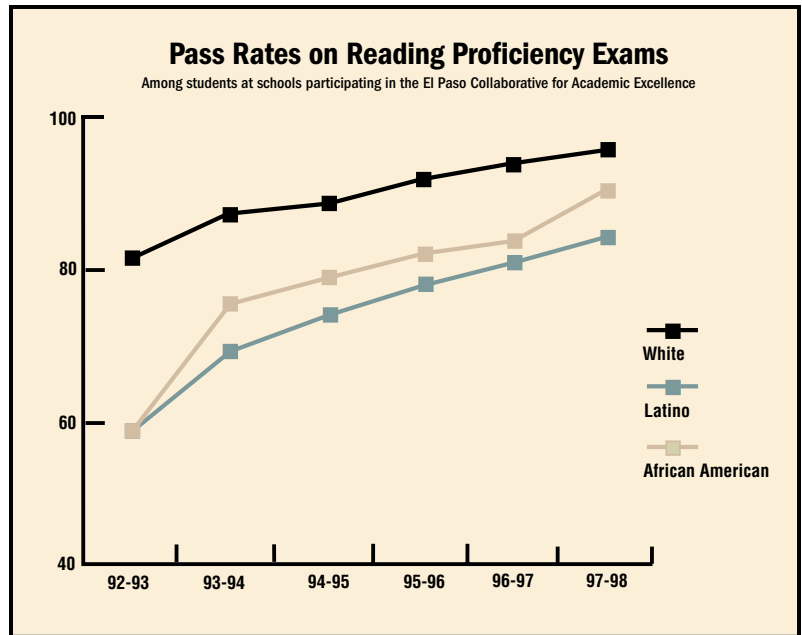
“Some high schools don’t want to be involved,” said Veronica Hernandez, a high school mentor in the El Paso School District. “Some teachers don’t see the need because their students are doing well on TAAS, and others like teaching calculus to small classes of the best students. They don’t want any part of the idea that all students should be taking these classes that get them ready for college.”

The Collaborative holds continuing leadership institutes for principals, subject matter workshops for teachers, meetings with parent groups and meetings with university and community college officials, to align the high school curriculum with college admissions requirements.

The result of all this activity has been a sharp rise in test scores and other measures of achievement.

Among the 80 schools participating fully in the program, the gap between the passing rate for white students and passing rates for African American and Hispanic students on state-mandated math and reading tests has been reduced by almost two-thirds in the last five years.

Five years ago, 15 schools in the three participating districts were classified by the state as “low performing” but no schools carry that designation today. The number of



“recognized” or “exemplary” schools identified by the state has increased from a handful to more than 75.

Although most of the work to date has been in elementary and middle schools, there are also signs of improvement in the high schools. Dropout rates are still high but there have been steady increases in numbers of students taking algebra 2, chemistry, physics and other college preparatory classes.

“The kids have gotten the message that this isn’t going away, and they’re starting to do the work,” said Monica Martinez, a Brown University graduate who has returned to El Paso to work with the Collaborative.

The Ysleta school district now requires all high school juniors, most of whom come from low-income families, to take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and to apply to at least one college. If a family cannot afford the SAT fee, the district pays it.

“In the past, too many of these kids thought college was out of reach,” Navarro said. “Ysleta decided to tell students, ‘Look, there’s no mystery here—you take the classes, you take the SATs and you have a good chance of getting to college.’ I think it’s a terrific idea.”

These gains have not come without some pain.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently reported that in the Ysleta district, more than half of the 51 principals and two-thirds of the 3,000 teachers either have retired or have taken jobs in other school districts in the last six years.

Navarro thinks the numbers are “exaggerated” but concedes that the radical changes involved in the Collaborative’s approach to school reform make many people uncomfortable.

“Any time you try to bring about real change, some people are going to be upset,” she said. “When you raise these issues, some people will ask, ‘What have we been doing? What are

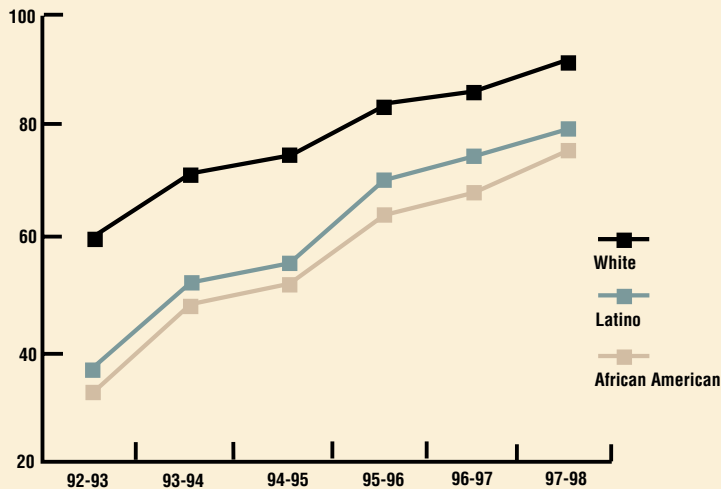
In the three participating school districts, two-thirds of the children come from low-income families and half enter the first grade speaking only limited English.



University of Texas-El Paso President Diana S. Natalicio supports the Collaborative’s work enthusiastically.

Pass Rates on Mathematics Proficiency Exams

Among students at schools participating in the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence



the values behind what we have been doing?’ And they will chose to move on.”

Navarro dismissed the notion that personnel changes are easier in the El Paso area because there are no teachers’ unions.

“With or without unions, education systems have not been very good about dealing with teachers who shouldn’t be in education,” she said. “For most principals, it has been part

of the culture that you just had to live with bad teachers.”

Support from the University of Texas-El Paso has been critical to the Collaborative’s success to date.

“The university has been very important,” said Ivonne Durant, principal at the H.D. Hilley Elementary School. “They light the fires.”

President Natalicio, Provost Stephen Riter and deans of the various colleges all are committed to improving the local public schools.

Lack of adequate preparation “is not just a problem for El Paso, it’s a problem that pervades all of American higher education,” said Riter, a systems engineering professor who has been provost for four years.

“Our schools are not equipped to turn out a lot of students who are prepared for college, even kids who took all the right courses, did all the right things,” he said, “so we have decided we have to change the system.”

Some of the biggest changes have occurred in the College of Education, which trains at least 60 percent of the teachers for El Paso County schools.

“We are fortunate to have a kind of closed loop,” said Arturo Pacheco, dean of the college. “We are the only four-year institution within 250 miles (in Texas, that is—New Mexico State University is only 50 miles away, across the state line in Las Cruces), we train most of the teachers, two-thirds of our students are Hispanic, and we have three large school districts to work with. We can see the results of our work.”

Subject matter courses have been beefed up. Prospective elementary school teachers now take many more math

UPDATE El Paso’s Collaborative June 2008

THE EL PASO COLLABORATIVE for Academic Excellence, first described in the winter 1999 issue of *National CrossTalk*, continues to contradict the widely held belief that partnerships between K–12 public schools and postsecondary education are ineffective.

The Collaborative, which includes the University of Texas-El Paso, El Paso Community College and 12 El Paso County school districts, has succeeded in improving the performance of K–12 students, increasing the numbers who move on to postsecondary education, and narrowing the achievement gap between white and minority students.

This has happened in a region in which 88.5 percent of elementary and secondary students are Hispanic, and 75 percent are low income.

M. Susana Navarro, executive director of the Collaborative, points to these indicators of success:

- In 2002, only 47 percent of the region’s students in grades three through 11 passed all parts of the statewide Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS); by 2007 that had increased to 70 percent.
- The high school graduation rate in the area’s three urban school districts was 78.3 percent in 2006, up from 69.4 percent in 1995.
- The high school dropout rate of 21.7 percent is substantially lower than in 1995.
- The numbers of students enrolling in some form of postsecondary education are inexact, but enrollments at the University of Texas-El

The El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence has succeeded in improving the performance of K–12 students, increasing the numbers who move on to postsecondary education.

Paso (UTEP), and at El Paso Community College, both of which draw most of their students from local schools, have been growing rapidly.

How did this happen? One reason for success appears to be close cooperation between leaders of the two postsecondary institutions and the local school districts. They meet regularly to plan projects and thrash out problems.

Continuity of leadership has been important. UTEP President Diana S. Natalicio has chaired the Collaborative’s board of directors since 1993 (the program began in 1991). The board also includes the president of El Paso Community College, superintendents of the three urban school districts and representatives of business, civic and religious organizations.

M. Susana Navarro has been executive director from the beginning. Natalicio and Navarro “provide a history of the Collaborative,” as district superintendents come and go, said Arturo Pacheco, former dean of the UTEP College of Education.

The Collaborative’s basic message remains the same. As Navarro

and science courses than before. They also spend three full semesters working in about 30 schools that are part of the El Paso Collaborative.

Federal funding will allow the college to offer a master's degree in educational technology to about 120 students over a four-year period.

However, the work of preparing teachers is not confined to the education faculty. Many faculty members from other colleges, especially the College of Science and the College of Liberal Arts, not only teach courses in the College of Education but also help create and evaluate curriculum materials and assist Collaborative schools in other ways.

Political scientist Kathy Staudt teaches a course titled "Schools and Communities" in the College of Education. "Fifteen years ago, no one from this department would have done this but now it's accepted, and I feel respected for what I do," said Staudt, who has taught at Texas-El Paso for 20 years.

"Many of our faculty—not all—have made a commitment to help with the training of teachers for the local public schools," said Thomas Brady, dean of the College of Science, who came to Texas-El Paso from the National Science Foundation a year ago. "You don't hear many saying, 'That isn't what I was trained to do—let the ed school do it.'"

But some faculty members say exactly that. Some were recruited by Texas-El Paso when enthusiasts were claiming it would someday become "Harvard on the border." They want to teach and do research in their academic specialties; they do not want to train teachers.

Another faculty complaint is that the El Paso



Every youngster at the H.D. Hilley Elementary School, a member of the El Paso Collaborative, has an e-mail account, and all classrooms are connected to the Internet.

Collaborative brings in outside experts to work on local school problems, ignoring local talent.

"In some parts of the campus, 'Collaborative' is almost a dirty word," said a mathematics professor who asked not to be identified. "The attitude of the Collaborative people seems

once put it, "We believe all students can learn at higher levels, given the opportunity?"

The Collaborative now works with about 50 schools, expanding from the original three urban school districts (El Paso, Ysleta and Socorro) to include nine smaller rural districts, Navarro said. The emphasis has shifted from elementary to middle schools.

A \$30 million grant from the National Science Foundation has enabled the Collaborative to train "coaches" who work with individual schools to improve math and science instruction. Over the years, additional financial support has come from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

A decade ago the Collaborative faced opposition from some UTEP faculty members who argued that helping local public schools was not part of the university's mission. UTEP officials now say most of that opposition has melted away.

The faculty "is quite positive about what we have been able to achieve," President Natalicio said. "Even the skeptics are convinced that this is the way to go in a university that draws so heavily on local

The close cooperation between leaders of the two postsecondary institutions and the local school districts appears to be one reason for the success of the Collaborative.

students."

"Some junior faculty were apprehensive at first," Pacheco observed, "but feel they are more valued now, especially since some of them have gotten tenure."

"Working on K-12 problems is not a tenure requirement but it is highly valued, not buried away in the 'service' unit," said UTEP Provost Richard Jarvis.

The Collaborative's work with El Paso Community College "has gone in a little different direction" in recent years, according to Dennis Brown, vice president for instruction at the two-year college.

Disturbed by the large numbers of students who still required remedial courses, especially in mathematics, when they arrived on campus, the community college, along with UTEP and the three largest school districts, introduced a placement test in the second semester of the junior year in high school. Students who do well on the test are placed in college-level classes as high school seniors. Other students receive tutoring or other "interventions," Brown said. As a result, the number of students in remedial classes has dropped sharply.

El Paso Community College also has started two "early college" high schools, where students take college-level courses. Some earn 20 to 30 credits toward a bachelor's degree before enrolling at UTEP.

"All of this has happened because of the Collaborative," Provost Jarvis said. "The structure is simple—five or six people from the university, the community college and the three large school districts meet regularly" to plan and evaluate. "All this takes a lot of time," he added. "Collaborative relationships are extremely high maintenance."

—William Trombley

to be, 'El Paso schools are not very good and UTEP produced most of the teachers, so UTEP must be the source of the problem.'"

M. Susana Navarro replied that many Texas-El Paso professors have been involved but that academic research sometimes is not compatible with the goals of the Collaborative.

"Academics are thoughtful and careful—that's not the speediest process," she said. "We are after systemic change. We think the schools need to be changed. We think we know how to do it, and we want to do it as quickly as possible."

In any case, with the university president and other top administrators strongly committed to the work of the Collaborative, its critics tend to be circumspect.

"I wish I could say that everybody was absolutely, deliriously happy and marching to the same drum," President Natalicio said, "but I think there is a sufficient number of people who are committed at this point that we are making the progress we would like to make."

It is difficult to determine how much of a role working on public school problems plays in faculty tenure decisions at Texas-El Paso.

"Not everyone would agree with this statement, but I believe we have built public school work into the tenure guidelines in the College of Science," said Jack Bristol, former dean of the college. "Teaching and public service are now given much more emphasis."

But Ralph Liguori, professor of mathematics and president of the faculty senate, disagreed. "The Administration has been trying to build in (more credit for) teaching and public service," he said, "but the easiest thing to quantify is still research."

"We are certainly working on changing the faculty evaluation criteria, trying to inject some flexibility into the process," Natalicio said. "Not everybody has to teach prospective teachers, and not everybody has to be committed to that particular role of the university, but those who are committed to it should be rewarded."

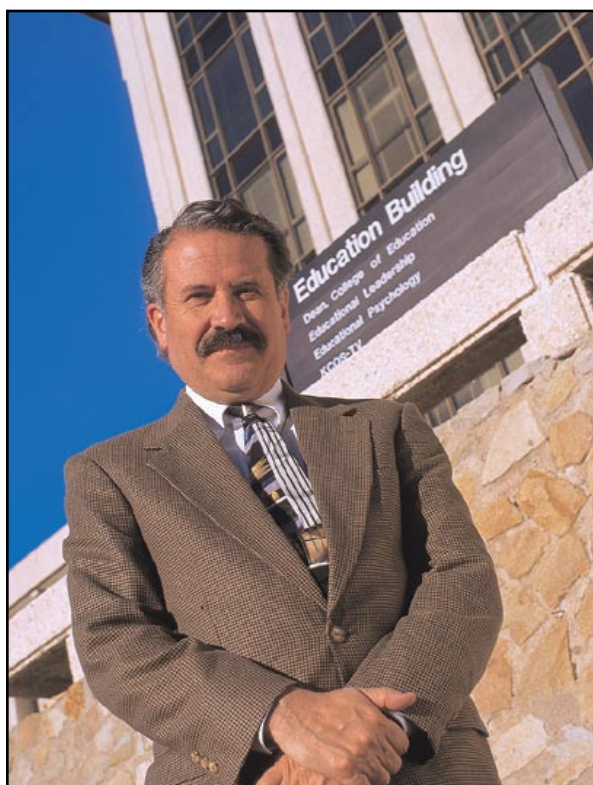
Some educators doubt that the El Paso success can be duplicated elsewhere. They note that the Collaborative operates in a geographically isolated part of the country, with a largely Hispanic population and with unusually strong support from the local university.

But Navarro scoffs at what she called "red herrings."

"The kind of poverty we have here, you don't see in most urban areas," she said. "If it can be done here, it can be done anywhere."

Kati Haycock, president of The Education Trust, a Washington-based organization that has been encouraging partnerships between K-12 and higher education around the country, thinks "the lessons are clearly transportable."

"At some level, El Paso has had an easier task because the environment is not as complex as, say, Los Angeles or Chicago," Haycock said, "but some things have been



Arturo Pacheco, dean of the University of Texas-El Paso College of Education, says it will take years to break down the barriers between K-12 and higher education.

harder. They're dealing with a porous border and a low-wage economy that employers like, so there's not as much community demand for higher achievement" as there might be elsewhere.

Few doubt that in the ten years Natalicio has been president, and in the six years of the Collaborative's existence, El Paso-area schools have made remarkable progress, and the mission of the University of Texas at El Paso has changed significantly. Teacher training, and helping the local schools, are now at the core of the university, not somewhere on the fringe.

But there are plenty of words of caution.

"Higher education and K-12 are two very different worlds, with very different cultures," warned Dean Pacheco of the College of Education. "We've got to talk to each other for a number of years before we start hearing what the other is saying."

Said Jack Bristol, "If you look at the data, clearly we're doing something right, but it will be several years before we know if our new teacher preparation efforts have paid off."

But those who run the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence are pleased with the results so far. "We have a long way to go," said Alicia Parra, the deputy director, "but in a community such as this, that never went anywhere, we have been able to move people." ♦

In addition to providing schools with math and science mentors, the Collaborative has launched a campaign to improve student reading and writing skills in its member schools.

“Early Colleges”

Innovative institutions attempt to reshape the transition from high school to college

By Ron Feemster

NEW YORK CITY

EDGAR GUZMAN moved here from Ecuador less than two years ago. A 15-year-old high school student with limited English skills at the time, he is doing college work at LaGuardia Community College in Queens today. Guzman did not skip a grade or test out of any high school classes. He became a part-time college student when International High School, on the LaGuardia campus, began its transformation into an “early college,” a high school-college hybrid that aims to graduate students with an Associate of Arts degree as well as a high school diploma.

In the next few years, scores of new “early colleges” are expected to open around the country. All are attempting to foster a smoother and quicker passage to higher education. Many, modeled on the new programs at LaGuardia, aim to catapult students directly into college who entered high school at risk of dropping out.

Guzman is one of about thirty 11th graders from International and neighboring Middle College High School to begin the “Excel” program, which will expand over the next several years to include nearly all students in the two schools. Excel students attend high school an extra year, finishing the “thirteenth grade” with an associate’s degree.

Most of International’s students arrived in the United States less than four years ago and entered the high school seeking extra help with English. Without it, they might not have survived in one of New York’s mammoth public high schools. At International, where catching up in English is part of every student’s program, learning a new language and culture has never been considered a handicap or disadvantage. If anything, students there seem to be more confident and ambitious than elsewhere. “I like to put myself in hard things,” said Guzman, a quiet young man who plans to become a medical doctor in the United States and eventually a politician in Ecuador. “I can save time and money if I get the AA degree now.”

Middle College High, which also has a high immigrant population, recruits students who have had difficulties in the public school system. Some have lost a year to illness, to family strife, or to trips back and forth between the U.S. and their native countries. More have simply lost their way in a complicated, anonymous system that serves 1.1 million students.

Both high schools are small—about 500 students each—and they have used their location on the community college campus to foster an adult atmosphere of responsibility and opportunity. Students at both institutions have always had the option to take college classes during high school. This has kept talented students moving forward at International, in particular, where immigrants are often a year or two ahead



Steve Sheldon, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Linda Campbell, of Antloch University, heads a group that plans to open early colleges for Native Americans in the state of Washington.

in mathematics or computer science even as they are behind in English. At Middle College, the mere presence of older, successful students has provided motivation.

Sylvester Rodriguez, a 17-year-old raised on the gritty south side of Williamsburg, a poor neighborhood in Brooklyn, is surprised by the ambition he has developed since ninth grade. Many of his neighborhood friends left school without a diploma, and he admits to choosing Middle College because the school gives students the afternoon off on Wednesdays, and because its assessment system, based on portfolio performance, makes it exempt from the New York State Regents exams, which most of the state’s high school seniors must take.

Instead of choosing the easy way through high school, he is now joining Excel, even though he will be in school until 5:15 p.m. every day and must take his share of college-level exams.

“My teachers told me I can do this,” said Rodriguez, the only son of a Puerto Rican single mother who brought him to New York as an infant. “If they give me the help I need, I’ll do what I have to do. If I’m going to high school an extra

In the next few years, scores of new early colleges are expected to open around the country. All are attempting to foster a smoother and quicker passage to higher education.



Cecelia Cunningham, former principal at an early college on the LaGuardia Community College campus in Queens, N.Y., now heads a consortium of such schools.

year, that's okay. I'm doing something for myself. I want to get my associate's degree."

The group of Excel students is attending high school as usual in the morning for the next two years and making their first forays into higher education in the afternoon. They enter the community college as a cohort and register for the same core classes. Last fall, for example, they took English 099, a prep course for the community college writing exam, and theater arts.

These are regular sections of community college courses taught by community college instructors. High school and college students are intermingled. "Having college students in the same classroom is important," said Bert

Rosenberg, principal of International High. "Our students' attitude and behavior is more mature when they are mixed in."

High school guidance counselors offer an additional seminar class to help students adjust to college. The seminar provides extra time to discuss work in the college classes, as well as a chance to talk about the differences between community college and high school. Not until their final year, when students design an individual program leading to an associate's degree, do they attend classes alone in the general population of the community college. But even then, the support services provided by the high school remain in place.

"Some students may be used to an environment that offers them second chances to get their work done," said David Grodsky, a social studies teacher at Middle College who is mentoring Excel students. "One of the biggest hurdles they face is dealing with new expectations. The college environment assumes you are an adult. There are consequences if you don't meet your deadlines."

Each student in the Excel program took LaGuardia's college reading course over the summer to prepare them for community college classes. All but three passed the test. Rosenberg and Aaron Listhaus, principal at Middle College High, are optimistic about these students' chances when they retake the test this semester. But repeated failures would

create a problem with the cohort structure of the class. Either students will drop back a year, or they may have to leave the program, Rosenberg said.

Faced with the social reality of attending class with people who are no longer teenagers, Excel students discover a new motivation: pride. Few want to be identified as high school students by the community college. "The kids want to start out viewed as regular college students," said Grodsky. "So the assumption is not that you are younger or 'not as good' as the others. Let the professors be pleasantly surprised."

A liberal arts public school

Across the East River in Manhattan, an early college with roots in a different tradition of higher education effects a more abrupt transition to higher education. At Bard High School Early College, near the East Village, high school as we know it ends after tenth grade. At this year-old public school, which moved from temporary quarters in Brooklyn last fall, 11th graders are not juniors, ready to concentrate on the college admissions process. They are known as "year-ones." Instead of lecture classes, they take mostly seminar-style courses with sixteen or fewer students. They plunge into calculus, art history, comparative literature and law, working with faculty who were teaching at colleges before they came to Bard.

As at Middle College and International High, graduates receive not only a high school diploma, but also an associate's degree, which enables them to enter a typical four-year college as juniors. Unlike those schools, Bard is a four-year program, with the final two years of full-time college courses leading to an associate's degree.

Bard, whose 500 students are housed in a former elementary school, was launched as a cooperative project between Bard College, a liberal arts school in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, and the New York City Board of Education. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided nearly \$1 million in startup funding.

The urban high school might not exist today if Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College had not pushed to buy Simon's Rock Early College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1979.

But in contrast to Simon's Rock, an idyllic retreat where gifted 15- and 16-year-old students begin a four-year liberal arts program, the New York City school aims

not to supplant the later high school years but to transform them. Instead of recruiting students who can do college work now, the faculty seeks to groom an ethnically diverse crop of ninth graders, not all of whom come from the top of their middle school classes, into young college students. And

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the early funders of Bard High School Early College, has donated \$40 million to launch 70 new early college high schools.

instead of accelerating or “advancing,” in the spirit of high school Advanced Placement courses, the school aims for the intensity, rigor and self-discipline of higher education, two years ahead of schedule.

Like Bard College and Simon’s Rock, Bard High School Early College begins the school year with a “Writing and Thinking Workshop,” at which students are encouraged to use writing as a tool to find out what they think. “At the university level,” Botstein told parents at a welcoming event, “the production of language is inseparable from the creation of thought.” The goal of the week-long workshop, he said, is to lose the idea that language is merely a vehicle for delivering ideas.

Exercises encourage students to begin with a theme or an idea, to develop it in a series of sketches or improvisations, and to push ahead without knowing precisely where they are headed. “We want students to use ideas as they come,” said Botstein, who is also the conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra. “We want them to write the way a composer writes music, by finding a theme and constructing a piece from it.”

Latin professor David Clark began an afternoon workshop session for year-one and year-two students with a 15-minute free-writing exercise. Students were to write spontaneously on any important educational experience in their lives. Students chose a variety of topics, from favorite teachers to discussions with older relatives, to jobs that brought them into contact with interesting people. In successive rounds, the class shared positive feedback and asked questions of the writer. In the end, the writer questioned the class about what was missing or misplaced in the text. The result, after a week, was a portfolio of rough and polished pieces to be shared at a “celebratory reading.”

“I’ve taught at Oberlin and Columbia,” said Clark, who is beginning his second year at Bard, “and I think the talent level is comparable. There are some who are great, a few who are not good, and a lot in the middle.”

Finding good students has not been simple. Ray Peterson, the Bard principal, reported losing 15 percent of the first year’s entering ninth grade class. The school managed to retain all but five members of the 2001 year-one class. “That was the recruiting class we were most careful with,” Peterson said. “We took chances on quite a few ninth graders and it didn’t always work out. Some didn’t have the habits of mind to study. We asked them to leave.” The school is not just looking for raw academic talent. They want students who can grow into self-directed individuals who see learning as the primary focus of high school.

At the same time, the school is sensitive to diversity issues. “We don’t want the student body to skew too white,” said Peterson, who noted that the city high schools requiring rigorous admissions exams tend to enroll disproportionate numbers of Jewish and Asian students. Five students interviewed by *National CrossTalk*—all of them white—discovered Bard when they were investigating Simon’s Rock as a boarding school. That school charges upwards of \$35,000 per year. Bard is a free public high school.

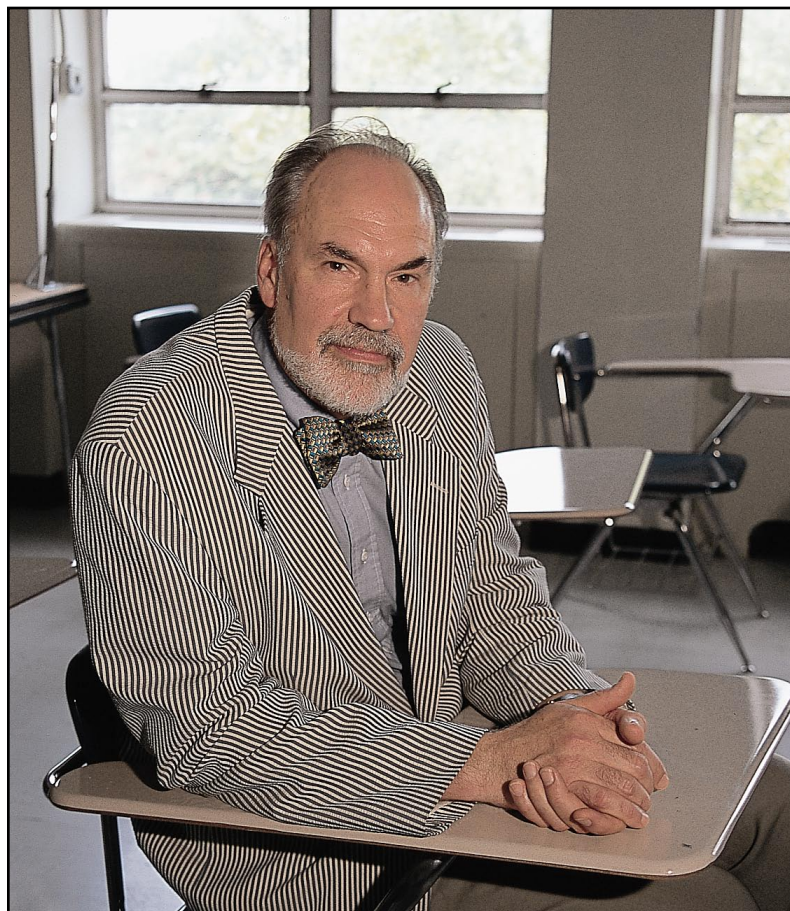
Older students, the ones who enter as year-ones at about the age of 16, tend to come to Bard because they want a new

challenge. “Here I have to actually think,” said Joseph Robateau, now 17, a year-two who left an accelerated cohort of 50 students at Brooklyn Technical, one of New York City’s three most selective public high schools, to enter Bard when it opened. “There are no wrong answers here if you can argue your point. At Tech we had blocked classes with more work than other students, more math, and math labs.

But we really just took tests about the teachers’ ideas. You could figure out what they wanted. So you did that sometimes instead of figuring out what you thought yourself?”

Of course, getting a jump on college is an added attraction. For Liz Dempsey, 18, who was attending Convent of the Sacred Heart, a private girls school on Manhattan’s tony Upper East Side, there were financial incentives as well. “My family saved four years of tuition,” she said. “Two years in high school and two years in college.” Even so, her decision to transfer had more to do with finding a new style of school. “Junior and senior year were just going to be about competing for good grades in Advanced Placement courses,” said Dempsey, who parlayed a year of Chinese language at Bard into a three-week fellowship to China last summer. “It sounds like a cliché, but we spend a lot of time here working

Bard High School Early College aims for the intensity, rigor and self-discipline of higher education, two years ahead of schedule.



Ray Peterson, principal at Bard High School Early College, says many ninth graders lack the “habits of mind to study” required of students in the accelerated program.

Lisa Quiñones, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Faced with the social reality of attending class with people who are no longer teenagers, students discover a new motivation: pride. Few want to be identified as high school students.

together to find an answer. We trust each other enough as colleagues and peers to talk about opinions.”

Ashli Haynes, a 17-year-old actress and violinist, left the Professional Performing Arts School to find more challenging academics. “People were distracting and rowdy in class,” she said. “They came to that school to be whatever fabulous thing they were trying to be. They didn’t care about the rest of the work.” Haynes is taking calculus, Spanish, law, chemistry

and jazz ensemble in addition to the required year-one seminar.

At the end of the first year of college last spring, when Bard was at its former location in Brooklyn, students in calculus class worked on expressing trigonometric functions as power functions. Meanwhile, a year-one seminar was comparing Hamlet and Don Giovanni, and an art history class was locating the techniques and subject matter of Monet and Renoir in the technological changes of 19th century France. This year, the school is expanding its music program with the help of the American Symphony Orchestra, which is donating funds to purchase musical instruments for the school’s chamber orchestra and jazz ensemble.

Teachers in most college courses at Bard High School Early College hold doctoral degrees. They spend the first year

or two getting certified as high school teachers by the state. Bard has found it necessary to supplement some teachers’ salaries to recruit them from university positions.

With all of its emphasis on academics, Bard attracts students looking for identity and affirmation as well as a more rigorous classroom experience. Nyla Rock, 17, who transferred from A. Philip Randolph High School in Harlem, said her former school was too large and too crowded. Almost any student transferring to International High or Middle College could have told that part of her story.

Equally important, she said, was the fact that the learning process was passive and anonymous. “We had 25 or 35 people in every class,” said Rock, who founded Bard’s literary club and is planning to attend a selective women’s college like Wellesley or Sarah Lawrence or Smith. “You couldn’t just speak up if you had an idea. Here my smallest class had five students.”

More early colleges

As much as the schools differ from one another, Bard, Middle College and International High School are all part of a common quest to reshape the transition to college, which often seems to waste most of the senior year of high school. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the early funders of Bard High School Early College, has donated \$40 million to launch 70 new early college high schools across the country.

Most of these schools will aim to serve students more like those at Middle College than at Bard, but organizers of the new schools have been regular visitors to the Bard and LaGuardia campuses. “We see these schools as a way of

UPDATE “Early Colleges” October 2008

SINCE *NATIONAL CROSSTALK* first reported on “early colleges” in its winter 2003 issue, the idea has spread widely. In the 2007-08 school year more than 40,000 students, in 200 schools, in 24 states and the District of Columbia, were attending these schools.

These numbers were provided by Jobs for the Future, the Boston-based organization that coordinates the Early College Initiative, which is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “This has grown into what we like to call a movement,” said Michael Webb, associate director of Jobs for the Future.

The eventual goal of the Gates initiative is 250 schools, enrolling 100,000 students, Webb said.

Most early colleges, or early college high schools as they are sometimes called, include students from grades nine through 12, though some begin as early as sixth grade and others continue through a “13th” grade. The schools are small—500 or fewer students. Most are located on either a community college or four-year college campus, where students take a mixture of high school and college courses. In many cases they are able to obtain, simultaneously, both a high school diploma and a community college associate’s degree or its equivalent.

Early Colleges are “aimed mainly at the underserved and the underrepresented” in higher education, Webb said—low-income

students, minority students and first-generation college students. Two-thirds of early college students are African American or Hispanic, according to Jobs for the Future. Many of these students had dropped out and had given up on education.

Working with students who have performed poorly in traditional schools “has been hard work—harder than we thought,” said Cecilia Cunningham, who was principal of one of the first early colleges—International High School, located on the LaGuardia Community College campus in the New York City borough of Queens.

“A big ‘aha! moment’” was the discovery that these students require more support, both academic and non-academic, Cunningham said in an interview. “Many of these teenagers have a feeling of shame about school,” she said. “They don’t take advantages that middle class kids do. Instructors and people who run these programs must be aware of that.”

The International High School and others have added daily student sessions with their high school teachers and frequent meetings with instructors who teach the college courses. A fifth year has been added to the program to allow time for these extra support services.

“This has grown into what we like to call a movement.”

—Michael Webb, associate director of Jobs for the Future

bridging the gap to higher education,” said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of the foundation’s education program. “In effect, we want to bring higher education to people that could be left behind—students whose parents may not have graduated from high school, much less attended college.”

The funding is being funneled through intermediaries that differ from one another as dramatically as Bard and International High. They will all be mandated to serve at-risk students, but the schools will be as different as their locations and the communities they serve: Indian reservations in Washington state; inner cities of Cleveland and Washington, D.C.; rural areas in Utah and the south; and mainstream college campuses across the country. The “intermediate” with the most experience starting early colleges is the Middle College National Consortium, an organization of high schools that, like Middle College and International, are located on community college campuses.

Cecelia Cunningham, the head of the consortium, was principal of Middle College High School at LaGuardia until Aaron Listhaus took over last fall. She expects the conversion of some two dozen middle colleges into early colleges to reawaken a perception of them as advanced placement programs, a view she plans to fight. “I don’t really care how people look at these schools,” she says. “I’m going to keep them focused on the same type of students.”

Other intermediaries express different values. Antioch University in Seattle, for example, plans to start at least eight schools for Native Americans in the state of Washington. And for Linda Campbell, an Antioch professor who chairs First People’s Education at Antioch and heads up the early college project there, the new schools represent

an opportunity to bring more Native American teaching and learning into the classroom. This curricular change, Campbell believes, will do as much to keep students in school as increasing academic support programs.

Two intermediaries focus on preparing teachers to offer a richer learning environment for students. SECME (formerly called the Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering) is starting eight schools as partnerships between local school districts and historical black colleges. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation plans to start early colleges on a “representative cross section” of college campuses across the country. At both organizations, in keeping with their traditional strengths, they will aim at deepening teachers’ ties to their disciplines. “If 16-year-olds are ready for college, then what holds them back is the mode of instruction,” said Robert Weisbuch, Wilson’s president. “We need exceptional teachers to raise the norm of instruction.”

In Utah, the new schools fill a need created by the state’s New Century scholarship program, which provides a 75 percent tuition scholarship at any state university to students who finish high school with an associate’s degree. A student who completes the AA degree at the age of 17 could graduate from college at 19. Nathan Pierce, an official with the Utah Partnership Foundation, which is starting early colleges there, tied the state’s scholarship program and its friendly policy on

Finding good students has not been simple. Ray Peterson, the Bard principal, reported losing 15 percent of the first year’s entering ninth grade class.

Cunningham is now executive director of the Middle College National Consortium, which includes 21 early colleges, enrolling about 6,000 students in ten states. In the 2006-07 school year, 78 percent of the students were from racial/ethnic minority groups; 62 percent were eligible for federal lunch programs.

Sixty-three percent of the students attending consortium schools were enrolled in college courses in 2006-07. Twelfth graders accumulated an average of 31 college credits. Ninety-two percent passed their college courses; 56 percent earned A’s and B’s.

The North Carolina New Schools Project, proposed by Governor Mike Easley and financed largely by the Gates initiative, included 42 early college programs, enrolling more than 5,000 students in the 2007-08 school year, said Geoff Coltrane, research and communications director for the project.

Thirty-seven of the schools were on community college campuses, four were at four-year institutions, and one was an online “virtual” school for students in regions of the state where there are no college campuses.

Fifty-six percent of the students were white, 30.8

Two-thirds of early college students are African American or Hispanic. Many of them had dropped out and had given up on education.

percent African American, 7.7 percent Hispanic.

Early College enrollments “should mirror the area’s population,” Coltrane said. This means there are more African Americans in urban schools, fewer in heavily white western North Carolina. However, Coltrane said, “we’re doing a pretty solid job of reaching first-generation college students” in that part of the state.

Because the New Schools Project was only four years old in fall 2008, there was no information about how well students were doing, in comparison with those attending traditional schools. But “we have seen a significant decline” in dropout rates, Coltrane said.

Although the early college idea seems to be catching on, there still are “significant obstacles,” said Michael Webb of Jobs for the Future. “Combining K-12 and higher education is always a problem,” he said. And the question of “how to pay for it, after the starting grants run out” remains unanswered.

Many states have a single fund to finance both K-12 schools and public colleges and universities, leading to intense competition between the systems. And some states “are reluctant to pay for college courses for high school students,” Webb said.

Despite these difficulties, “we’re going to see a huge increase in states using this approach to improve education results,” Cecilia Cunningham predicted. “As states employ this as a reform strategy, it will be used for a wider range of kids.”

—William Trombley

dual enrollment to the influence of the Mormon Church.

Although he was careful to say that there was no evidence of an official tie to the church, he noted that members of the Mormon faith generally take two years off to proselytize abroad when they are about 19 or 20. "If this program had been available when I was in high school," Pierce notes, "I might have finished college before I went away."

Except for the Middle College Consortium, which sponsors the LaGuardia program, none of these programs has yet opened a school. Each intermediary is currently engaged in a planning year. Each will open two or three schools during the 2002-03 school year, and additional schools during the next five years. Each school receives three years of funding, counting the planning year. The overall project is huge. Even the most sympathetic observers wonder if it will come off as planned.

There is more to creating a new school than recruiting talented students and teachers, of course. The finances are complicated, and three years of Gates funding hardly guarantees that a school will become a self-sustaining institution. About \$600,000 in planning and startup money is budgeted for each of the new schools (\$1,500 per pupil in a 400-student school, over three years) said Vander Ark. If an existing school is being restructured, the funding is cut in half.

As much as a third of the money will stay with the intermediaries, which plan and select school sites, negotiate finances with school districts and colleges, hire core staff, and so on. The remaining two-thirds must suffice to get the school anchored in a public funding cycle that guarantees its survival without tuition.

"We try to find an amount of money that encourages people to carry out plans," said Vander Ark. "But not so much money that we supplant public funds or create something that is not replicable. They will need local support and local matching funds." The Ford, Carnegie and Kellogg foundations also have contributed funds.

Funding an institution that crosses traditional boundaries between secondary and higher education can also require changes in state laws that govern dual enrollment in high schools and colleges. In the state of Washington, for example, a legislative initiative called Running Start, which passed in 1992, permits any high school student who passes an entrance exam to take courses at community colleges without paying tuition.

Bard College President Leon Botstein, whose book,



Steve Sheldon, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Tom Vander Ark directs education programs for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which will spend \$40 million to start new early colleges.

"Jefferson's Children," first attracted the Gates Foundation's attention and funding, is a warm supporter of the early college movement. Yet even he turns a skeptical eye on the Gates project. "Starting a new school is more difficult than it looks," he told the parents of Bard students this fall. "I believe that Gates will end up spending more money and starting fewer schools than they have planned." ♦

Ron Feemster has been a freelance writer based in Germany and New York. He currently teaches at the Indian Institute of Journalism & New Media in Bangalore, India.

With all of its emphasis on academics, Bard attracts students looking for identity and affirmation as well as a more rigorous classroom experience.

New Teacher Education

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation program brings change, one state at a time

By Susan C. Thomson
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

ARTHUR E. LEVINE is a hurried man on a big, bold mission. His goals, he says, are to dignify classroom teaching, attract exceptional people to it, transform the college and university programs that prepare them, and create the teacher-education models of the future. He's thinking nationally, but he's acting a state at a time, starting with Indiana.

There, 56 high-achieving, handpicked men and women are rounding out a transformative year, earning master's degrees while spending long hours in classrooms, learning to teach by watching and doing. Come late summer, when the bells ring in a new school year, they will begin new careers teaching science and math in some of the state's lower-income public secondary schools.

As teaching recruits, they're a decided breed apart—and above. Each brought to this challenging year at least a bachelor's degree, typically in math, science or engineering. More than a quarter came with advanced degrees—Ph.D.s and MBAs included—as well. They range from fresh college graduates to 60-something retirees returning to the workforce. More than half are career changers with resumes that include jobs like laboratory technician, medical technologist, respiratory therapist, veterinary assistant, wildlife manager, pharmaceutical researcher and bench scientist.

They are the inaugural class of a new Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation program for would-be teachers—the above-average kind that the high-energy, highly

When Arthur Levine came calling about Indiana's possible interest in Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships, Governor Mitch Daniels was thrilled.

persuasive Levine had in mind when he became the foundation's president in 2006.

He arrived on the job after a dozen years as president and professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he had established himself as a vigorous advocate of greater, research-based rigor in teacher education.

Then came a timely convergence of his and the foundation's priorities. The foundation, famous since its founding in 1945 for providing stipends to prospective college and university teachers, was looking for a new direction. Levine, at the same time, was wrapping up "Educating School Teachers," a 148-page report that offered an unflattering assessment of the nation's 1,206

schools, colleges and departments of education.

"At the moment, teacher education is the Dodge City of the education world," Levine wrote in the report. "Like the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and disordered. The disorder is increasing as traditional programs vie with nontraditional programs, undergraduate programs compete with graduate programs, increased regulation is juxtaposed against deregulation, universities struggle with new teacher education providers, and teachers are alternatively educated for a profession and a craft."

Levine led the team that did the underlying research, which included case studies of 28 departments or schools of education, plus surveys of thousands of education faculty, deans and department chairs, as well as teachers and principals. The report, published under his name alone, faulted teacher education in general for, among other shortcomings, low admissions standards, over-emphasis on theory at the expense of practical, classroom experience, and, for beginning teachers, a lack of follow-up and on-the-job support.

Levine concluded by advocating, as a new standard in the field, five-year, research university-based training that would allow teachers-to-be to both complete an academic major and get plenty of classroom practice. To attract the most promising teacher candidates, he suggested a new scholarship, equivalent in prestige to the Rhodes, created by, for instance, the federal government or a philanthropy.

Or, as he recalls proposing in his job interview, perhaps such a scholarship could be created by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. What better sponsor than an organization with decades of experience working with colleges and universities, and with several dozen Nobel laureates, MacArthur fellows and Pulitzer Prize winners among its 20,000 alumni? The foundation seized on the idea and hired Levine to implement it.



Arthur Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, hopes to spread the foundation's teaching fellowship programs to all 50 states.

Joe Guertler, Black Star, for CrossTalk



“We don’t have a ‘Woodrow Wilson model,’” says Constance Bond, a foundation vice president. “We don’t go in and give them a program that they must implement.”

Levine hit the ground running. The teaching fellowships he had in mind would be competitive, limited to outstanding students who had already earned their undergraduate degrees, typically not including education courses. Successful candidates would receive \$30,000 stipends for a full-time year at a university, where they would divide their time between study toward their master’s degrees and equally demanding “clinical” work in schools, where they would be accepted and mentored more like medical interns than old-school student teachers. In exchange, the fellows would commit to then teach three years in “high-needs” middle or high schools. And their universities would continue to mentor them on their jobs.

As Levine concedes, none of these ideas originated with him or the foundation. If not in widespread

use, all had been strongly endorsed by research, and they added up to “a collection of best practices,” he said. “We just put them together in ways you don’t usually see them.”

Taking early shape along the lines Levine envisioned was the foundation’s Leonore Annenberg Fellowship, funded by the Annenberg and Carnegie foundations, with places for 25 fellows each at Stanford University and at the universities of Virginia, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Levine was pleased—up to a point. “It was a good strong program, but it didn’t have enough leverage,” he said. In other words, he didn’t think it would go far enough fast enough to accomplish his far-reaching goals. He foresaw greater, quicker,

more lasting impact if the states could be engaged as fellowship partners and champions.

States could offer the fellowships high visibility. States could build supportive coalitions of leaders to sustain them. Plus, as Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels pointed out, states are uniquely positioned to take down barriers to teaching, making way for non-traditional candidates.

When Levine came calling about Indiana’s possible interest in Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships, Daniels was “thrilled” by what he saw as an opportunity

“for real improvement in our time,” especially in the subjects where Indiana students were coming up the shortest on state tests—science and math. So he suggested that the fellowships be restricted to those fields.

Having won Daniels to his idea, Levine followed up by getting buy-ins from the state’s movers and shakers in education, business, government, labor and philanthropy.

The Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowship in

math and science (funded by a \$10 million grant from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment) and the Annenberg fellowship were announced together, in December 2007. Consistent with Levine’s state theory, the bigger headline-maker by far was the Indiana version, with openings for 20 fellows each annually at the University of Indianapolis, Purdue University, Ball State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), starting with the 2009-10 school year.

Constance Bond, a foundation vice president, said that the four universities were chosen because all were already offering graduate degrees in teacher education, and all were open to change.

The foundation insisted that each university come up with an entirely new curriculum for its fellows, developed by a committee made up of faculty from math, science or related disciplines, as well as from education. The result had to be an integrated mix of the academic and the clinical, graduate school and classroom, theory and practice. Otherwise, the universities were free to design their programs. “We don’t have a ‘Woodrow Wilson model,’” said Bond. “We don’t go in and give them a program that they must implement.”

The work proved burdensome enough that Ball State decided early on to take an extra year to prepare. The three other universities proceeded.

The University of Indianapolis designed a master of arts in teaching degree consisting entirely of new courses solely for its fellows.

IUPUI created a hybrid of new courses and borrowings from its Transition to Teaching program for non-education graduates, and then combined them into three different tracks, each leading to a different education-related master’s degree.

Purdue tailored its curriculum to its School of Education’s emerging, special mission to prepare teachers for poor rural schools, coming up with a master of science degree in education made up of existing courses, and new fellows-only ones in rural education.

Given the long distances between the campus and its focus schools, Purdue’s fellows began by spending one day a week in classrooms, working up to full days in their last ten weeks. Their population-center location allowed IUPUI and the University of Indianapolis more flexibility in scheduling their fellows’ clinical work.

The foundation took sole responsibility for recruiting and selecting the fellows, and it wasted no time in doing so, inviting applications in July 2008. To amass the largest possible candidate pool, it sent personal invitations to qualified college seniors, advertised on radio and in newspapers and magazines, and notified college alumni offices, state unemployment offices and downsizing employers.

One of those ads, and a newspaper column about the fellowship, grabbed the attention of Laura Cummings, who had “been teaching one thing or another”—including college biology and pre-school music—and loving it for 20 years since earning her master’s in biochemistry. “The fellowship came at just the right time,” she said, because her four children were newly in full-time school. And she was persuaded by “the fact that the foundation was adding some prestige to teaching.”

Hers was among 318 applications—each consisting of a

Under the guidance of university faculty and carefully selected in-school mentors, the fellows assumed more and more classroom responsibilities.

resume, transcripts and three letters of recommendation—for the 60 possible slots. She became one of about 130 finalists, selected for a day of interviews and other exercises, including reading, writing and teaching a five-minute sample lesson. She and 58 others—20 each for IUPUI and the University of Indianapolis, and 19 for Purdue—made the final grade.

All started flat-out, with summer school courses. In some of the career changers, some observers sensed a certain culture shock—as the fellows became students again, and then as they started working with this new and challenging generation of students. “The demographics are obviously different,” said Ed Kassig, a biology teacher who mentored fellows at the Indianapolis Public Schools’ Broad Ripple High School, where more than 80 percent of the students are African American, and 60 percent qualify for free or reduced-rate lunches. As children of the video-game age, all are visual learners, used to immediate gratification, Kassig said. “Everything happens quicker. Everybody—students and teachers—needs to be able to adapt quickly to change.”

That is no problem for Cummings, whose year included clinical work in 11 different schools, such as suburban Indianapolis’ Ben Davis High School, where half the students are minorities, and half qualify for free and reduced-rate lunches. For her, what took the most getting used to was “a lot of little things,” like taking attendance on a computer.

Gradually, under the guidance of university faculty and the experienced teachers carefully selected as their in-school mentors, Cummings and the other fellows assumed more and more classroom responsibilities. By spring, they were teaching most, if not all, of their mentors’ schedules.

All this while, the fellows were continuing their graduate courses. “I knew this wasn’t going to be a 40-hour-a-week program,” Cummings said. But the 12-hour days of school followed by evening classes were “very hard.” The combination added up to “a lot of work, more work than had been anticipated,” said another of the fellows, Hwa Tsu, who had to put aside his work on a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering.

Traci Schath, once an IBM engineer, said she learned to get

by on about four hours of sleep a night. The demands frazzled even Tim Devlin, at 25 one of the youngest fellows. “Every day at 9:30 (p.m.) I’m barely keeping my eyes open, because I’m so tired,” he said.

Along the way, three of the original 59 fellows dropped out. “We feel OK about that, given that in all three cases it was for personal reasons,” Bond said.

For the remaining fellows, the learning curve was steep, but they scaled it quickly. “I think their transition from when they walked into the program was huge,” said Kathi Walton, an instructional coach who observed fellows at Decatur High School in suburban Indianapolis. “They showed great development quickly.”

Kassig said the fellows he mentored stood out among the two dozen or so student teachers he has had in his 36 years of teaching, exceeding all three of what he sees as the profession’s basic requirements: “If you’re going to teach, you have to have something to say, and you have to care about kids, and you have to have classroom management skills.”

Come spring, the fellows came under the added pressure of looking for the jobs they pledged to do for three years in exchange for their training and \$30,000 stipends. Many are anxious because, in the wake of state funding cuts, the news from schools across Indiana is less about hiring than laying teachers off. Bond is confident, and she pointed out that math and science teachers are always “in huge demand,” and that many schools delay hiring until summer, when they know exactly what openings they have. “We don’t have any indication at this point that these fellows are going to have trouble finding jobs,” she said.

The fellows are at least assured that, once on the job, they won’t be abandoned to sink or swim as so many first-year teachers are. The foundation has seen to that by requiring their universities to continue mentoring them for their three-year classroom commitments. As they firm up their different plans for doing that, the universities are considering, besides the expected one-on-one coaching by school and university faculty, such innovative add-ons as online discussions and video critiques.

The fellows are achievers, accustomed to success—academic and professional. In what will doubtless be a first for many, they will be judged as teachers, in part, by the success of others. Levine said their first measure will be their students’ scores on next spring’s state assessment tests, due for release before the school year is out.

Longer term, he said, the fellows will be followed to see



When Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels learned about the Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships, he saw an opportunity “for real improvement in our time.”



“The fellowship came at just the right time,” says Laura Cummings, of Indianapolis. She credits the program for doing “a great job of immersing us in schools from day one.”

Longer term, the fellowship program as a whole will be evaluated on its success in bringing change to teaching and teacher education.

how long they last in their new profession. And the fellowship program as a whole will be evaluated on its success in bringing change to teaching and teacher education.

It was in hopes of improving on the U.S. Department of Education's depressing statistic that half of all U.S. teachers leave the profession within five years of entering it that the foundation made closely supervised clinical work a must in the fellows' programs. Research has linked lack of supervision to teacher burnout as well as low student achievement, a point underscored by a policy brief issued in March by the 800-member American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE).

Cummings credits her program for doing "a great job of immersing us in schools from day one." And she considers herself ready to teach until she retires.

Devlin, who said he spent the year between his college graduation and his fellowship living in his van and pondering his future, is also into teaching for the long term. "This is the first time I know what I want to do with my life," he said.

The fellowship has been a learning experience not just for the fellows but also for the three universities that took them on, and they are changing their other teacher-education programs accordingly. "It has reinforced our move to more site-based junior-year methods classes for elementary and secondary programs," said Kathy Moran, dean of the University of Indianapolis' School of Education. "It has allowed the traditional faculty to think outside traditional models."

IUPUI will add more mentoring to its Transition to Teaching program, having learned from the fellowship how valuable that is, said Patricia Rogan, dean of the university's School of Education.

Purdue has been encouraged to increase the clinical content of its secondary education program, said Sidney Moon, an associate dean of education.

Levine said he has heard from still other colleges and universities that have learned about the fellowship, and are adding elements of it to their teaching degrees.

Daniels has been so impressed that he is talking about expanding the Indiana fellowships to history and perhaps special education. Math and science are just "the place to start, not to stop," he said.

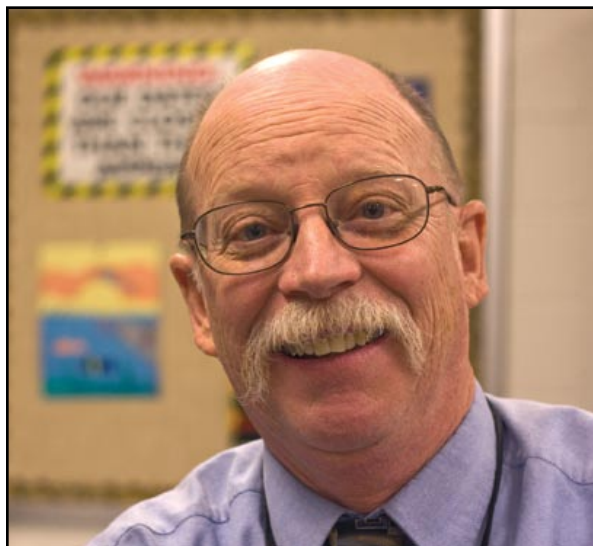
Levine's strategy is to proceed state by state, as, one by one, they find the money and the structure to support their own fellowships.

Earlier this year, the foundation announced that Ohio and Michigan will be next up. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has pledged \$16.7 million to the fellowships in Michigan, where the foundation has chosen as its partners the

University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Eastern Michigan University, Western Michigan University, Grand Valley State University and Wayne State University.

In Ohio, financing is coming from a combination of state and foundation funds, and fellowship sites will be Ohio State University, the University of Cincinnati, John Carroll University and the University of Akron.

The two new states will welcome their first fellowship



Ed Kassig, a high school biology teacher, says the fellows he mentored stood out among the student teachers he has had in his 36 years of teaching.

classes for the 2011-12 school year.

Levine happily did some elementary school math: Add 20 more fellows from Ball State University beginning next school year, and Indiana will be producing 80 Woodrow Wilson teachers, increasing the state's total supply of secondary science and math teachers every year by 20 percent. In Michigan, six universities times 20 fellows each equals 120 fellowship graduates a year—enough to fill all of the math and science vacancies in Kalamazoo, Detroit, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids. "Extraordinary!" he exclaimed.

Still, Levine presses enthusiastically on. He's in conversations with several other states (no names, please!) about possibly starting Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship programs of their own. And yes, he said, his goal is to spread the fellowships to all 50 states. To that end, he sees spreading the word—getting attention for the fellowships from the media, policymakers and practitioners—as a major part of his job.

He has succeeded in getting notice in some influential and high places. In its March policy brief, AACTE cited the Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowship as one of five "clinical preparation programs that are emerging as potential models." The brief said the programs are "based on the best research and professional judgment," are "innovative and inspiring," and hold "great promise for success." Unlike the Woodrow Wilson model, each of the other four programs is offered exclusively at the college or university that created it.

The highest notice of all has come from no less than the nation's influencer-in-chief. In January, announcing his Educate to Innovate campaign, aimed at getting more U.S. students to study and excel in math and science, President Barack Obama lauded the Woodrow Wilson teaching fellowships as an example of "several new partnerships launched that will help meet our goal of moving American students from the middle to the top of the pack in science and math achievement over the next decade." ♦

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

Levine presses enthusiastically on. His goal is to spread the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship program to all 50 states.

Daring to be Different

Rio Salado College has won a reputation as both outcast and innovator

By Pamela Burdman

TEMPE, ARIZONA

IF THE SIX-STORY cement-and-mirrors edifice doesn't resemble the typical college campus, the interior looks even less like an ivory tower.

In the hallways, inspirational posters extol virtues like "Teamwork," "Vision," "Success" and "Excellence." Offices buzz with talk of marketing to clients, selling products and winning new accounts.

Students are few and far between—most take courses via the Internet or at nearby corporations—but FTSE (Full-Time Student Equivalent, or "footsie") is part of every conversation. Exact enrollment is a moving target, because classes begin every two weeks.

Welcome to Rio Salado College, the renegade institution that eschews the trappings of the typical college. Rio's refusal to bow to academic norms and traditions—rejecting everything from the classroom wall to the academic calendar—has won it a reputation as both outcast and innovator.

The dual roles have been with Rio since its founding as the "college without walls" for the Maricopa Community College District in 1978, well before the advent of the Internet added luster to the idea of distance learning. Envisioned to serve working adults and those who could not reach existing campuses, Rio has tried every form of delivery from radio and newspaper to correspondence and CD-ROM.

That those experiments were not always successful—

newspaper classes, for example, flopped—has not enhanced Rio's reputation locally. And Rio's habit of reducing instructional costs through accelerated programs and heavy reliance on part-time instructors has not won favor with area educators.

Still, Rio hasn't stopped growing for most of its 23-year life, and flexibility and

adaptability have been key: Not only do classes start every other week, the distance learning format means that classes are never full and are never cancelled.

Today Rio ranks third in size among the ten colleges in the Maricopa district, the second largest district in the country. In 1999–2000, the school enrolled more than 26,000 students in for-credit courses, for a total FTSE of 8,457. The average age of students is 32.

If anything, daring to be different has raised Rio's profile outside Arizona's borders—to the point that raised eyebrows only seem to encourage the folks who run the place.

"It's music to our ears when someone says, 'You can't do that,'" Linda Thor, Rio Salado's president since 1990, said with a laugh.

The laugh underscores Thor's conviction that she will prove her critics wrong. "We're always under the microscope," she said. "Our level of accuracy has to be high."

Thor then proudly ticked off examples of accomplishments that others didn't think possible:

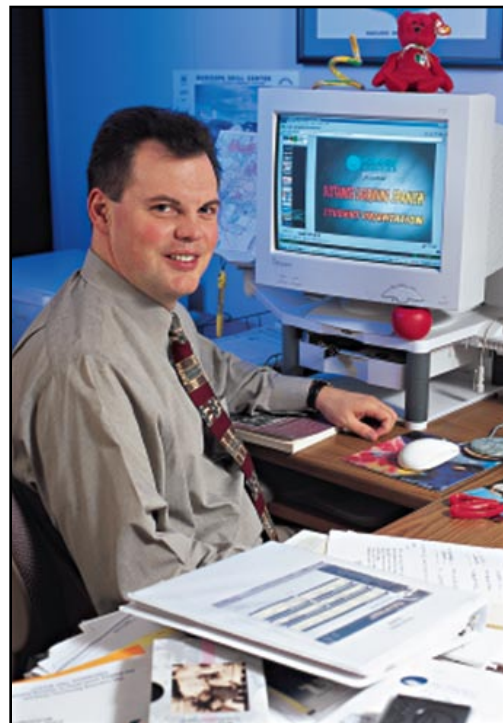
- classes that start 26 times a year;
- a "dual enrollment" program that allows high school seniors to take college classes at the high school site;
- an accelerated dental hygiene program that takes 15 months instead of the usual two years—and has only one full-time instructor;
- one of the most lopsided ratios of part-time to full-time instructors in all of academe;
- online laboratory science classes; and
- a law enforcement certificate that awards 35 units of credit for graduates of the Phoenix Police Academy's 16-week program.

That these innovations have contributed to a six-year stretch of 15 percent annual enrollment growth has helped to vindicate Rio's model.

Take dental hygiene for example: Skepticism about the quality of the accelerated program was quickly dispelled after the first class achieved a 100 percent pass rate on their board examinations. Rio was catapulted to the top ten percent of hygiene programs nationwide, despite being the only 15-month program and the only one with a single full-time faculty member, according to Jim Van Dyke, dean of applied programs at Rio.

A statewide shortage of dentists made hygiene a priority. The Arizona Dental Association and the Delta Dental

Photos by John Phillips, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Vernon Smith is president of the Rio Salado faculty, which includes 21 full-time instructors and 600 part-timers.

Rio Salado College refuses to bow to academic norms and traditions—rejecting everything from the classroom wall to the academic calendar.

insurance company pitched in \$1.2 million to renovate a clinic and classroom facility. Unlike most hygiene administrators, Rio health programs director Liz Kaz doesn't need to scrounge up used equipment.

On a recent morning, a dozen student hygienists dressed in white lab coats were leaning over patients in a state-of-the-art clinic. The students checked patients' blood pressures and performed intra-oral exams as purple-clad instructors (hygienists who teach part-time) looked on.

Down the hall, more students clustered around dental slides, studying them in preparation for their board exam.

Eryn Ramsey, 24, of Yuma, explained that she and her classmates were "stressing" about passing the exam, but pleased that the accelerated program would get them into the job market in record speed. Ramsey said she came to Rio at the recommendation of a dentist in Flagstaff, where she used to work as a dental assistant: "He thought very highly of it. The dental hygienists coming from Rio know more about what the dentists want."

Dental hygiene typifies Rio Salado's programs in that it is tailored to meet the needs of area employers. At any given time, Rio courses are being offered at some 50 to 75 government and corporate partners in the greater Phoenix area. Such partnerships account for 51 percent of the college's total students, but a greater number—64 percent—of the FTSE.

Rather than packaging courses and offering them to employers, the college's curriculum specialists assign college credit to existing training programs. "We can't do this for everyone, because it has to meet standards," said Van Dyke.

The Law Enforcement Technology program is a good example. Rio officials analyzed the Phoenix police academy's 16-week, 585-hour program and identified 17 separate courses—ranging from a one-unit search and seizure course to

a four-unit seminar on criminal investigation—for a total of 35 credit hours. Upon completion, that work earns police recruits a certificate from Rio Salado.

Though only one out of 100 police departments in the country requires a bachelor's degree, college credentials often figure in promotion decisions, a message that was delivered home to 41 new recruits one Monday afternoon this spring at the police academy.

Wearing crisp white shirts, black pants and buzz cuts (or, in two cases, buns), the recruits sat staring at a white board that removed any doubt about how to behave. "SIT DOWN. DO NOT TALK. DO NOT TOUCH ANYTHING," the board barked.

In addition to being their first day as recruits, this was to be, for some, their first day of college. Others already had some college experience.

Retired police officer Jim Hornburg, coordinator of Rio Salado's public safety programs, guided the recruits in filling out enrollment forms—and exhorted them to think about their futures. "Academic credentials translate to credibility," he said. "Patrol is a lot of fun, but you're going to want to go on to other things, into specialty details. An academic degree in law enforcement looks good in your portfolio.

"This is a service being offered to you by your agencies and Rio Salado College," Hornburg added. "Take advantage of it."

The police academy pays the recruits' tuition. Rio, in turn, pays the police academy for use of their facilities and instructors—resulting in a paper exchange. After that, the college collects another \$1,625 per FTSE from the state.

The program is important because most criminal justice programs include coursework that is redundant to the police academy curriculum, and few are tailored to the schedule of working officers, said Kelly Michelson, director of Rio Salado's law enforcement program.

With an additional 29 units at Rio Salado, graduates of the law enforcement training certificate program can earn an associate's degree. And through a partnership with Ottawa University, officers can take another 52 units online and earn a bachelor's degree.

More than 8,000 students have gone through the law enforcement program, and a new agreement with the state of Texas could enroll as many as 5,000 police academy graduates a year for credit by examination. Another eight states have asked Rio Salado to evaluate their police academies as well.

Arrangements like these—along with a low ratio of full-time faculty—help Rio Salado keep its cost per student about one-third lower than its sister colleges in the Maricopa district: Rio spends about \$3,209 per student, compared to a district average of \$4,733.

The workplace partnerships also fulfill a long-term goal of Thor's to adapt education to meet the needs of working adults and the expectations of employers. That interest dates back to Thor's days in the '70s and '80s as an administrator in the Los Angeles Community College District, where business leaders told her they needed more hands-on training at the workplace—not two-year training programs at the college campus.

In pursuing that mission, Rio Salado flips educational models on their head.

With an annual online enrollment of roughly 10,000 students and growing, Rio Salado is a national leader in online instruction, particularly among community colleges.



Graduates of the 16-week Phoenix Police Academy training program can also earn 35 credits from Rio Salado College.

“At traditional colleges, they build it and hope somebody comes. We essentially say, ‘If you buy it, we’ll build it,’” said Jim Van Dyke.

Rio looks for accounts of 50 FTSE and larger, said Karen Stigers, director of corporate and government programs. Otherwise, she said, “It isn’t a win scenario for us, and it isn’t a win scenario for them.”

Van Dyke, who says he joined Rio Salado 12 years ago as the college’s first “salesperson” and went on to sign up the first “client,” America West Airlines, is unashamed of using sales terminology.

“It’s a very noble thing,” he said. “These are the people who make us grow. A student is a serf; a customer is a whole different kind of thinking.”

The business lingo isn’t limited to the school’s external relationships, as attested to by a license plate on the wall outside Thor’s office. “RIO TQM” reads the plate, alluding to Rio’s focus on Total Quality Management, a business philosophy devoted to perpetual improvement of an organization.

And, while most colleges never mention customer service, Rio administrators decided two years ago that mere service wasn’t enough. They hired a consultant to work on “customer astonishment.”

Rio’s entrepreneurial spirit and reliance on business models invite comparisons to the for-profit institution just across the freeway. In many ways, Rio has more in common with the University of Phoenix than it does with its sister community colleges.

Both are geared for working adults and have significant online enrollment. And both have national ambitions.

“They’re a competitor in some respects and a partner in others,” said Pam Felkins, director of operations for the Phoenix campus of the University of Phoenix. “They’re an institution that’s on the edge. They’re willing to go out and explore things that the other community colleges either haven’t been given the blessing to do or haven’t wanted to.”

Rio Salado’s public school price tag of just \$41 a credit hour for in-state students is highly competitive at the lower-division level. As a result, many students transfer to the university for their upper-division work.

“If anybody asks me where to go to get their (lower-division) courses, I always recommend Rio Salado. It’s more like the type of learning environment they will get here,” said Felkins.

With an annual online enrollment of roughly 10,000 students and growing, Rio Salado is a national leader in online instruction, particularly among community colleges. More than 1,000 of the online students live outside Arizona. Of its 300 distance learning courses, 200 are available on the Internet.

While today most colleges offer Internet courses, Rio’s distance learning mission meant that it jumped in earlier than most. In 1996, Thor put the college’s 17 full-time faculty members through “Internet boot camp,” and then asked each to develop an online course for the fall.

Once known for hundreds of classroom sites dotted around the county in shopping centers and public buildings, Rio has shrunk back to just seven locations, even as out-of-state enrollment grows.

A vehicle for growth is Anatomy and Physiology, a

course using a customized commercial CD-ROM with on-screen dissections and lab practicals. Rio officials love to use the course for demonstrations and student testimonials.

Rio certainly has not escaped criticism for having the guts to do science labs online, but John Arle, faculty chair for the sciences, has a ready retort: “Are you still using a cat?” he quipped, referring to the standard practice for lab dissections. “I’ve replaced a cat in a tray with a human on a screen. At least it’s the right species.”

That combination has worked for student Matt Zimmerman, a Florida psychotherapist. “Not only can you do dissection, but it gives you computer graphics of anatomical structures,” said Zimmerman. “It can rotate them, and do all sorts of things you can’t do in an actual lab.”

To teach such courses, Rio relies almost exclusively on part-time faculty—another feature it shares with the new for-profit institutions. Adjuncts are particularly common at virtual universities, where instruction is labor intensive.

“It’s the emerging model for online institutions,” said Sally Johnstone, director of the Colorado-based Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications.

“If you bring in someone at an assistant professor level... you just won’t generate enough money to cover that salary,” noted Jerry Ice, president of the International Center for Distance Learning and provost at Thomas Edison State College, a New Jersey distance institution that employs no full-time professors.

Though the use of part-timers is rising everywhere, Rio has taken the principle further than most. This year, the school employs 600 adjunct instructors and just 21 full-time instructors. The full-timers teach very few courses, instead serving as department chairs—supervising part-timers and overseeing academic programs.

Since its founding, Rio Salado intended to have a small number of full-time faculty. That enables the college to keep costs down, and keeps it nimble.

“If you have a large group of full-time faculty, you can’t move as fast,” said Dean of Instruction Carol Scarafioti. “With



Jim Van Dyke, dean of applied programs at Rio Salado, believes students should be treated like “customers,” not “serfs.”

While most colleges never mention customer service, Rio administrators decided that mere service wasn’t enough. They hired a consultant to work on “customer astonishment.”

a small group, the whole organization is a lot more agile.”

Faculty who choose to work at Rio seem to like the system. “We try to move forward as an entire faculty and an entire college,” said Vernon Smith, faculty president and chair of foreign languages. “At other institutions of higher education...I hear problems like, ‘My dean won’t let me do that.’ It’s not even in our mindset. It sounds so foreign.”

In keeping with TQM philosophy, Rio Salado provides many services for part-timers that other colleges do not: Couriers deliver paperwork directly to instructors’ homes, for example. “You have to view the adjunct faculty as a customer, not as a pain,” noted Linda Thor.

That has been sociology adjunct Dave Horsman’s experience. “Anything I bring up as a suggestion for improvement, generally it’s seized upon and acted upon and in place not too far in the future,” he said. It was his idea, for example, to set up a special team to help ensure that students

can track down instructors when they have to—a regular need at a distance learning institution.

Despite all these efforts, the lopsided ratio of full-time to part-time faculty has been a great source of controversy since Rio Salado’s inception. Al Shipley, a math professor in the district since Rio’s founding and current chair of Glendale Community College’s math department, is among the skeptics.

“There are good part-time teachers, and there are bad full-time teachers, but the probability of getting mostly full-time teachers with higher standards is greater,” said Shipley.

In math, for example, Shipley’s department employs 32 full-time instructors—50 percent more than Rio employs college-wide—even though Glendale is only slightly larger than Rio.

Leaders of the district’s part-time faculty association also have their complaints.

“The leadership of Rio Salado was non-cooperative in any

UPDATE **Rio Salado Is Going Strong** **July 2008**

RIO SALADO, the community college described in the spring 2001 issue of *National CrossTalk*, has continued to grow in size and scope, and remains largely online.

Offering everything from ESL classes for newly arrived immigrants to post-baccalaureate degrees in teacher education, Rio Salado has become the largest of the ten colleges in the Maricopa Community College District, which includes Phoenix and the surrounding area.

In 2006-07, enrollment in credit classes was 48,761—an 85 percent increase since 2001. Online enrollment had jumped from 10,000 to more than 28,000. Total credit and non-credit headcount exceeded 61,000, or about 25 percent of the district total.

“While other colleges in the district have lost enrollment, Rio Salado has been gaining,” said Alfredo de los Santos Jr., professor of education at Arizona State University and former vice chancellor of

Rio Salado has become the largest of the ten colleges in the Maricopa Community College District, which includes Phoenix and the surrounding area.

the Maricopa district. “Their institutional gains in the uses of technology have been remarkable,” he added. “The quality of service they provide has continued to improve.”

“We continue to be cost effective,” said Linda Thor, Rio Salado’s president since 1990. In 2006-07, cost per full-time equivalent student was \$5,550—36 percent less than other Maricopa district colleges. “We are a big financial contributor to the district,” Thor said.

Staff size grew from 300 in 2001 to almost 500 in 2008; to accommodate them, a second building was added at Rio Salado’s Tempe headquarters.

In 2001, new classes began every two weeks. Now they start every

week, to provide flexibility for students, many of whom work full-time or part-time and also have family responsibilities.

“Many of my students (at Arizona State) have taken online courses from Rio,” said de los Santos. “They spend a week or two on one course, and then they’re finished with it. It fits better into their schedules.”

Not all Rio Salado coursework is online. The college has partnership agreements with more than 40 corporations and government agencies in the Phoenix area, and these classes generally are taught at the places of employment.

The post-baccalaureate program in teacher education is a hybrid—basic coursework is online, but students also must do traditional classroom teaching. Arizona’s public four-year universities have fought successfully to keep community colleges from offering four-year degrees, but state law has created an exception for teacher education. Rio Salado has graduated “800 verified teachers in the last seven years,” said Janet Johnson, chair of education.

College officials said more such hybrid programs probably would be offered in the future.

“My impression is that Rio Salado is a really fine institution that is managed well,” said David A. Longanecker, executive director of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. “The only question is, Will this survive after Linda Thor leaves?”

Perhaps the clearest sign of Rio Salado’s success came in January 2008, when a for-profit group sought to buy the college for \$400 million.

“After a wild 48 hours,” Linda Thor said, “the chancellor (Rufus Glasper, chancellor of the Maricopa Community College District) said no, Rio Salado was not for sale.”

—William Trombley

Perhaps the clearest sign of Rio Salado’s success came in January 2008, when a for-profit group sought to buy the college for \$400 million.

effort we made to contact adjunct faculty. It seemed they went out of their way to make formal contact with those teachers difficult,” said Jack Goodman, association chair in the late 1990s. “A lot of people are glad they’re there because they’re so flexible...but the people who teach for them still have to make a living.”

Warren Mosby, current chair of the association, says the situation has improved only slightly, noting that two years ago, he had a hard time getting e-mail addresses of Rio adjuncts.

Thor, who insists Rio’s part-time instructors are treated as well as any in the district, if not better, understands the suspicion. “If this model is effective, and you project it to all of higher education, it would be very threatening to the ranks of faculty,” she observed. “We have never suggested that. We are a niche institution.”

Fairly or unfairly, the use of part-timers lends Rio Salado a certain taint in the minds of some area academics—and draws additional scrutiny to everything the college does.

Even as Rio’s national ambitions are increasing (the school recently entered a partnership with the U.S. Open University, for example), its attempts to invade new turf repeatedly draw fire locally.

Dual enrollment is a case in point. Rio was the first of the Maricopa community colleges allowed to offer programs in which high school students earn college credit for courses taken at the high school.

Those programs, now also offered by Rio’s sister colleges, have been criticized as low-quality cash cows for the district, since both colleges and high schools receive state funding for the same student.

“The notion that every student is ready to do college work before they graduate high school—it sounds ludicrous when you say it out loud,” said Gay Garesche, an economics instructor at Glendale. “There was a tremendous drive to see this everywhere because it’s so lucrative, but it’s way beyond what’s academically warranted.”

“You have a bunch of faculty who think this is a sham... that the system is open for abuse,” said Tom Trotter, Arizona State University’s vice provost for academic affairs.

But since ASU has articulation agreements with all of the community colleges, the university leaves quality control up to college officials. Thor defended the quality of the classes, and said the additional money helps pay for faculty development, lab upgrades and field trips at the high schools.

Rio Salado sent 445 transfer students to Arizona State this year, but Trotter declined to say how well the transfers were doing this year or how well they have done in the past.

While the universities may have grudgingly accepted dual enrollment, they could not tolerate another initiative of Rio Salado’s: a campaign to extend community colleges’ tentacles into the universities’ territory by letting them offer four-year degrees in selected areas.

Though the idea was approved by the legislature in 1997, then-Governor Fife Symington vetoed it under pressure from the universities—a rare case of the University of Phoenix siding with the state’s three public universities.



“It’s music to our ears when someone says ‘You can’t do that,’” says Linda Thor, Rio Salado College’s entrepreneurial president.

“The offering of degrees comes at a cost,” said Trotter. “It requires faculty and the resources. The question is whether... those resources should be duplicated on the community college level. We felt that the universities are meeting the needs of the citizens.”

Thor doesn’t agree, citing several areas, law enforcement among them, where degree completion at Arizona universities is not easy. “I believe the need for the community college baccalaureate still exists,” she said.

Still, Rio Salado has successfully expanded its role in upper-division education, through partnerships with four-year institutions that accept up to 80 units from the college, more than traditional universities.

“Rio Salado has been and still is the leader in the arena, with regard to aggressively finding new ways to serve students,” said Sally Johnstone.

The college’s commitment to using business models and breaking boundaries in order to work with private institutions raises the issue of the relevance of public institutions. On this question, Linda Thor has much to say. Educational entrepreneurship, she believes, is necessary to protect public institutions against inroads made by the likes of corporate universities and credit aggregators.

“We potentially could lose what has been a large part of the community college function,” she said. “We are trustees of the public’s dollars and the public’s faith. We will have failed if we don’t adapt the institutions to the public’s needs.” ♦

Independent consultant Pamela Burdman is a former higher education reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and former program officer in education at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Rio’s habit of reducing instructional costs through accelerated programs and heavy reliance on part-time instructors has not won favor with area educators.



The World's Community College

Diversity in action at LaGuardia

By Ron Feemster

QUEENS, NEW YORK

GAIL MELLOW, president of LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, understands why institutions like hers are important. She began her higher education at Jamestown Community College in the southwest corner of New York State. She juggled classes, a full-time job and a two-year-old daughter. She knew then—and remembers today—that school was not her most urgent priority. At the same time, it was a life-transforming process that opened up opportunities beyond any that she might have imagined for herself. “If there hadn’t been a community college in my town,” she said, “I might be working for Wal-Mart today.”

A look of consternation passed briefly over Mellow’s face, as if she were considering the possibility that remarks about working at a retail chain are somehow insensitive, when hundreds of her full-time students are hoping to keep similar jobs in a tight New York job market. What she meant, she pointed out quickly, is that she couldn’t have gotten here without her beginnings at a local community college.

“Here” is a spacious corner office in one of the refurbished factory buildings that LaGuardia calls home. A photo on the bookshelf over her head shows Mellow and four other community college presidents shooting rapids in a rubber raft. The American Association of Community

With students from 140 nations, speaking 104 languages, LaGuardia is a microcosm of Queens, perhaps the most ethnically diverse county in the United States.

Colleges sponsors the annual Outward Bound-style initiation in Colorado for newly appointed presidents. She took the trip in 1998, the summer after her first year as president of Gloucester Community College in southern New Jersey.

Two years later she was being considered for three vacant community college presidencies in the

City University of New York system. LaGuardia, she told the search committees, was the only job she would take in New York. If they had asked, she would have told them that running LaGuardia was the only job in the country that could have lured her from the comfortable position in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

What was special about LaGuardia? Dozens of challenges and opportunities that start and end with a single fact: LaGuardia’s diversity. With students from 140 nations, speaking 104 languages—some second-generation immigrants and some right off the plane—the school is a microcosm of Queens, perhaps the most ethnically diverse county in the United States. If Queens is a microcosm of the world, LaGuardia is the world’s community college.

Students at LaGuardia have lived through war in Bosnia, ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, guerrilla kidnappings in Colombia, even slavery in the Sudan. When political violence struck New York last September, the campus was shocked but not cowed, according to Mellow. At a spontaneous school assembly convened last September 12 (which would have been the third day of classes) students reflected on their strength as well as their vulnerability, on the richness of a campus community whose members hail from five continents. “This place is so diverse, you can’t drop a bomb anywhere in the world without hurting someone on this campus,” said a student the college president likes to quote.

A walk around campus

The community college—which was named for Fiorello LaGuardia, New York City’s flamboyant mayor from 1933 to 1945—was founded 31 years ago in spaces where an earlier generation of immigrants worked. The Ford Instrument Company was the original LaGuardia facility. The Equitable Bag Company, which once stood across the street from Ford in the Queens industrial neighborhood known as Long Island City, was opened in 1992. They are the two main campus buildings today.

Photos by Lisa Quiñones, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Richard Elliott, LaGuardia’s vice president for finance and administration, says the college was seriously underfunded during Rudolph Giuliani’s years as mayor of New York.

LaGuardia by the Numbers

Enrollment (fall 2001)

Total:	11,427
Full-time:	6,908
Part-time:	4,579

Median student age: 23

Racial/ethnic composition

Hispanic:	34 percent
Black non-Hispanic:	16 percent
Asian, Pacific Islander:	16 percent
White:	14 percent
Other:	5 percent
Unknown (no response):	15 percent

National Origin

Foreign-born students:	67 percent
Students from 140 countries, speaking 104 languages	

Full-time faculty: 243

Part-time faculty: 315

Operating budget (2001-02): \$84.4 million

Tuition and Fees: New York State full-time students seeking degrees pay \$1,250 tuition per semester, plus \$60.85 in fees. Out-of-state students pay \$1,538 tuition.

A few hundred yards to the west, at the foot of the 59th Street Bridge to Manhattan, LaGuardia is slowly renovating a third factory building, which still has a few manufacturing tenants. Classes are held on three of the nine floors of the former Loose Wiles Sunshine Biscuit Complex. The school envisions a business incubator on the top floors.

Back on the main campus, LaGuardia had the street between buildings “demapped” by the city of New York and transformed it into a courtyard, the only bit of outdoor space on campus.

LaGuardia houses four high schools in addition to the community college. Middle College High School, one of the nation’s first schools for at-risk students, encourages its 500 students to do college work during high school and seek an associate’s degree. International High School gives 500 fresh immigrants with limited English skills their first taste of American secondary education. The Robert Wagner High School, named for another former New York City mayor, focuses on the arts and

technology. LaGuardia is also the temporary home for Frank Sinatra High School for the Performing Arts, which was founded by fellow singer Tony Bennett.

Visitors never quite know who will be waiting around the next corner on LaGuardia’s campus. Two Chinese students hammering a table tennis ball back and forth, or a tight

circle of young women, heads covered by shawls, conversing quietly outside a classroom. Many ethnic groups have their formal or informal meeting places, but everyone comes together in a three-story atrium off the courtyard. At this campus (and world) crossroads, it seems that everyone hails from somewhere else. Simply stopping passersby for fifteen minutes highlights the disparate goals, academic histories, cultural values and language backgrounds LaGuardia’s students bring to the school.

Some, like Wumi Daramola, 21, are living the almost universal story of second-generation immigrants in New York. Her father practiced as a medical doctor in Nigeria, and traveled alone to England and later Canada on sabbaticals before settling in New York. He is working as a school nurse to support his family. Daramola, who came to LaGuardia after graduating from Evander Childs high school in the Bronx, is at home on the streets of two big cities, New York and Lagos. And she is torn between the future her family sees for her and the one she is discovering for herself. “I told my father that I would study nursing,” she said. “But I think I want a career in business.”

Daramola’s tale is as old as the CUNY system. But Dhruba Saha’s story is more typical of LaGuardia’s recent students. A 26-year-old native of Bangladesh, he was studying botany and zoology there two years ago when Saha received word that the United States had granted him a student visa. Without finishing the semester, he dropped out of school, took the next flight to New York, and enrolled in the computer science program at LaGuardia.

Asked if he always wanted to study computers, Saha

“We want them to have enough experience on the job to begin to think about the world of work. We offer hope, encouragement, and a little bit of reality.”

—Jack Rainey, director of cooperative education at LaGuardia



President Gail Mellow believes LaGuardia Community College offers valuable opportunities for its many foreign-born students.

offered an answer that new immigrants have given for generations. “I just want to improve myself,” he said. “I am interested in having a better life.” Computers are fine, but he is considering a change to the nursing program, because it offers immediate steady employment upon graduation, even in an otherwise tough job market.

LaGuardia has grown from 500 students in 1971 to nearly 12,000 degree candidates today (9,500 full-time equivalents). But now as then, the school is a predominantly female institution. Almost two thirds of the students are women. Many are working mothers with tight schedules who depend on a complex web of family relationships for childcare and financial support. Mellow says the school lost 700 registrants in the wake of September 11, largely because the family members who had provided or paid for childcare were no longer able to do so.

Writing—everybody’s problem

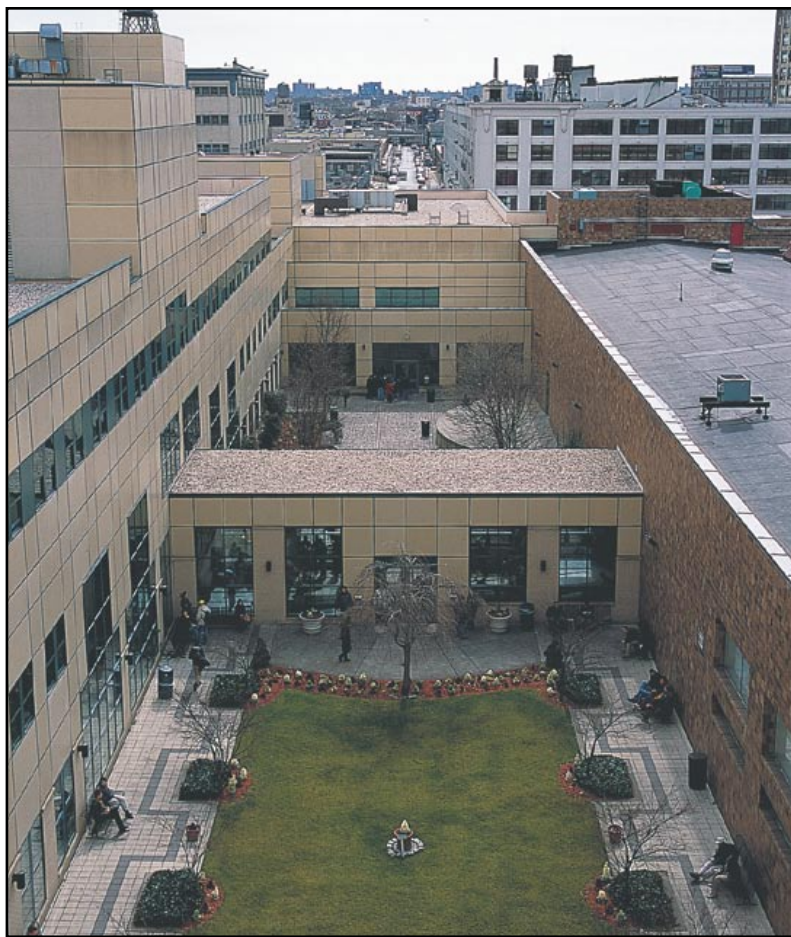
Saha was relaxing at midday with Bill Mazza, his former tutor at LaGuardia’s writing center, which is at the heart of the school’s remediation program. For most non-native speakers of English—and for many others who simply are not ready to do college work upon leaving the New York City public schools, the center is the key to survival at LaGuardia. Students who can follow a lecture, read a textbook and participate in a class discussion cannot necessarily write a paper or pass a written exam.

About half of the student body takes at least one of the remedial English courses. All of them convene for a one-hour writing lab in addition to regular class meetings every week. Some 3,500 other students show up for tutorials every year. Any teacher in any course on campus can suggest that a student attend the writing center. Writing and remediation are not among the sexiest programs at the community college, but everyone from Gail Mellow on down brings up the writing center within the first few minutes of conversation. And why not? Two thirds of LaGuardia’s students are foreign born. If the school wants to maintain or increase enrollment, it must teach students to write in English.

“I get excited when people learn to write a simple, fairly well argued essay,” said Bert Eisenstadt, a senior staffer at the center, whose credits include writing at *Soap Opera Digest* and teaching autistic people. “The first step is the biggest. I get an enormous kick out of being responsible for that step.”

Tutors like Mazza, who typically make significant progress toward a graduate degree before they are offered a job, start at \$10 per hour. The hourly rate doesn’t climb beyond \$12, according to Eisenstadt, who says he loses tutors constantly because they become classroom teachers for higher pay. “You don’t do it for the money,” said Mazza, who, true to form, is angling for an adjunct faculty position in English.

Most students meet their tutors in a warren of tiny cubicles with four or five chairs around the table. The furniture points up the biggest problem LaGuardia’s writing teachers face. “Teaching writing is all about relationships,” Eisenstadt said. “One-to-one teaching works the best. You can still accomplish many of the same goals in a two-to-one



The LaGuardia campus is located in three former factory buildings in the New York City borough of Queens.

setting. But three-to-one is too much like a small group.”

“Fluency does not proceed in a straight line,” said Sandra Hanson, chair of the English department, and inhabitant of the most arresting office on campus. (Posters of Elvis Presley share wall space with advertisements for John Deere tractors and an aerial photo of her family’s farm in Iowa. Framed Norwegian American embroidery complements a collection of African dolls.) “You can’t assume that a student who finished ESL 099 last fall with a good 300-word essay will succeed in remedial English. They could stay on the same level for a while without the writing center and other supports.”

Even at the depressed tutor wages, there simply isn’t enough money at LaGuardia to teach writing one-on-one. There is no formula for creating productive groups. In general, group teaching slows progress, Eisenstadt says, which in turn feeds the political objections to community college education. New York City has decreased its share of community college funding, even during the boom years of Rudolph Giuliani’s mayoralty, with the argument that too few students graduate on time. “One percent of our students graduate on time,”

LaGuardia has grown by expanding adult and continuing education from 19,000 enrollments in 1996 to more than 28,000 in 2000.

Eisenstadt said. “I find it surprising that *any* graduate on time. They work in factories. They have spouses and parents who don’t speak English. They write term papers in a second language. Why would they graduate on time?”

Community, cooperation, direction

If the writing center is what gets new arrivals and underachievers on track in the classroom, the Cooperative Education program helps students chart a future course in the outside world. Every LaGuardia student must complete two semester-long internships to graduate. In addition to getting their feet wet in a field that interests them, students attend seminars to help decide if they want to pursue a four-year degree or go right to work after graduation. Employers include large manufacturers and banks, small shops specializing in photography or design, magazines, television networks and newspapers, nonprofits and government agencies.

“We sometimes offer occupational training, as in travel or hotel reservations,” said Jack Rainey, the director of cooperative education at the college. “But sometimes the career exploration is much less specific. It also depends on what the company needs. At Verizon (the local telephone provider), students have been repairing derelict equipment and building new networks.”

At Community Board 3 in Queens, a local government advisory body funded by the city, one LaGuardia student per semester works on a prototype for a Community Board

website. Tom Lowenhaupt, one of 50 volunteer board members whose own company donated server space for the site, explains the scope of the project, gives students direction and sends them home to write the code. “This is not just about programming in HTML or Java,” Lowenhaupt said. “I try to teach them to solve a communications problem. They need to learn to think about the site from the user’s point of view.”

Every intern is likely to have a slightly different work experience, since each company

tends to develop its own co-op model, Rainey said. One technology firm that uses LaGuardia interns on a help desk hired LaGuardia graduates (former interns) to supervise the rotating crop of workers. “We want them to have enough experience on the job to begin to think about the world



Wumi Daramola, whose father was a medical doctor in Nigeria, intended to study nursing at LaGuardia Community College, but might switch to business.

of work. We offer hope, encouragement, and a little bit of reality.”

The best and worst of times

In 1991, two years before Giuliani was elected mayor of New York, the city contributed \$121 million dollars to CUNY’s community colleges, or 42.4 percent of the budget. Tuition payments of \$61.5 million represented 21.6 percent of the budget. By 2002, when he left office, the city contribution in current dollars had dropped to \$101 million, or 28 percent, while tuition payments had more than doubled to \$135.5 million, or 37.5 percent. State aid remained nearly constant in percentage terms during the same period, falling to 34.5 percent from 36 percent. Tuition has doubled, in current dollars, to \$1,250 per semester for full-time students.

“We suffered during those years,” said Richard Elliott, LaGuardia’s vice president for finance and administration. “The mayor was not an ardent supporter of community colleges, probably because he did not have as much control over CUNY as he would have liked.”

Elliott described the 1990s as a period of trying to get by from year to year. Even today, he sees paying day-to-day expenses as one of the greatest challenges facing the community college during the next five years. LaGuardia is about to settle a faculty contract dispute and has agreed to a labor settlement with its civil servant employees that will cost the school about \$1 million.

There is no money in the budget to fund the settlements as of yet, according to Elliott. The school has made cuts where it could—everywhere from cleaning and building maintenance to leaving vacant staff positions unfilled. With a new mayor in City Hall, the school hoped for additional

“I get excited when people learn to write a simple, fairly well argued essay. The first step is the biggest. I get an enormous kick out of being responsible for that step.”

—Bert Eisenstadt, an instructor at LaGuardia’s writing center

funding from the city. But faced with a budget deficit of \$4.8 million, Mayor Michael Bloomberg has called for cuts across nearly all city agencies.

Reaching out

In an attempt to make up the shortfall in city funding, LaGuardia has aggressively pursued grants. In the 1991-92 academic year, the school brought in \$6.4 million in grants. In 2000-01, LaGuardia received \$13.4 million in grants from government sources and private foundations. "We doubled the dollar volume of grants in the last ten years, but it isn't nearly enough," Elliott said. The school also has a private foundation that will eventually produce an income stream. Community college alumni rarely make significant financial contributions to their alma mater.

Among the larger grants the school has received are two federal Title V grants for \$3.5 million, awarded to institutions that serve large Hispanic populations. One dedicates \$400,000 per year for the next five years to

upgrade computer networks and fiber-optic data lines. But introducing technology into a greater number of classrooms is only the beginning of the tasks set by LaGuardia. In the long run, the school wants to require almost every student to create an online portfolio that would become part of the school's graduation requirements. In addition to posting term papers and similar projects, LaGuardia would ask students to put up videos of final speeches or dramatic performances, original music, or photos of sculptures and paintings.

"We will have the portfolio project going as a pilot project in a few classes first," Elliott said. "If it works out, we see it as a campus-wide requirement." To ease the introduction of this requirement among the school's senior faculty members, many of whom were hired in the 1970s and have not hurried into the computer age, LaGuardia has designed a program in which students become technology mentors for faculty.

The school was among several singled out for recognition this year by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Based in

UPDATE

Steady Growth at LaGuardia

July 2008

LAGUARDIA Community College, which was described as "the world's community college" in a spring 2002 *National CrossTalk* article, has been living up to its reputation in the years since.

In fall 2007 the college, located in the New York City borough of Queens, enrolled students from 156 countries, speaking 118 different native languages. Fifty-nine percent were foreign born; 53 percent were first-generation college students. A majority were low income.

There has been steady growth. Fall 2007 enrollment included 15,169 credit students and 58,281 non-credit.

Although the number of white students has increased in recent years, they remain a minority. In fall 2006 the student population was 38 percent Hispanic, 21 percent Asian, 20 percent black, 15 percent white and six percent "other races and ethnicities."

Since most LaGuardia students must combine their studies with jobs and family responsibilities, they often take longer to earn degrees

Fall 2007 enrollment at LaGuardia included 15,169 credit students and 58,281 non-credit.

or certificates.

"We continue to look for ways to enable our students to earn degrees or certificates in two years," said Gail O. Mellow, LaGuardia's president since 2000, in a 2008 interview.

In recent years the college has been "trying to create career paths, so students can

move from lower-paying jobs like cleaning rooms in Manhattan hotels to something that pays better and is more interesting," Mellow said.

For example, after taking ESL and other remedial classes, a student "might move to classes for home health aides, then to a certified nurse program, after that training to be a phlebotomist or a similar job, and perhaps eventually to a nursing program, either LVN

(Licensed Vocational Nurse) or RN (Registered Nurse)," Mellow said.

There has been an increasing focus on electronic portfolios, in which students keep a record not only of their educational progress but also of their personal life experiences.

These portfolios make it easier for "students whose lives are quite complex—they have families, or hold part-time jobs or perhaps are in drug recovery—to get a community college education," Mellow said. "We think this is a very important development—it has become the singular pedagogy of the college."

"These 'e-portfolios' are both a record of students' work and a reflection on their learning experiences," said Bret Eynon, executive director of the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning. "They are a mix of the academic and the personal. They allow students to capture what's happening to them, to reflect on how they're changing."

Since the program began in 2001, between 13,000 and 15,000 students have compiled e-portfolios, Eynon said. Enrollments have risen from 5,000 in the 2005-06 academic year to more than 7,500 in 2007-08.

"This e-portfolio is basically a showcase of my best works and pieces that I've done to date," Abigail Philip, an aspiring teacher who was raised on the Caribbean islands of Antigua and Barbuda, wrote in her electronic journal. "This tool is basically one of my tickets into the workplace or a four-year institution. This is a perfect way of displaying my abilities, not only academically but socially and personally as well."

—William Trombley

There has been an increasing focus on electronic portfolios, in which students keep a record not only of their educational progress but also of their personal life experiences.

large part on work done at Middle College High School, a total of \$40 million was awarded to a number of foundations, which will distribute the money to community schools doing similar work throughout the United States. The grant aims to replicate a secondary education model pioneered at LaGuardia. At Middle College, students at risk of dropping out of high school are placed in smaller classes within smaller schools and challenged to do college work. Instead of merely finishing high school, students are expected to earn an associate's degree within a five-year span.

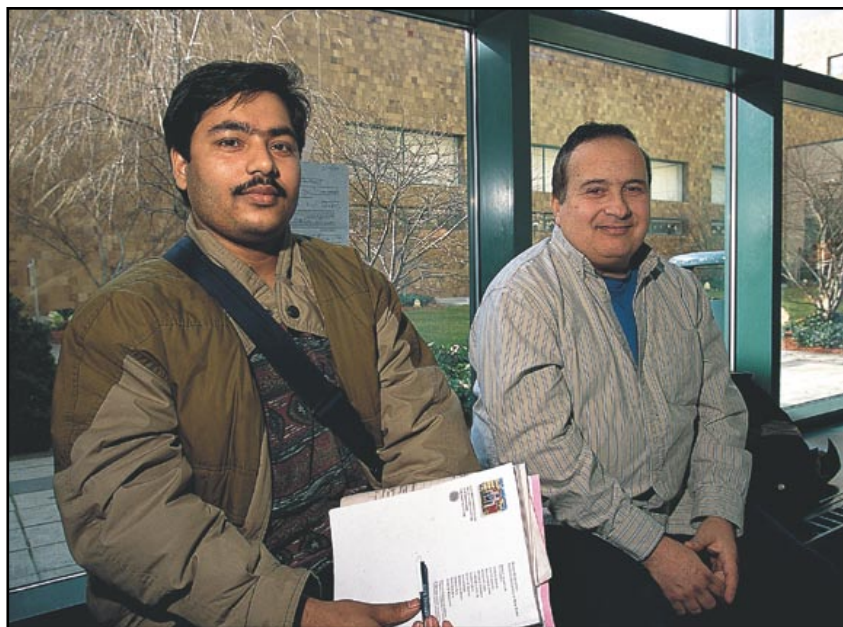
LaGuardia has grown by expanding adult and continuing education from 19,000 enrollments in 1996 to more than 28,000 in 2000. The heart of the growth strategy is figuring out what services the public needs. The school was among the first to train taxi drivers; it has developed a program to help deaf adults transition from high school to college; and it has become a leader in training paramedics and emergency medical technicians. Enrollment in the ESL program grew by 25 percent between 1996 and 2000, topping 2,000 registrants that year. Participants ranged in age from 16 to more than 60. Spurred mostly by immigration to Queens, the English language program has also become an inexpensive option for free spirits like Kazu Miyoshi, 33, an architect from Japan who quit his corporate job to become a sculptor. He wants to learn English before traveling the world to look at art. "Friends in Japan told me

to come here," he said.

And when the student cannot come to LaGuardia, the community college comes to the student. LaGuardia receives \$1.3 million from the New York City Department of Corrections each year to teach high school equivalency courses in jail. The program serves a highly transient population, given that most city inmates are awaiting trial, and no convicted criminal serves a sentence longer than one year in a city facility. "We have to set short-term goals,"

said Linda Gilberto, the head of Continuing and Adult Education at LaGuardia. "But we sometimes have a lasting effect."

LaGuardia is the kind of community that challenges assumptions, whether about the way to teach a diverse group, or the goals appropriate for at-risk high school students. As an institution, it has enjoyed great successes, but it does not have all of the answers, as Gail Mellow readily



Dhruba Saha (left), a native of Bangladesh, was a student of Bill Mazza at LaGuardia's writing center, key to the college's remedial programs.

admits. It does view its greatest challenge as its greatest opportunity: The same mind-boggling diversity that makes simple communication an adventure guarantees a fresh point of view every day. "We don't really know what's next," Mellow said. "Sometimes we have to say, Let's just learn our way through this." ♦

Ron Feemster has been a freelance writer based in Germany and New York. He currently teaches at the Indian Institute of Journalism & New Media in Bangalore, India.

The school hoped for additional funding from the city. But faced with a budget deficit of \$4.8 million Mayor Michael Bloomberg has been forced to call for cuts across nearly all city agencies.

The Virginia Plan

State's community colleges confront the need to do more with less

By Robert A. Jones

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

THE FALL TERM had just begun, and the chancellor of Virginia's community college system, Glenn DuBois, was whizzing toward the Blue Ridge Mountains in the state airplane. DuBois and several aides were headed for two of the system's upland campuses to deliver a message that was both expected and dreaded: Systemic failure was coming for the 40-year-old collection of colleges unless major changes were made.

Strapped into his seat, DuBois leaned toward a visitor and spoke almost conspiratorially about the day's upcoming events. He knew, he said, that some faculty members were skeptical of his reform plans. Many previous reform plans had come and gone. But this time was different, and he was giving himself approximately one hour with the faculty at each college to turn them from skeptics to supporters.

"Our problems are like waves crashing on top of each other. Big tsunamis," DuBois said. "If we don't acknowledge the size of this thing, we are going down. We can't nibble at the edges. Today is my chance to make the case, to give them the whole loaf, to show them what's at stake."

The air of crisis in Virginia has built steadily over the last three years, as it has at most community colleges across the nation. Enrollment has exploded on most campuses, forcing some systems to turn away students for the first time in history. Meanwhile, state governments have drained budgets like vampires in the night.

This double bind has occurred, ironically, just as community colleges have begun to receive widespread recognition of their importance in the higher education pantheon.

Far cheaper than four-year institutions, community colleges teach the vast majority of poor, minority and immigrant students in the nation and offer the United States its best chance to regain its lost edge in

educating its young people. President Obama has become a community college cheerleader and recently chaired a White House summit to search for answers to the funding dilemma.

Few states, however, have gone as far as Virginia in confronting the need to do more with less. When DuBois arrives on campuses to make his pitch these days, he brings not only a litany of gloom—\$100 million in budget cuts over

the last two years; an increase of 20,000 full-time equivalent students in the same period—but also his ambitious plan to increase the number of graduates, to get them out the door faster and at lower cost.

Judging the performance of community colleges can be tricky because of their multiple roles, but the traditional measurements suggest Virginia's 23 colleges could use some improvement. Their average graduation rate of 14 percent over the past five years puts them below the national average, as does their 14 percent rate of transferring students to four-year institutions.

The Virginia plan is designed to change those numbers dramatically by 2015. Produced by a team of college presidents and administrators known as the re-engineering task force, it attempts to grapple with some of the unique burdens of community colleges. Here are a few:

- **Unprepared students.** Every year Virginia community colleges assign roughly half of their incoming students to remedial or developmental courses because they are not prepared for college work. Of those, only a small percentage succeeds. The Virginia plan will toss out its old developmental program, replacing it with a model designed to be more individual and productive, and will establish beachheads in high schools to improve the quality of graduates.

- **Jobs.** The flip side of community colleges is vocational job training, and Virginia plans to expand programs that offer customized training for individual employers whose needs are growing. Over the next four years the state promises to double the number of such programs to include 10,000 employers across the state.

- **College dropouts.** At the receiving end of the nation's education ills, from dysfunctional high schools to students without financial resources, community colleges have dismal graduation rates. Virginia is promising to increase by 50 percent the number of students graduating or transferring to four-year colleges, and to increase those numbers by 75



"Our problems are like waves crashing on top of each other. Big tsunamis," says Glenn DuBois, chancellor of Virginia's community college system.

Jay Paul, Black Star, for CrossTalk

The air of crisis in Virginia has built steadily over the last three years, as it has at most community colleges across the nation.



“We must increase productivity,” says Robert Templin, president of Northern Virginia Community College. “If we don’t, we begin to edge toward mission failure.”

percent for poor and minority students.

- Life support. New students in community colleges often are bewildered by the complexities they encounter, and student advising constitutes a crucial but expensive support system. Virginia intends to partially replace one-on-one advising with an online system featuring an avatar who will eventually plan course schedules, track student success and even nag when necessary.

Strikingly, Virginia plans to accomplish these goals without an increase in per-student funding from the state between now and 2015. In fact, DuBois believes the situation with state funding is more likely to grow worse than better. On his recent tour, he bluntly told the faculty at

New River Community College near Blacksburg, “I think we’re going to lose another gazillion dollars (in state funding) before it’s all over.”

That’s not to say that Virginia will neglect other possible sources of funds. The revamping plan incorporates a goal of raising \$550 million from a mixture of government and foundation grants and private parties. Already, in fact, Virginia has become something of a darling of the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Several Virginia community colleges, for example, were early participants in Lumina’s Achieving the Dream program, which funds efforts to use quantitative measurements to improve student outcomes. After a hesitant start, Virginia became one of the stellar performers in the program.

Jamie Merisotis, president of Lumina, spoke at Virginia’s annual retreat for community colleges this summer, and told the gathering, “You have reached a level that most of the nation can rightly aspire to. What’s happening here in Virginia is what needs to happen nationally.”

Nonetheless, foundation grants do not provide operating funds, and the crushing budget declines—a 41 percent drop in per-student funding

over the past five years—have left Virginia with the necessity of pulling off what one administrator called “the hat trick”: achieving dramatically more with less.

Robert Templin, president of Northern Virginia Community College, and the chairman of the planning team, described the dollar dilemma this way: “If we merely tried to achieve these goals by seeking more state funding, we would need an additional \$300 million. There are few prospects we

would get it. So we must increase productivity by an equivalent amount. There’s really no choice. If we don’t, we begin to edge toward mission failure.”

Following the old business school dictum that problems are merely opportunities in disguise, Virginia has focused its early attention on the sinkhole of all community colleges: the unprepared student. These young people show up at community colleges by the tens of thousands with few academic skills, low self-confidence and dim prospects.

One Virginia study showed that only 16.4 percent of students sent to developmental math classes ever manage to pass a college-level math course. Overall, developmental students graduate or transfer to four-year colleges at half the rate of other students. Discouraged and defeated, the great majority of them drift away from college after a few semesters.

DuBois and the planning team decided that the old system of assessing and handling unprepared students was such a bust that they needed to throw it out and begin afresh. The new system will divide students into three groups—liberal arts, science and job training—that reflect the different course requirements those students will encounter. Each group can then be tested separately and assigned to its own remedial courses.

Moreover, the new assessment tests will tease out students’ skills in various sub-categories, or “modules,” so a student who passes, say, three modules and fails one will only need to take a makeup course in that single module. If it works as planned, the process should operate in a more customized fashion, presumably producing higher success rates, while taking less time.

“Not everyone is required to take the same level of math in college, so why shouldn’t we have an assessment process that reflects that?” asked Templin. “We looked all over the country for a test that worked the way we wanted, and couldn’t find it. So now we’re developing our own.”

David French, a math teacher at Tidewater Community College in Chesapeake for 17 years, said the new approach has created debate among his colleagues, with some fearing that the module approach will divide math into disconnected segments and erode the sense of continuity. But it is clear, he said, that the old system needed to be changed.

“Under the old system, math teaching tended to be a mile wide and an inch deep because teachers did not have time to linger,” said French. “And why on earth would a liberal arts student need to know how to do long division of polynomials?”

When the new system cranks up in about 18 months, Templin and other college leaders will know fairly quickly whether it has succeeded. That’s because the Virginia system has adopted the “culture of evidence” engendered by its Achieving the Dream experience over the last half decade. “Without Achieving the Dream, Virginia would not be in a re-engineering mode today,” said Templin. “It started the conversation about focusing on student success and on using our data to measure the results.”

Among all the metrics used by Virginia, the most closely watched are the “Student Success Snapshots,” issued regularly from Richmond, that give college-by-college results for programs ranging from student retention to graduate job placement. The idea was cross-pollinated from Florida where

Judging the performance of community colleges can be tricky, but the traditional measurements suggest Virginia’s 23 colleges could use some improvement.

colleges had used it successfully.

All agree that the snapshots, by their regular appearance, have drawn the attention of campus presidents and have gotten the competitive juices flowing. When a snapshot is posted on the system's website, the results for each college are all too easy to see.

Virginia has focused its early attention on the sinkhole of all community colleges: the unprepared student.

One snapshot, for example, compared results for “distance learning” classes where professors teach through video screens. The snapshot showed that 88 percent of students at Blue Ridge Community College earned a grade of C or better for classes where the instructor was

teaching over a live feed, whereas only 49 percent of students at New River Community College performed as well.

“So college presidents will see numbers in a snapshot and ask themselves, ‘Does this measurement mean anything important? And, if it does, how can I change things for the better?’” said Templin.

At Tidewater College, President Deborah DiCroce has used another data pool to transform the school's job training programs. In the past, she said, colleges set up training programs for particular skills and expected them to last forever. But databases on employment in the Norfolk area showed that demand for jobs like truck driving or nursing waxes and wanes dramatically over time.

“So we paid good money to purchase these databases, and now we use them to shape our training programs,” DiCroce said. “If the demand for truck drivers is dropping, we know about it and slow down the driver training program. And vice versa, if demand starts to jump up. We now assume that every

program has a shelf life.”

The number crunching also allows Tidewater to connect with individual employers who are growing and need skilled employees. In the past year the college has worked with 1,375 local companies to develop training programs specific to their needs, and the college now has 9,000 students enrolled in these customized programs.

Sitting in a light industrial park, next to a medical clinic for children, Tidewater's automotive technology center exemplifies this new wave. Looking nothing like the dark garages that often house auto repair programs, the two-year-old technology center sparkles, its classrooms filled with computers, its repair bays spotless.

The center works in a partnership with Toyota, Honda and Chrysler to train mechanics for dealerships. The manufacturers determine the curriculums for their particular makes and supply new cars to be used as repair guinea pigs. The Tidewater teachers do the rest.

In some cases, said center director Bud Brueggeman, local dealerships pay tuition for individual students and pretty much guarantee employment after graduation. “When we first proposed this facility, some wanted us to put it in a barn at the edge of town. It was the old grease monkey idea. We said, ‘No, no, no, if you want Toyota as a partner, you need to have a different kind of place.’”

Rory Lavallee, a 19-year-old trainee from Richmond, said the elegance of the center was startling when he first arrived. He is paying his tuition himself, but the total cost over two years will come to \$8,000, versus \$20,000 for a commercial training program. And pretty soon, he will be a certified Honda mechanic.

“If this place was not here, I couldn't afford to become a Honda mechanic,” Lavallee said.

Just as important as quantitative measurements, Virginia administrators say, will be a nearly obsessive introduction of technology. DuBois pushes this theme constantly. “Higher education is one of the last sectors that sees technology as just another cost, rather than a way to increase productivity and actually lower costs,” he told the faculty at New River College near Blacksburg. “We need to change that.”

Soon, Virginia hopes to lower its costs for processing financial aid applications—and also increase financial aid to students—by centralizing, computerizing and speeding up the application process. Another technology program will beam distance-learning classes from college to college throughout the state. Existing programs such as online tutoring and skills teaching will be greatly expanded.

Usually, when DuBois mentions technology, he also uses the word “scaleable,” meaning that a program,



David French, a math teacher at Tidewater Community College, supports the new “modular” assessment approach. “Why on earth would a liberal arts student need to know how to do long division of polynomials?”

Jay Paul, Black Star, for CrossTalk



“If this place was not here, I couldn't afford to become a Honda mechanic,” says, Rory Lavallee, a 19-year-old trainee at Tidewater Community College's automotive technology center, which works in a partnership with Toyota, Honda and Chrysler to train mechanics for dealerships.

Jay Paul, Black Star, for CrossTalk

once established, can be expanded at little additional cost. The human-to-human interchanges of teaching and counseling generally cannot be scaled up, he said, but technology changes that.

Nowhere is the enthusiasm for technology and scalability more evident than with the program known as the Virginia Wizard, a new effort that will attempt to convert the laborious and expensive process of student advising into an online experience.

The Wizard begins by administering a career assessment program and then, via an avatar known as Jenny, leads students through college selection, course planning, registration, and possible transfer to a four-year institution. The program was developed through a \$2.5 million federal grant and, if successful, could eventually replace several hundred human advisors that the system otherwise would be forced to hire as a result of increased enrollment.

DuBois loves to anticipate the future of Jenny. Conceivably, he said, she could eventually detect students' errors in course selection, remind them of upcoming exams via text messaging, and even nag them when their class attendance falls. "Getting through college is complicated, and most kids can't do it by themselves," DuBois said. "Jenny could be there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and that's something no human can do."

In all, the Virginia plan seems determined to introduce change into every nook and cranny of the Virginia system. DuBois already has placed special counselors inside 150 state high schools to help with college planning, and promoted joint efforts with school superintendents to write more effective high school curriculums. The reform plan also will attempt to redefine the role of adjuncts—the miserably paid and overworked part-timers who form the backbone of the teaching corps at community colleges.

On and on it goes. To spend a day with DuBois is to be assaulted by ideas, plans, programs. His determination, in part, seems to stem from his own personal history. He was raised poor by a single mother and is the product of a community college himself. He has a French name and an Irish face, and his steely resolve is often combined with Irish charm. With faculty members he disarms and cajoles as easily as a Dublin ward heeler.

He has also learned the trick of enjoying himself in the midst of relentless work. A bicycle enthusiast, he once rode his bike more than 700 miles through Virginia's back roads to raise money for foster-home kids to attend community college. On his two-college tour by state airplane this fall, he made hour-long addresses to two campus faculties, met with college presidents, and pressed the flesh with students, all without a break for ten straight hours, and seemed ready for more at the end of the day.

Whether he can transform the culture of Virginia's system remains to be seen. Community colleges have the most complex mission in higher education, teaching quantum physics on one side of campus and truck driving on another.



Jay Paul, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Deborah DiCroce, president of Tidewater Community College, has used databases to shape the school's job training programs, based on demand in the community for certain jobs. "We now assume that every program has a shelf life," she says.

They operate remedial high schools during the day and transform themselves into adult education centers at night. And they must do it far more cheaply than full-fledged colleges, because that's all the market will bear.

And because they are so intertwined with their local communities, community colleges can be difficult to change. "Reforms tend to fail at community colleges because the problems are bigger than the colleges themselves. To change the college in an important way, you also have to change the community," said Earl Simpson, a retired English professor in the Virginia system.

But others sense that the sheer magnitude of the current problems is creating a momentum for reform in Virginia and elsewhere. "After talking about reform for so long, we are finally seeing some institutions change themselves across the board, rather than in pockets and corners," said Robert McCabe, executive director of the National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges. "They are developing new ways of delivering education."

DuBois agrees that momentum is on the side for change. But, returning on the state airplane to Richmond, he argued that Virginia's efforts, contrary to the views of some, are not intended to redefine community colleges and are not intended to offer all things to all people.

"We could be starting honors programs for kids with high SATs," DuBois said. "And we could be offering four-year baccalaureate degrees. A lot of community colleges are doing that, and you'll notice that some have even removed the word 'community' from their names.

"We're not interested in those kinds of programs. Honors kids don't really need us; they'll do just fine. Our programs are aimed at the kids without the money, without the best background, the first ones in their family to show up at college. The simple truth is, those are the kids who need us, and we're going to help them. That's what the change is all about." ♦

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

In the past year Tidewater Community College has worked with many local companies to develop customized training programs specific to their needs, and now has 9,000 students enrolled in them.

Technological Transformation

An ambitious national effort to use technology more effectively in large introductory university classes

Photos by Axel Koester for CrossTalk

By Kay Mills

POMONA, CALIFORNIA

THIS IS NOT your father's introductory psychology course. No professor is standing in front of a vast lecture hall, writing concepts like "operant conditioning" or "depression" on the blackboard. No students are nodding off, at least not that anyone can see. They're all sitting at computers, either at home, in their dormitory, or in an on-campus lab.

For the redesigned Psychology 201 class at Cal Poly Pomona, there is a website, a password, lectures streamed online, a CD-ROM for drilling tricky material, a chat room for discussions, e-mail for asking questions, and assignments and exams online. During the last spring quarter, this California State University campus, about 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, had one professor teaching the introductory general psychology course online while four others taught in the more traditional lecture method. This fall two professors will conduct large online sections, and next winter quarter students will only be able to take the class online.

Cal Poly Pomona is part of an ambitious national effort to use technology more effectively in large introductory university classes, to improve instruction in what are often deadly dull lecture classes with high dropout rates, and to save money as well.

This redesign project is run by the Center for Academic Transformation, headquartered at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Its goals may sound like an oxymoron but they're not, according to Carol Twigg, the center's executive director and the moving force behind the project. "Most people in higher education think you improve quality by spending more money," Twigg said. But that's not necessarily the case, she argues, and she clearly thinks this program is proving it.

Supported by an \$8.8 million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Twigg is encouraging academics to think differently about how they use technology. If they just use it to duplicate what they do in lecture halls, she says, they will not save money or teach much more effectively. As part of the Pew Learning and Technology Program, Twigg's center has provided \$200,000 grants to 30 colleges and universities across the country to redesign large classes. The project tests the premises that economies of scale could help the schools save money, and that better use of technology could help students focus better on what they are supposed to learn.

The schools range in size from Fairfield University, a private school in Connecticut with an enrollment of 5,200, to large public campuses like the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Central Florida, and Penn State. Three community colleges also are included.

The redesigned introductory courses include algebra, computer literacy, computer programming, English



Karen Brzoska (right), an instructional technology designer, created a CD-ROM that is a key part of a restructured introductory psychology course at Cal Poly Pomona.

composition, fine arts, Spanish, astronomy, sociology, American government, psychology, statistics, biology, world literature and chemistry.

Each institution has redesigned one course. But Twigg is convinced that if colleges learn the methodology, they will not need a grant to move on to redesigning other classes—they'll generate their own savings. The goal, she said, "is to move beyond 30 models to change the way every introductory course in the country is taught." If all institutions were to redesign their top 25 courses using the center's methods, she projects an overall reduction in the cost of higher education of about 17 percent. She acknowledges that's "a pretty large goal."

While individual universities or faculty members have redesigned courses using technology in the past, there has been nothing like this project in any coordinated fashion, said Peter Ewell, senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in Boulder, Colorado. In most earlier redesign efforts, instruction has remained teacher-centered rather than learner-centered, he said. With this systematic approach, "you have to fundamentally

As part of the Pew Learning and Technology Program, the Center for Academic Transformation has provided \$200,000 grants to 30 colleges and universities across the country to redesign large classes.



The goal of “academic transformation” is to “change the way every introductory course in the country is taught,” says Carol Twigg, the moving force behind the national project.

rethink what’s going on.” Ewell thinks that is revolutionary.

Writing the grant proposals was part of the rethinking process. Universities interested in the program responded to eight “readiness criteria”—for example, did support for redesigning a course extend to the schools’ top levels? Did they have the infrastructure and experience to undertake such a project?

About 150 universities participated in this process for each round; the number was then reduced to 40. Those that made that cut, and another down to 20, attended workshops at which Twigg went over the redesign process. “We started with the premise that institutions

don’t know how to do this. We have to teach them to think differently,” she said. The center provided applicants with what Twigg called “aggressive help” in preparing proposals. Rather than having potential grantees guess what the center wanted, the staff told them. That means the schools should be measuring their results with the same yardsticks.

People don’t always recognize the innovative potential of technology. For example, when the Pony Express faced the invention of the telegraph, it responded by buying faster horses, then trying to find better riders, Twigg has written. Or when banks first used automated teller machines, they located them inside their branches, where they were available only during banking hours. Only when the ATMs were placed outside and in grocery stores or airports, available at all hours, did real innovation occur.

It is clear that Twigg also hopes schools will move beyond the idea that there is no significant difference in traditional and online courses and no significant learning difference. She believes that students learn more when they participate actively instead of passively listening to lectures or following online courses without significant interaction. Good instructional software “engages the full range of the human senses through multimedia technology,” she has written. “In short, good learningware encourages active learning.”

In assessing savings, the center does not include the cost of wiring campuses for computers. “You cannot be a college or university in the 21st century without being a networked campus,” Twigg said. That is going on all over, so schools involved do not include that in the calculation of redesign expense. If a school needs to buy some special software for the course, however, that does count in the cost.

“You reach the savings in terms of people’s time,” Twigg said. “You might have a situation in which seven people taught the introductory course and now it is handled by four. Those three people can be doing something else. Or if you use adjunct faculty or teaching assistants, you don’t need to hire as many.”

Jane Wellman, senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, D.C., cautions that “tracking the savings is key. If the savings aren’t documented—if they’re hypothetical or swallowed up by other programs—then they won’t ‘count’ in the way we account for costs in higher education. So documenting where real cash money is saved and how it’s being redirected or reprogrammed is important.”

The redesign grants started three years ago, and each grant lasts two years. Each school has faced its own challenges—convincing faculty to get involved, getting them accustomed to the technology, building enough structure into the courses so that students don’t easily fall behind, and dealing with staff departures or illnesses.

At Cal Poly Pomona, 1,800 students each year take Psychology 201 toward their general education requirement. Another 750 would like to take the course but cannot because of classroom space limitations. With California facing a \$23.6 billion budget deficit, there obviously will be less money rather than more. The school has been working to redesign this psychology course to accommodate more students.

Changing the course, taken mostly by non-psychology majors, was an evolutionary process. It started in 1995 when Sonia Blackman of the behavioral sciences department had a hip replacement and thus limited mobility. She taught this psychology course to 22 students in the on-campus television studio, broadcasting to two more rooms in which there were 70 to 100 students each.

An artist as well as a professor, Blackman found creative ways to present her topics using illustrations or demonstrations. She decided that if she could do that, the department might use its professors to put together a videotaped course. She convinced some of her colleagues to tape lectures on their specialties, using whatever props they wanted.

“This course came up the ideal way—it emerged from the faculty,” said Barbara J. Way, dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences. “Sonia convinced some of the faculty it would be a good thing to do.”

Originally, students checked the video lessons out of the library. That had built-in restrictions, such as library hours and the number of copies of the videos available. Even though there were multiple copies, some students would keep them too long or everyone would want them the night before an exam. Now the videos are available online.

Blackman and Cal Poly Pomona applied for a redesign

While administrators and faculty involved basically are supportive of the online approach, there is still some ambivalence.

grant to develop a CD-ROM as a tutorial for the psychology course, to redo some of the videos, and to shift the course onto WebCT software. Blackman felt the CD was needed because “in any course there are several lessons that are very hard for students to grasp.” In general psychology, these include experimental design, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and depression.

The CD, developed with instructional technology designer Karen Brzoska, begins when a student on a field trip finds a glass jar. He peers into it and a Tinker Bell-like character named Sigmundia beckons him along to help free inhabitants of a “dark world” held captive against their will. While in essence playing an educational video game, students drill on concepts they have been learning through the video lectures and textbook. Some faculty felt that students would not warm up to instruction online or through CDs, but “this generation has demonstrated how addictive computers are,” Blackman said.

Carol Twigg agreed. “The problem generally is not the students but some of the faculty,” she said. “Luckily, we’ve found some pioneering faculty who are willing to show the way.”

Cal Poly Pomona had hoped to implement the redesigned course fully last fall but illness forced Blackman to retire. The department patched together the instruction for that term. The person who filled in made some changes as she went along, and now, the college dean said, those changes have been incorporated.

Felicia Friendly Thomas, professor of behavioral sciences, took over the class during the winter term. She had to learn how to use WebCT, she said, and spent more time on the class than a traditional approach would have required. Now Thomas spends about the same amount of time as before. She doesn’t have to lecture because that material is on the video, but the balance of her time is spent monitoring the electronic bulletin boards and answering e-mail about the course content.

Course work is carefully mapped out. The website shows the syllabus, schedule, instructions, assignments, the textbook publisher’s related resources that are online, an area in which students can check their own progress, and the class bulletin board. Students have regular assignments that they can do at their own pace—up to a point—but once the deadline has passed, they can’t go back into that material.

“Computers crash,” Thomas acknowledged, “so there is one written assignment each that a student can miss.”

Exams are also taken online with Thomas monitoring the test periods. The computer randomly generates questions, and students see one question at a time. If they skip a question, the computer will not let them go back to it. “I tell them I put the most difficult questions at the end, usually those based on the video lessons. They’re not in the book. They don’t know what’s coming” so they can’t spend time in the early part of the test looking up answers. This is Thomas’s way of trying to “minimize academic dishonesty.”

Thomas had 186 students in her spring quarter online class. This fall, she and another professor will handle online sections of the class to accommodate a total of 400 students. Traditional sections will also be offered. But in the winter quarter, the class will be offered only online.

While administrators and faculty involved basically are supportive of the online approach, there is still some ambivalence. “If we could check these students ten years from now,” Thomas said, “I’d like to ask how much of [the course content] did they keep? Do they view it as a canned class that they took and got a good grade and moved on? Was there something about a face-to-face class that increased the probability that a student would take life lessons from it? I don’t know the answer to that question.

“If it is less personal, do you personalize less?”

Even though Cal Poly Pomona wants to put more Psychology 201 students online, Dean Way thinks that her college will have to continue offering some traditional sections. “Digitally delivered classes don’t work for everybody, so we have to identify the largest populations where it is good,” Way said. Those groups might include working people, young mothers with children at home, more mature students, she added.

Using the CD-ROM tutorials and computer-based testing should allow the university to reduce faculty hours significantly and replace them with less expensive teaching assistant hours. As a result, the university had said in the early days of the project, the cost-per-student would drop from \$152 to \$21, a reduction of 86 percent.

But Way says the school probably hasn’t saved any money yet. There are “incredible amounts of time invested up front.

An administrator like myself has to recognize that faculty can’t do this and maintain their workload, at least initially. You just burn them out.” In the development phase, she said she “tried to be generous to give faculty time to work on this. You can’t anticipate what will go wrong technologically. Once we’ve got that under control, one professor can take up to 200-250 students,” with teaching assistants to help supervise.

Twenty-five miles east of Pomona, on the Moreno Valley campus of Riverside Community College, the highest-enrollment math class on campus is being redesigned.

At the Moreno Valley campus of Riverside Community College, the highest-enrollment math class on campus is being redesigned.



Dean Barbara J. Way of Cal Poly Pomona supports the restructured psychology class, saying, “It came up the ideal way—it emerged from the faculty.”

At Riverside Community College, a math lab was established where students receive help from faculty or tutors and where they do their assignments online.

Some 3,600 students each year take elementary algebra, the lowest-level math class that fulfills the general education requirement. The traditional lecture format had minimal student interaction with faculty and didn't account for students' different learning styles and widely varied backgrounds.

Riverside cut the lecture time in half because, as Sheila Pisa, associate professor of math,

explained, faculty members were spending 15 to 30 minutes of each class answering homework questions. The redesign project shifted those homework assignments to an interactive software program that generated individualized assessments, study plans and learning sets. A math lab was established where students receive help from faculty or tutors and where they do their assignments online.

One lesson learned from the redesign process, Pisa said, is to match the technology to the course. Once the pilot project was under way, the faculty discovered that the software didn't go along with the textbook. Students like to see the material presented in the same way, and so they were sometimes confused, Pisa explained. So this fall the course will use a different textbook and software called "My Math Lab" that comes with it.

Riverside calculated that it saved about \$140,000 in wages with the redesign—almost exactly the amount it cost to set up the math lab that the school had needed anyway. That lab will generate even more savings because students from other courses use it, too. The redesign process also prodded the faculty to agree on a level of standardization for this course, which Pisa said professors had been talking about for some time.

Other schools among the 30 pilot projects also report compelling results.

Rio Salado, part of the Maricopa Community College District headquartered in Tempe, Arizona, intended to

UPDATE
Online Instruction Proliferates on Campus
July 2008

THE EXPANSION of technology in higher education seems to be an unstoppable force. There is no avoiding it, even for those who see it as an encroachment on the purity of academia. In the summer of 2002, *National CrossTalk* examined an ambitious national program, run by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), to use computer technology in large introductory courses as a means of improving instruction and cutting costs. Since that time, interest in such approaches has only grown.

"We've expanded well beyond the initial 30 schools in the original process," said Carol Twigg, NCAT's executive director. "There are two additional national projects, with 20 schools in the first project, and 60 in the second."

The first of the two projects, called Roadmap to Redesign, lasted from 2003 to 2006, while the second, called Colleagues Committed to Redesign, began in January 2008. "We took the lessons learned from the original Pew-funded process and streamlined it so schools wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel," Twigg said.

NCAT is also putting major emphasis on developing state-funded programs that replicate the national process. "We have six state programs going on—in Arizona, Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, Maryland, and SUNY in New York," Twigg said. "SUNY has 60 institutions, and they're going to award ten grants, similar to the national program, but in this case the state is providing the funding." That will ultimately result in 70 to 80 new redesigns by 2010.

"We are in discussion with other state systems to launch additional programs," Twigg said. "It's really exploding. We've gone from the original 30 schools to about 200, in one form or another."

The corporate world is getting involved as well, through the Redesign Alliance, a national association for colleges and companies. "The Corporate Associates Program involves companies that are members of

the alliance—mostly higher ed publishing and software companies whose materials are used in the redesigns," Twigg explained.

The corporate associates (of which there were five in the 2007-08 academic year) are paying an annual fee of \$50,000. Smaller companies can also participate in the alliance for \$5,000 per year. "Companies that pay the \$50,000 membership get more in return," Twigg said. "The smaller companies can't afford that, so we give them a chance to get involved."

The proliferation of programs such as these speaks to the desirability of what they promise. But do they really work as intended? Do they pay off?

Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, has his doubts. "I still have my reservations about that," he said. "Carol Twigg is now in the third voluntary semi-funded project that involves individual institutions. Each successive round has been a little less successful than the last. The first 30 programs were spectacularly successful, but in the ensuing rounds, there has been a little less bonsai spirit." Ewell, who also serves on NCAT's board of directors, suggested that the declining success of the programs is "largely because institutional commitment is less because they're not receiving any money."

As to the savings generated by online courses, Ewell said that it is disingenuous to suggest that they are plowed back into academic programs. "The bottom line is fewer faculty," he said. "If there is no increase in what one might call efficiency in the instruction, there's no point in doing this. You can go in with a straight face and say you're going to grow enrollment and not have to get rid of anybody, but this will result in fewer full-time faculty per student. That clearly is the case."

Nevertheless, some faculty find this very exciting, and are anxious to embrace the new technology. "What you're seeing is a quiet revolution,

Are the savings generated by online courses really plowed back into academic programs, or do they merely allow colleges to hire fewer full-time faculty?

redesign the delivery of its introductory algebra course. It wanted one instructor to handle 100 students while devoting more time to content instead of troubleshooting technology problems and performing course clerical work.

But because Rio Salado begins each of its distance learning classes every two weeks, it proved too difficult to enroll 100 students in any one section. Instead, the college redesigned its course management system so that one instructor handled four different math courses with a total of 100 students.

The redesign added a course assistant to work on the technology questions, monitor student progress and alert the instructor when students were having difficulty with the material. The instructor could therefore spend more time on content.

Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia, redesigned its linear algebra course, which is taken by about 2,000 first-year engineering, physical sciences and math students. The redesign was part of a larger transformation project for all large-enrollment math courses, made possible by the opening of the Math Emporium, a 500-workstation computer lab and

learning center.

Lecture sections for the redesigned course were eliminated and all the classwork is conducted in the Math Emporium, which is open every day. Content was organized into units that a student would normally cover at a rate of two a week, followed by a quiz. Interactive tutorials give the student feedback.

The Math Emporium employs student tutors, who point students toward appropriate resources for answering their questions. Last fall the shift in format allowed one professor to handle 1,500 students and helped the university save more than \$130,000, said math professor Ken Hannsgen.

“This is just a first shot,” Hannsgen said. “When you consider that traditional methods have had decades or even centuries to perfect themselves, I think we’ve made a good beginning. You should encourage people to be creative—maybe you can do more than you expect.” There were a lot of doubters, he added. “But you should not listen to the worst fears.”

A major lesson from the redesign process, said Carol

a generational shift,” Ewell explained. “Thirty-year-old faculty like the teacher technology. They’re good at it. They understand it.”

A case in point is Felicia Friendly Thomas, a professor of clinical psychology at Cal Poly Pomona who was featured in the 2002 article. At the time, Thomas had to master the new teaching technology in order to conduct a redesigned introductory psychology course, and has since become an advocate for online learning.

“I have done a number of research studies on learning in the online environment, and presented at numerous conventions over the course of the last four years in every imaginable topic of online learning and instruction,” Thomas said. In 2005, for instance, at the Western Psychological Association convention, Thomas gave a presentation entitled, “Can one teach about human behavior in a non-human environment?”

While Cal Poly was considered only “partially successful” in its redesign program, according a report by NCAT, and did not complete or fully implement its redesign plans, online instruction is more popular there than ever.

“At Cal Poly we have pre-registration, and this is one of the courses that closes almost immediately on the first day it is available,” Thomas said of her online introductory psychology course. “It’s extremely popular. I usually have twice as many students trying to get into the course as there are spaces.”

The use of online resources is popular in a growing number of non-introductory and upper-division courses as well, and Cal Poly has licensed an educational database program called Blackboard to help facilitate this. “All of our courses are automatically uploaded into Blackboard,” Thomas said. “An instructor can decide if he or she wants to use some, all or none of the

Felicia Friendly Thomas, a professor at Cal Poly Pomona, had to master the new teaching technology, and has since become an advocate for online learning.

features available within Blackboard. Even the regular, traditional courses have that available to them.”

Most of the resistance to online pedagogy comes, predictably, from faculty. “A few recalcitrant faculty can stop dead the process,” Twigg said. “Something that will typically happen in a research university is that the research-oriented faculty are resistant. One of the reasons we chose to focus on introductory courses was because there is less possessive ownership of introductory courses, and generally star faculty are not involved in them.” Peter Ewell was more blunt, referring to the courses as “mega-classes that nobody wants to teach anyway.”

The students, on the other hand, seem to be embracing the new technology. Thomas says that they are demanding online courses, and Twigg concurs. “Students like it,” she said. “They become big advocates of changing other courses. We have plenty of stories of students who failed in the traditional course, and then passed the redesigned course.”

A lot of the math programs, in particular, show impressive results, according to Twigg. “They make gains in scores initially, and then the sores continue to go up,” she said, citing the University of Alabama as an example. “In Alabama, prior to their original redesign, only 40 percent of students passed college algebra; after the redesign, in the first year in implementation, it was 60 percent. That number has increased steadily to 80 percent.”

Another much-touted success story is the Math Emporium at Virginia Tech, a facility with hundreds of computers, staffed by faculty and teaching assistants, where thousands of students satisfy introductory math requirements.

“I don’t think there is as much resistance to using educational technology as there was ten years ago—it’s how things get done,” said Jane Wellman, executive director of the Delta Cost Project, an organization that focuses on college affordability and institutional productivity. “When it is done comprehensively it clearly both saves money and produces better results.” She cautioned, however, that the technology has to be used in the right way. “Whether this is resulting from comprehensive, thoughtful redesign—whether it’s something other than just putting the Internet in the classroom—remains to be seen.”

—Todd Sallo



Felicia Friendly Thomas, professor of behavioral sciences, directs the psychology course redesign work at Cal Poly Pomona.

Twiggy, is that “the more you individualize the learning process for students, the better the results are. Virginia Tech is a good example of this. They have gone to the level of what each student is ready to learn and what problems each has” and have structured their course around that. “The more you do this, the more successful you will be.”

Math and other quantitative courses appear the most likely candidates for using technology to increase quality and decrease costs. But some schools are redesigning world literature, the performing arts, and English composition.

Brigham Young University is reducing the amount of time students spend in the classroom and replacing it with interactive multimedia lessons for its first-year writing course. The technology also helps the university standardize a course that has had a wide range of quality because of different experience levels within the faculty.

The University of Southern Mississippi is testing an online section of its world literature course in which faculty presentations of the content are taped and placed online along with instructors’ notes, additional media resources, quizzes,

exams and essay assignments. Students can attend the live presentations, but the school reports that only a handful do—sometimes none at all.

Change, reform, revolution—whatever one calls it—is never easy in any field. “Universities are going to push back a good deal more” when redesign efforts go beyond pilot

projects, said Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. He sees three questions to be addressed:

- How far-reaching can redesign be? “It’s no coincidence that most of the redesign projects are in math and science,” Ewell said. “In those fields you have a faculty that can agree on the outcomes it wants.” It is harder to convince faculties in the humanities and social sciences to do this because “that means giving up ‘my god-given right to do what I want to do.’”
- How do you deal with credit hours and registration? How do you account for faculty teaching load? How do you alter, in Ewell’s words, the “administrivia” of academic life with these redesigns?
- What do you do with the savings? This is perhaps the most fundamental question. Right now, many schools are selling the redesign process to faculty who want to be freed to do their own research or teach upper-level courses. “But that’s just feeding the higher education habit,” Ewell said. If you implement these redesigns big-time, he asked, shouldn’t you be putting a lot of that money back into lower-division courses? And if you enlarge the redesign process, isn’t it likely that colleges and universities will need fewer core faculty in the future?

To spread the word about the redesign process, the Center for Academic Transformation encourages participating schools to disseminate their findings on their own campuses and at conferences. For example, Fairfield University, which redesigned its two-semester general biology course with a Pew grant, hosted a conference this summer. Conferees discussed what worked and what didn’t, how redesign results can be assessed, and how more faculty members can be brought on board. The center also maintains a website (www.center.rpi.edu) containing extensive detail about each college’s effort.

“I’ve been talking about these ideas for a long time,” Twigg said. “I think we’ve proved that you can do this. Now the question is how do you disseminate these ideas more rapidly through higher education so that people who hear about the process won’t start from scratch. We let these 30 schools experiment, within certain parameters. Now we know what works.” ♦

Kay Mills is the author of “This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer,” and four other books.

“The more you individualize the learning process for students, the better the results are.”

—Carol Twigg, executive director of the Center for Academic Transformation

Math Emporium

The use of technology has changed the way Virginia Tech's introductory math classes are taught

Photos by Jay Paul, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kay Mills

BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

IT IS 8:30 on a Tuesday night. Students pile out of the shuttle bus from the nearby Virginia Tech campus and head into the University Mall. But this is not what you think—they are going there to do course work, take quizzes or study at the Math Emporium, formerly a Rose's department store anchoring one end of the shopping center.

The Math Emporium is both a place and a concept. It has changed the way nearly a dozen Virginia Tech math classes are taught, while saving the university money. On this particular evening, 314 students have checked in to use some of the 531 computers in the cavernous room.

Three courses—mostly for first- and second-year students—are now online and are based at the emporium. Unlike the experience of taking courses entirely online, these students can meet with their teachers if they wish, and all graded work must be completed at the emporium, not on students' own computers.

Enrollment in these courses totaled 4,000 last fall. One reason for the large numbers is that every Virginia Tech student must satisfy a "Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning" requirement, and 98 percent do so by taking a math class.

Eight years ago such huge enrollments led the math department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University (the school's full name) to explore better ways of teaching than simply "putting anyone with a pulse in charge of a class," as John Rossi, the current math department chairman, put it. Since then, several other universities—particularly the University of Alabama and the University of Idaho—have established similar programs.

The math emporium was part of the first round of course redesign projects assisted by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, through what is now called the National Center for Academic Transformation, in Troy, New York. Carol Twigg, the center's executive director, said the Virginia Tech project was so successful that it has been adopted as a model for future efforts to utilize technology in the teaching of large introductory courses.

Some Virginia Tech students have complained about not having a teacher in a classroom. But Chuck Hodges, math emporium manager and a former math instructor, responds, "No, you've got a dozen." Help is available from math faculty, graduate students or other undergraduates, most days and nights. The emporium itself is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, during the academic year. To summon help, all a student needs to do is place a very low-tech red plastic cup on top of the computer.

"Before, students had me 50 minutes, three times a week, plus my office hours," Hodges said. "If a student for some reason did not mesh with my teaching, he was sort of stuck.



Most Virginia Tech students take introductory math classes at the Math Emporium, a computer lab located in a former department store near the campus.

Here, there is an enormous opportunity for different styles of help."

Asked why the emporium approach works, math department chairman Rossi said, "I hate to use jargon, but I think it's active learning. We are forcing them to do the work. If they don't do the work, they'll flunk. It's not like sitting in the back of a class of 500 and doing your e-mail." Nonetheless, Rossi still receives messages from parents who complain that they are paying all that tuition (undergraduate in-state tuition at Virginia Tech is \$5,838 this year), yet their child doesn't have a teacher. "I reply by asking, 'How much personal attention do you think your child gets in an introductory psychology class?'"

Three courses are taught entirely at the emporium: college algebra and trigonometry, differential calculus and introductory linear algebra. Another half dozen math courses have an emporium component.

Before going to the emporium, students can check its website to see how many computers are in use. Sometimes there are lines, so the website warns, "It is your responsibility to arrive early enough to meet your deadlines."

Students entering the emporium show their university identification cards and are assigned a computer if they want to use one. However, many students come just to study, because the emporium is quieter than their dorms or because parking is more plentiful.

"A typical math emporium session consists of logging into a computer, then logging into the testing system to take a quiz or exam," said Terri Bourdon, the instructor who manages

At the Math Emporium help is available from math faculty, graduate students or other undergraduates, most days and nights.

“If they don’t do the work, they’ll flunk. It’s not like sitting in the back of a class of 500 and doing your e-mail.”

**—John Rossi,
Virginia Tech math
department chairman**

both the college algebra and trigonometry course and the differential calculus course. Many students also do their course work at the emporium. They log onto the computer and click the link for their course on the emporium homepage. Students can take practice quizzes to prepare for the graded quizzes. “Most of the questions that the emporium staff answers come from the practice quizzes,” Bourdon said.

Bourdon does not put the entire course online immediately, so students will pace themselves. But after the first few weeks, all aspects of the course are available all the time.

Exams are proctored and are given at the back of the former department store,

in an area where garden tools once were sold. Quizzes are not proctored, and students are expected to follow the same honor code policy on quizzes as on exams. Bourdon explained that proctored exams are weighted much more heavily in the students’ grades than the quizzes, “so there is not a serious concern about cheating on the non-proctored quizzes.”

Bourdon, a math instructor at Virginia Tech since 1977, has managed the college algebra and trigonometry course for two years, the differential calculus course for three. Last fall about 2,100 students were enrolled in her classes.

“I did have misgivings,” she said. “I said I would do it for one year, because I expected to lose what I went into teaching for”—that is, personal contact with students. “I also enjoy explaining concepts in a lecture format, so I was afraid that I would miss that even more. As it turns out, I have been pleasantly surprised. I have even more personal contact with students, primarily due to the fact that students seem more comfortable asking for help at the math emporium than they do in a faculty office. And I enjoy explaining concepts in this environment since I am talking to students who have already worked through the materials beforehand.”



John Rossi, chairman of the Virginia Tech math department, thinks students learn more at the Math Emporium than in traditional classrooms.

Student reaction to the math emporium is mixed. On the plus side, Soly Alvarez, from Bogotá, Colombia, a junior in industrial and systems engineering, took linear algebra there in fall 2002 and was pleased with the experience. “I think the math emporium was a positive experience, because I was able to work at my own pace, go back, reread the material, take the practice quizzes as many times as I wanted to,” she said. “And I was able to work from my dorm room or go to the math emporium if I preferred.”

“Also, it served as an opportunity to develop self-discipline skills, letting me organize my time and not having to attend class at a certain time but rather move around my schedule to accommodate other assignments,” she added. Once Alvarez completed linear algebra, she continued to go to the emporium to study for other math classes or to get help from the aides.

Not everyone has such positive reactions. Said freshman Hunter Simmons, of Fincastle, Virginia, who is taking linear algebra and calculus, “It is saving money, but I don’t think the savings are worth what it does.” Simmons said he had a great math background in high school and thinks the software computing program used in his emporium classes is “a complete waste of time.” He would like another day in the classroom, to reinforce concepts, rather than use that program.

In theory, Simmons said, the emporium “really works well. But it’s hard to get to, it’s depressing to be in, and quite often you can’t get help when you need it.” He said the huge room, which is painted a shade of white, could be made more attractive. “We’re at Virginia Tech—make it orange and maroon, everything else is orange and maroon. You could make it more inviting.”

One of the biggest gripes is the emporium’s location, across a busy street and a long hike from the center of campus. The university regularly runs shuttle buses to the emporium—theoretically it’s a ten-minute ride, but sometimes it takes longer, and the buses are crowded.

Christie Roark, from Alpharetta, Georgia, a senior engineering major, objects to having courses “taught completely on the computer at the math emporium. It takes up a lot of time to ride a bus out there, sit at a computer and do something that really you should have been able to do from a computer anywhere else on campus.” For on-campus students “it’s really inconvenient,” she said. Roark never took a course that was entirely emporium-based. “That was by design,” she said. “I planned it that way.”

Roark and some other students do not like the fact that all the computers at the emporium are Macintoshes. “Engineers are required to purchase and use PCs for school, so having to switch over to a Macintosh at the math emporium is really just an annoyance and doesn’t make sense,” Roark said. Software incompatibility sometimes makes it impossible to write a paper at the emporium and e-mail it to a professor, she added.

Chuck Hodges, the emporium manager, explained that Macs are used because they are cheaper, “considering the whole package—security (fewer virus problems), maintenance” and so on. He said there were complaints about an earlier Mac version but few now.

Matthew Vetting, a junior industrial engineering major from Harrisonburg, Virginia, summed up the feelings of many students: “I think the emporium is a good idea but one that

could be greatly improved by locating it on campus.”

Virginia Tech professors and administrators say there was neither time nor money to build an on-campus facility in 1997, when the acute need for a large space developed. Had the computer-based courses taken over existing on-campus space, they say, other classrooms would have been displaced. By fall 1998, the emporium’s second year of operation, it had freed up space in 64 classrooms, each with a 40-student capacity, and another 12 classrooms with a 100-student capacity.

Also, officials say, an on-campus facility would have cost about \$19 a square foot to build, while the mall department store could be leased for about \$1 a square foot.

State budget cuts also played a role. Virginia Tech’s state support was reduced by \$72 million during the 2002 and 2003 fiscal years. “The pressures, forces and influences that led to this are at least 15 years old,” said Mike Williams, a math

professor and a former university associate vice president. “We’ve not been treated very well by state financing.” With personnel cutbacks, “the faculty was being squeezed big time in what they had to deliver,” Williams said. So some administrators and faculty members started looking at ways to make better use of technology.

Among academics, Williams said, “change comes hard. Everything is fought over. The smaller the issue, the bigger the fight.” In the early 1990s the university started to prepare faculty for transitions in technology. Once the math department saw what could be accomplished with computers,

“I think the emporium is a good idea but one that could be greatly improved by locating it on campus.”
—**Matthew Vetting,**
a junior at Virginia Tech

UPDATE

Math Instruction at Virginia Tech

May 2008

ALL OF THE COMPUTERS at Virginia Tech’s Math Emporium have been replaced, some of them a couple of times, since *National CrossTalk* published an article about this program in January 2005. “We replace about a third of them each year,” said Michael Williams, a Virginia Tech math professor, and the director of the Math Emporium.

Featuring 550 Macintosh workstations, the cavernous facility is still housed at the same location, a former department store across the street from the campus. And it has reached the limits of its size. The number of students who take a complete emporium course (one that has no formal classroom component) has increased about ten percent. But because so many other classes make use of the emporium, and because students also like to use it on an informal basis, limits have been put in place to prioritize the availability of the computers.

“When we were giving final exams,” Williams said, “we had a line out the door, for a 45 minute wait, for those free-use computers, which are used commonly for group work and other kinds of studying. But we had to limit the amount of free-use time in order to make sure computers are available for test takers.”

Do students generally like the emporium? “Some love it; some hate it,” Williams said. “Probably more of them dislike it, but they’ll tell you things like, ‘I don’t like to have to teach it to myself. What they’re missing is that, in the end, you teach everything to yourself. That struggle is what changes your mind and makes for learning. In the emporium that connection is painfully obvious. In essence, it amounts to hard work.”

In the last few years several courses have been added to the emporium’s offerings, which included college algebra and trigonometry, differential calculus and introductory linear algebra. “We also run a two-semester business calculus course, and a two-semester

Virginia Tech’s Math Emporium was a trailblazer, of sorts, and has been much imitated in the decade since it was established.

course for architectural students,” Williams said. “We also have another course, like the linear algebra, that’s first-year multivariate calculus. We generally take on a course over the summer, and then rewrite it for the emporium.”

That will change this summer, however. “We are at a limit, and cannot support any more students, so we have to put a freeze on converting more courses, though there are certainly more candidates,” Williams said. “Virginia hasn’t been kind to higher education through the years. Our staffing is way down, and it continues to fall!”

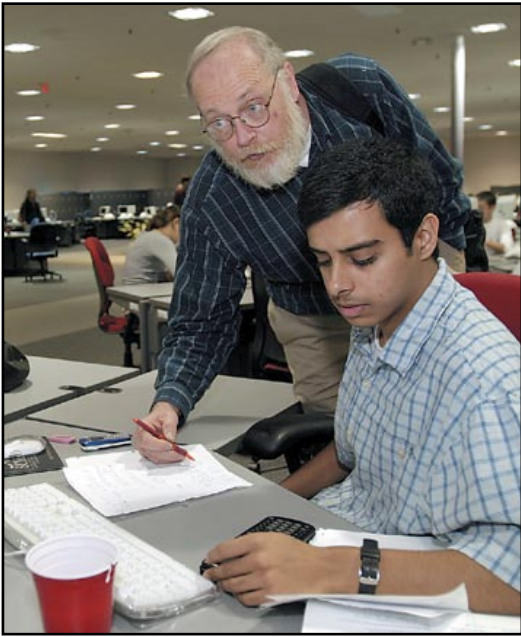
Although there is often resistance, particularly among faculty, to converting courses for the emporium, it all comes down to cost, according to Williams, who would like to see it that savings realized from the emporium remain within the math department. “It’s such a total change in the way you approach education, and it requires a substantial effort to make the switchover,” Williams said. “The thing that makes the emporium go economically is critical mass—it’s scalable. And that leads you to large enrollment classes. We tend to look toward specialty service courses with high enrollments. Cutting costs on them will result in real savings.”

The recently implemented course for architectural students, which is a mix of calculus and geometry, is a good example. “We’ve had such a squeeze, and it was next on the chopping block,” Williams explained. Noting that there were a number of instructors who were upset about the change, he added, “It’s not a happy thing.”

Perhaps the most important benefit of this approach is that these courses become more available to students. “There’s a real emphasis around here about not putting capped enrollments in place for math classes,” Williams said. “When you start capping courses, that’s when graduation times lengthen significantly, because students can’t get spots in the courses they need.”

Virginia Tech’s Math Emporium was a trailblazer, of sorts, and has been much imitated in the decade since it was established. Carol Twigg, executive director of the National Center for Academic Transformation, cites the emporium as a prime example of the positive results that can be achieved through technological transformation in higher education. “It was the first such program,” said Twigg, whose organization has assisted in the development of many more. “We based our approach on what they did at Virginia Tech,” she added. “The two stories are like the micro and the macro.”

—Todd Sallo



Math professor Mike Williams says state budget cuts are one reason Virginia Tech turned to the computer lab solution for large-enrollment math classes.

its labs began to be crowded. That was a good pressure but one that had to be relieved, Williams said.

Virginia Tech, with a current enrollment of about 25,600 at the Blacksburg campus, promised the state to take more students by 2010, with no increase in state funding, said Anne Moore, associate vice president for learning technologies. From 1992 to 1995, the additional students did not arrive. But in 1996 enrollment jumped, whether through admissions office miscalculations or other reasons, and the math labs were overflowing.

“People were wanting to get off a burning platform” and knew something had to be done, Moore said. The math emporium was the answer.

Comparing costs of traditional classroom teaching and emporium-based classes is difficult, math professor Mike Williams said. For example, when math faculty wrote the software for the college algebra and trigonometry course, they made it a bit more difficult than before, so comparing results would be like comparing apples and oranges.

Student performance has improved since the emporium opened. In fall 1997, the first year for the redesigned linear algebra course, 68 percent of the students received C grades or better. By fall 2002, 90 percent were earning at least a C.

The student success rate also has improved at the University of Alabama, which established a Mathematics Technology Learning Center, modeled on the Virginia Tech emporium. In fall 1999, only 40 percent of students taking traditional math classes were earning grades of C-minus or better, but after three years of the technology-based approach, that has increased to 60 percent.

Early on, some Virginia Tech math professors were skeptical about computer-based courses. “I think they saw it as something that would change the ultimate outcome, that it was more of a gimmick than substance,” said Robert Bates, then dean of arts and sciences at the Blacksburg school, now provost and academic vice president at Washington State University. “Some would

say that our classes had gotten too big, and if we would just go back to smaller classes we could educate students.” But “some students need individual attention; some don’t,” he

added. “Some can move faster through the material. If we can individualize the students’ experience, we can teach them better.”

“What is (traditional) teaching?” asked Mike Williams. “It’s 40 to 80 students in a room. A broadcast, not unlike watching TV. A very passive act. The majority are zoned within 20 minutes. My view is that the lecture is not worthwhile. But there are those who are very prideful about their material, being the ‘sage on the stage.’”

One instructor with many students is highly inefficient, Williams added. “What we have now is one-to-one. We train our helpers to be good listeners, not to solve the problem for the student but to figure out the right question to make the light go on. The work of discovery changes a person’s brain. We try to understand exactly what it is the student doesn’t understand.”

Teaching methods have not changed in upper-level courses, according to Williams. “I am not sure this would be worth doing for courses of less than 500 students,” he said. “There are about eight courses for which this works. Of 11,500 math enrollments, 8,000 are registered at the emporium for some activity that requires grading.”

Virginia Tech has been in one financial crisis after another in the last decade because of state budget cuts and tuition freezes. Meantime, said Provost Dixon Hanna, the math department was struggling because of the university’s large engineering and science enrollments. “The math department here is much larger than at most institutions, and it was struggling getting its classes taught.” Under these circumstances the department was willing to take a chance on the emporium.

In order to succeed with the emporium approach, “you really have to have people who believe in it, who are willing to do almost anything to keep it from falling on the floor,” said Monte Boisen, who helped start the project at Virginia Tech and now is math department chairman at the University of Idaho. “It requires an amazing amount of commitment.” Frustrations can abound when software doesn’t work as it is supposed to, or, as happened soon after the Virginia Tech emporium opened, someone plugged in a vacuum cleaner and shut down the electrical power supply completely.

The emporium project could not have succeeded without strong support from top campus administrators, including then-President Paul E. Torgersen. “We’ve always been very innovative about anything having to do with technology,” said Torgersen, who was president from 1993 to 2000 and now teaches industrial engineering. “We were the first university to require PCs of all engineering freshmen.”

Some other departments thought that math was getting undue attention—and money—and were not happy, Torgersen recalled. “Anytime you do some initiative, it comes at the expense of somebody else,” he said. “If you just sit around and hand out money evenly, you’ll never make progress. Once you decide you’re going to do this, you just do it. This was a train on a fast track and there was no way we were going to stop it.” ♦

Kay Mills is the author of “This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer,” and four other books.

“My view is that the lecture is not worthwhile. But there are those who are very prideful about their material, being the ‘sage on the stage.’”

—Mike Williams, a Virginia Tech math professor

Redesigning the Basics

Tennessee's community colleges use technology to change their approach to developmental reading and math

By Kay Mills

CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

TIFFANY WHITE, out of high school for 15 years, confesses that she was “really nervous” about taking algebra at Cleveland State Community College in southeastern Tennessee. “But I’ve surprised myself by doing better than I thought I would,” she said. She’s motivated because she was laid off from a manufacturing job last May and wants to become a legal assistant.

And she is helped along by a redesigned math program that uses technology to focus attention on the skills students need for college-level courses and lets them move at their own pace instead of in lockstep with classmates. White also likes the idea that, while she is at the computer in the math lab, “all day long somebody is here if I need help.”

White said that, while she had passed the writing placement test in about 13 minutes, after almost an hour she failed the math test. But halfway through the spring semester, she had already finished elementary algebra and had decided to move on to intermediate algebra.

Cleveland State, which is about 30 miles from Chattanooga, enrolled 3,471 students (2,329 full-time equivalent) this spring. Seven hundred students must take developmental math each semester because of gaps in their background. But in the past only 54 percent of them moved on.

“We’ve got 20 years of data to show that the lecture method of teaching doesn’t work,” said Karen Wyrick, math department chair. “We had too many kids failing. We had too

“We’ve got 20 years of data to show that the lecture method of teaching doesn’t work.”

—Karen Wyrick, Cleveland State Community College

many kids dropping out before they got through. This approach is quicker and saves money.” It also helps students complete the courses at higher rates. For example, the completion rate (that is, achieving a C or better) for elementary algebra was 50 percent before the redesign, 68 percent afterward.

The intermediate algebra completion rate increased from 57 percent to 74 percent.

In addition, the overall college retention rate increased by seven percent in spring 2009. “That’s due to the math department,” Wyrick said.

Cleveland State’s redesign and several others in Tennessee occurred with the support of the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), headed by Carol Twigg,

its president and CEO. Starting in fall 2007, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) staff convened meetings to familiarize its schools with the NCAT approach to delivering instruction by taking advantage of technology and measuring student learning, all with the aim of serving more students better and at less cost. Supported by an \$8.8 million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, NCAT had previously awarded grants to 30 colleges and universities to reorganize large classes, such as the Psychology 201 course at Cal Poly Pomona.

Representatives from all the community colleges and universities—the University of Tennessee system does not come under the Tennessee Board of Regents—had to attend the first sessions. After that, participation was voluntary; 17 of the 19 TBR schools submitted 28 applications for redesigns. NCAT awarded six grants of \$40,000 each to Tennessee schools, using money from the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). Five were community colleges; the sixth was Austin Peay State University. Two redesigns covered remedial reading or writing courses, and four involved math.

NCAT reported that the redesigns at four of the schools improved course completion rates and school retention rates while reducing costs. Financial savings at the community colleges ranged from 19 percent to 51 percent.

Nationwide in this round of grants, NCAT has also worked with campuses in four other states: Arizona, Mississippi, New York and Maryland. Most of the schools involved are four-year institutions, but Niagara County Community College in Sanborn, New York, received a grant to redesign its introductory statistics course.

Much of the action concerning developmental education is occurring at the community college level, as states work to shift these courses out of four-year institutions. The Education Commission of the States (ECS), based in Denver, Colorado, which worked with Tennessee in preparing its FIPSE grant application, sponsors the “Getting Past Go” project through which it helps states develop policy and



Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Karen Wyrick, math department chairman at Cleveland State College in Tennessee, made the instructional videos that accompany the college’s redesigned developmental math courses.



"I've surprised myself by doing better than I thought I would," says Tiffany White, who took algebra at Cleveland State Community College in Tennessee 15 years after finishing high school.

model practices to improve developmental education, thus increasing college retention and graduation rates.

Among the states working in this area is California, which has a Basic Skills Initiative, begun in 2006 through the community college chancellor's office. It helps colleges to improve their developmental courses and faculty training to teach them. High schools are also getting more directly involved. In Florida, for example, the state is working with high schools to assess students' abilities and provide any remedial help needed before they get to college.

Bruce Vandal of the ECS says that across the country there is "greater recognition that there needs to be a more

customized approach in our delivery of developmental material." One size does not fit all. "What's exciting about Tennessee's work is that it is focused systemwide," Vandal said. "Tennessee is far and away ahead in that approach."

At Northeast State Community College, in Blountville near the Tri-Cities area of Tennessee, the redesign effort centered on the developmental reading course, considered the gatekeeper for other classes. "If you can't read for information, you don't do well in other classes," said Xiaoping Wang, dean of Northeast's behavioral and social sciences division and lead staff member on the redesign. "Once students fail this reading course, they disappear."

Work in the redesigned reading course is divided into 20 modules. All students take sections on note taking and highlighting as well as test taking. The next eight units are considered priority: vocabulary, reading for the main idea, supporting details, patterns of organization, purpose and tone, inference and critical thinking. There are ten extra units that can help students not only to read better but also to increase their grades if they complete them satisfactorily. These include active reading strategies, outlining and summarizing, and time management.

Northeast's program uses a lab and web-based learning materials. MyReadingLab, a product of Pearson

Education, Inc., gives students diagnostic tests, various reading assignments, tips on areas such as identifying slanted language or supportive details, and tests to determine whether the student is ready to move on. Readings include such topics as planning a trip to the Getty Center in Los Angeles, or the emergence of jazz; practice tests might involve readings about

a presidential advisor meeting the press, or about human cloning.

"We made quite a few changes as we went along," Wang said. "There has been a learning curve for the faculty." Wang explained that it was understood from the outset that the lab work must build into the course because "community college students aren't going to stay to use the lab" as some at four-year schools might do. The planners added a reading group meeting after the first semester of the pilot project because many students felt lost, with no connection with each other or the faculty. In that reading group, the instructor covers the concepts involved. Then students work independently.

In one of the labs, instructor Jimmy Henson was providing individual help, and checking students' course notebooks—another addition after the pilot project began. "We were struggling with the whole monitoring process," Henson said. "Students didn't know how to keep course materials organized." Henson added that faculty were "just relying on verbal assurances but often found the students hadn't really mastered the material." The notebooks include sheets recording whether students have worked on various concepts, and their scores on practice tests.

Almost ten percent of Northeast's 5,841 students (3,975 full-time equivalent) take this course, and they cannot advance unless they finish it. "Math is only a prerequisite for math and science courses, but reading is needed for virtually all college courses," Wang said. The student success rate for traditional reading courses at Northeast was 58 percent, while the success rate for redesigned courses averaged 60 percent over three semesters, and significantly more students had A's and B's in the redesigned course than in the traditional one. When the redesign was fully implemented, students averaged 86 percent on the final exam, compared with 81 percent in traditional classes.

The redesigned course also saved \$41,119, a 51 percent reduction, by enlarging class sizes and using fewer adjunct faculty. Using the lab approach allowed one faculty member to provide more attention to more students, Wang said. "Success is the main thing," she added. "If we save money but don't do well, then we don't do this. The savings are icing on the cake."

At Henson's Friday morning lab session, students of varied backgrounds were working on practice tests, moving at their own pace. Chelsea Anderson, who graduated from high school in 2007, is a first-year student who wants to become an x-ray technologist. "I goofed off" in high school, she admits, but says now she is learning how to apply herself. Bo Bellamy, 38, was laid off from construction work in December, so he enrolled at Northeast State to study electrical technology in order to get the certificate he needs for better jobs. "It's a whole different world now," he said.

C.H. Charlton, the other full-time developmental reading instructor, was in favor of the redesign from the beginning. He had been concerned that when students were at different places in their learning in traditional classes, some were slowed down.

However, Henson was skeptical at first. "I didn't think technology could be as effective as me, with a degree in teaching reading," he said. He became a convert once he had hands-on experience with the program. "I said, 'Wow, this is

Much of the action concerning developmental education is occurring at the community college level, as states work to shift these courses out of four-year institutions.

great.” He saw students grasping material where previously he would not have known whether they got it or not. “They may do well on a quiz or on a test, but I don’t know whether they really have mastered it,” Henson explained. “Once I see them interacting with the modules, I see whether they are comfortable with the material. I saw their ‘aha’ moment more often than I saw it in the traditional setting.”

Likewise, Karen Wyrick said that she “just wanted to lecture. I thought that if I was not standing up there in front of them, teaching them, they weren’t going to get it.” So John Squires, the department chair at the time and lead person on the Cleveland State math redesign, asked her if she wanted to make the videos that accompany the course. Students can watch those CDs and use the modularized material on computers. Last year, Wyrick said, one of her colleagues had a student who completed elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, college algebra and statistics in one year. “That student would have been bored out of his brain if he’d had to sit there in a lecture class.”

After revising its three developmental courses, Cleveland State’s math faculty found that the number of students in college-level classes increased. “Prior to redesign, we had about 400 students per semester in college-level math courses,” Wyrick said. “We now have 500 to 600 in these courses per semester.” As a result, the faculty redesigned eight college-level courses. “We had seven full-time faculty, and otherwise it would have been hard to field the load.”

Betty Frost, associate professor of math at Jackson State Community College in west Tennessee, was initially a naysayer as well. Now she has been named as one of six NCAT scholars who will help teams from 50 schools prepare redesigns under the organization’s new program called “Changing the Equation.” Some of those schools will receive \$40,000 grants for math redesigns, with funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“This is my 35th year of teaching at Jackson State,” Frost said. “I’m kind of old-school. I thought the students needed some classroom instruction. Some others were that way, too,

but I was probably the worst one.” The faculty decided to have focus groups where they could go over some of the material, then students could talk about it and ask questions. One day Frost took her students across the hall from the lab to a classroom and was talking about something—equations perhaps—and asked if there were any questions. “A young man put up his hand and asked, ‘Can we go back across the hall?’ And I’ve never had a focus group since.”

The Jackson State program is called SMART Math, an acronym for Survive, Master, Achieve, Review and Transfer. When the college began its redesign, Frost said, they surveyed the math faculty to see what competencies, or skills, were involved in their courses. That helped them decide how many modules to include in the redesigned course. Then they took the list of the competencies to be developed to all the departments and asked them which of those skills students absolutely needed to complete their classes.

“Previously, students whose goals were to be a registered nurse, an elementary school teacher or a rocket scientist had to pass, or test out of, the same developmental math courses before enrolling in the courses and programs they came to college to take in the first place,” according to the college’s description of its math program. “Traditionally, developmental math courses required students to learn competencies not necessary to be successful in their chosen career.” That is no longer the case at Jackson State.

Overall, redesign students increased their average post-test scores in all courses by 15 points, according to the math department. The percentage of students passing developmental math courses has increased by 45 percent. The SMART Math program reduced the cost per student by 20 percent, by increasing the maximum class size from 24 to 30, providing the chance for students to complete the developmental work more quickly, reducing the number of sections taught by full-time faculty from 78 percent to 58 percent, and by using tutors at lower cost per hour than faculty.

The Community College Futures Assembly, based at the University of Florida, gave its Bellwether Award to both the Cleveland State and Jackson State redesigned math programs,



“I didn’t think technology could be as effective as me,” says Jimmy Henson, an instructor at Northeast State Community College, who was skeptical of the new reading program, but has become a convert.

Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk



“Reading is needed for virtually all college courses,” says Xiaoping Wang, who was the lead staff member on the redesign of Northeast State Community College’s developmental reading course.

Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk

After revising its three developmental courses, Cleveland State’s math faculty found that the number of students in college-level classes increased.

the former in 2009 and the latter this year. These awards “recognize outstanding and innovative programs and practices that are successfully leading community colleges into the future.”

Two of the Tennessee programs—a reading and writing redesign at Columbia State Community College in the center of the state, and a math redesign at Chattanooga State Community College—were considered less successful. Nonetheless, said Treva Berryman, TBR’s associate vice chancellor for academic affairs, “what we learned from them may have made a huge difference systemwide. It’s not that they failed if they saved other campuses from similar problems. A pilot’s a pilot. Give it a try.”

Communication is often a problem in redesigning courses. If a leader in a pilot program thinks it isn’t going to work, “you can forget about the rest of the people,” Berryman said. “You have to be willing to fail. And presidents have to give support so that people aren’t

punished if they do fail.”

NCAT’s Carol Twigg has her own assessment. The Columbia State redesign failed to incorporate a lab where students could work, she said, and did not offer them enough support in the technology they did have, which can be a big problem in a rural area. As for the math redesign at Chattanooga State, “the math faculty didn’t want to do it,” Twigg said bluntly. But the academic vice president did, she added, and has hired John Squires, who led Cleveland State’s redesign, to chair the Chattanooga State math department. He and the math faculty there are now creating mini-lectures

students can attend, bridging the gap until they can prepare CDs with the course material similar to the ones Wyrick and others made at Cleveland State.

“You can’t just stick a student at a computer,” Squires said. Chattanooga’s earlier attempt “just didn’t work,” he added, pointing out that Cleveland State “had a semester of planning and a semester to create the program. Chattanooga is in the midst of it. We’re having to push the reset button and build it as we go. We have ten faculty working on course materials, and ten doing the mini-lectures. They will be developing the videos over the summer.



Harrison McClary, Black Star, for CrossTalk

“Redesign may appear piecemeal because we’re not finished. It will be systemwide,” says Paula Short, vice chancellor for academic affairs for the Tennessee Board of Regents.

We have much more flexibility at Chattanooga.” Demand at Chattanooga State is greater as well. Of 9,427 students (5,988 full-time equivalent) last fall, about 2,000 had to take developmental math.

The Tennessee Board of Regents is expanding its redesigns for developmental courses, and by 2013 all its community colleges must have in place programs that have technology as an integral part and must focus on helping students master the subjects at their own pace. Developmental work was already a major focus in TBR’s strategic plan for 2005–2010 after the state legislature told the system it needed to do more with less, said Paula Short, vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Tennessee worked with NCAT because it had “a proven record in creating change,” Short said. NCAT provided training for applicants and helped follow the pilot programs to see what worked and what didn’t. “We saw this as systemwide. We offered training to everyone. We wanted them all to have the benefit of that training,” she added. “Redesign may appear piecemeal because we’re not finished. It will be systemwide.”

As the colleges prepare their redesigns, Berryman said, “we’re asking them to start with a blank slate. Take what you know about how students have changed, how careers have changed, how technology has changed. If developmental studies didn’t exist, what would you need to carry our students over the next 25 years?”

“We are not trying to fix what was broken in the past,” Berryman added. “We are trying to teach whatever competencies they need for careers they are going to choose. That really is a different philosophy.”

Betty Frost knows that from her own experience. She recalls a student years ago who wanted to enter the nursing program but was struggling with intermediate algebra. “She just never got it, and she disappeared. Today we see she didn’t need intermediate algebra for nursing.” ♦

Kay Mills is the author of “This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer” and four other books.

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Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk

“You can’t just stick a student at a computer,” says John Squires, who led Cleveland State’s math course redesign and is now chair of the Chattanooga State math department.

Keeping Them in College

East Carolina University's efforts to improve retention and graduation rates

Photos by Tom Cogill for CrossTalk

By Don Campbell

GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

NEARLY A THOUSAND incoming freshmen and anxious parents are crammed into East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium on a steamy hot morning in late June.

Don Joyner, ECU's associate vice chancellor for admissions and advising, is pacing from one end of the stage to the other, microphone in hand, doing a dead-on imitation of a fire-and-brimstone television minister exhorting the faithful in a high-pitched twang.

He's deep into a well-practiced recitation of what it takes to succeed in college—get involved in campus activities, use the library, learn some basic study skills, have realistic expectations—beginning with commandment number one: “Go to class.”

“Let me tell you what’s going to happen to some of you,” Joyner shouts. “You’re going to break up with your boyfriend or your girlfriend, and all of a sudden, you think your life is over! Well let me tell you something else: You’ve got to get over your depression! You can’t use that as an excuse...because this place can be unforgiving!”

Wide-eyed parents and students are cackling one moment and nodding their heads solemnly the next, mesmerized by a popular and locally famous ritual that Joyner performs in orientation sessions seven times each summer. His tough-love message for new students is just one weapon in an innovative arsenal that East Carolina uses to keep them in college and get them through graduation.

Increased awareness of the dropout problem is leading to demands for increased accountability in higher education across the nation.

Retention and graduation are two of the hottest topics in higher education these days, as governing boards, accrediting agencies, and state and federal lawmakers demand more accountability and bang for the buck from college administrators. College dropout rates are not declining noticeably—and are rising in some cases—despite a wide array of programs aimed

at keeping students enrolled.

The traditional standard of only four years in college is mostly a relic; today's measure of an acceptable completion rate, except in the most elite institutions, is six years, and some prominent education experts think the standard should be eight or ten years.



East Carolina University tries to involve new students like track and field athlete Valeria Moore in as many non-classroom activities as possible in their first few weeks on campus.

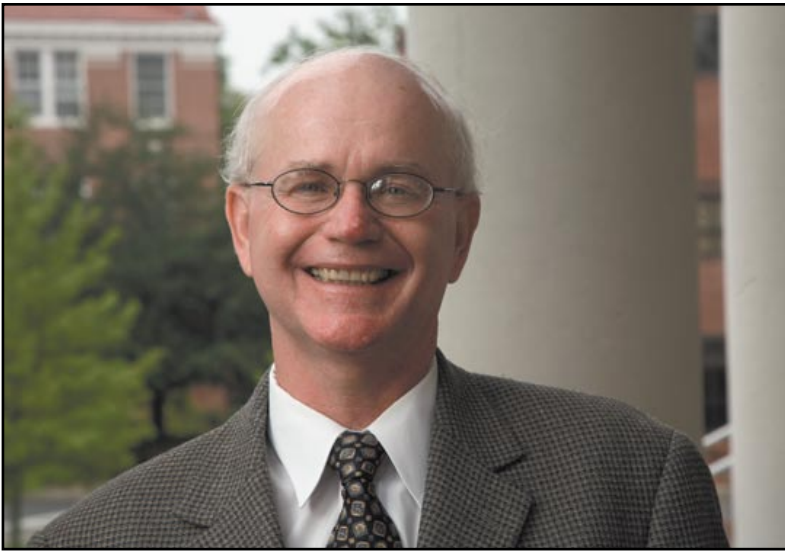
Assessing the problem is difficult because national statistics on retention and graduation rates are unreliable. Because students often transfer to other institutions, there is no dependable way to track retention and graduation beyond state borders. Rates for both vary wildly from the Ivy League schools to lower-tier schools in public university systems.

But ECU, despite drawing heavily from a rural eastern North Carolina population that includes sizeable numbers of first-generation college students, has managed to hold its own—and even excel in one area—when compared with peer institutions within the state and nationally.

Its six-year graduation rate of 54 percent compares favorably with other institutions in the University of North Carolina system, except UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University. Its freshman retention rate is six percentage points better than those at 13 peer institutions across the country. And it compares favorably to 85 “moderately selective” public institutions nationally on both retention and graduation rates for four, five and six years.

Most notable, however, is its success in retaining and graduating African American students. Not only is the percentage of ECU's black student population higher than at most public colleges in North Carolina, its six-year graduation rate for blacks is nearly five percentage points higher than that of the UNC system as a whole.

A study by The Education Trust found that East Carolina University's six-year graduation rate of 60 percent for African American students was nearly double that of “competitive” doctoral-degree granting institutions in its peer group.



"We know you need to tie them into the university in those first six to eight weeks," says Don Joyner, associate vice chancellor for admissions and advising at East Carolina University.

And yet the hurdles that must be overcome to keep students from dropping out or "stopping out" at ECU are the same that face most public institutions. They start with personal problems that often are most acute in the first six to eight weeks of the first semester, ranging from homesickness to a death or financial crisis in the family to breaking up with one's high school sweetheart. Some new students find that they just don't fit in, or can't make friends, which is not surprising on a campus where the university population alone may be many times that of the community in which they grew up.

Some have no idea how to manage their time, while others arrive poorly prepared, with the mistaken assumption that college is just high school writ large. "One thing we hear a lot is, 'I didn't have to study in high school,'" said Shelly Myers, director of ECU's Academic Enrichment Center. That notion starts to fade with midterm exams and is dispelled completely for some when D's and F's start showing up at the end of the first semester.

Moreover, surviving the first semester on the 23,500-student campus doesn't guarantee long-term persistence or timely graduation. Growing debt prompts some students to give up, and others to "stop out" for a semester or more to earn tuition money. While most administrators here believe that working ten to 12 hours a week helps give structure to a student's life, the problem comes when they try to work 20 to 30 hours a week and carry full class loads of 15 or 16 hours. "That's mutually exclusive, and I tell students that," said Joyner.

Still other students get bored with their professors or the field of study they've chosen and opt to switch majors, a move that is almost guaranteed to cost them an extra year in school. Some just decide that the community college back home is the place they should be.

Whatever the reasons, increased awareness of the dropout problem, fueled in part by better record-keeping

and more accessible data, is leading to demands for increased accountability in higher education here in North Carolina and across the nation. And the debate over who is responsible for students dropping out—the students themselves who are, after all, adults, or the institutions—seems to be losing steam.

"We've always assumed that it was all about students," said Kati Haycock, executive director of The Education Trust. "All that universities were responsible for was to make their treasures available, and if students take advantage of that, fine, and if not, fine. I think what folks are saying now, especially when it's clear that it's not all about the students, is that you cannot blame your low graduation rates on more poor students, and them having to work more jobs, because when you look at comparable institutions, you find wildly different success rates."

Stanford University education professor Michael Kirst is less sanguine. He said that while universities are doing better at assessing the dropout problem and providing data that documents the scope of the problem, "there's still no accountability in higher education. While there are people bemoaning this, there are no sanctions and incentives for these results."

But there are signs of change. The new president of the University of North Carolina system, Erskine Bowles, declared in his inaugural address earlier this year that retention rates at the state's 16 four-year colleges and universities are "wholly unacceptable." Some administrators here at ECU took that to mean that targets or quotas for retention will be imposed.

In Georgia, the university system's board of regents recently adopted a plan that freezes tuition for four years for incoming freshmen, an incentive for students to get their degree in four years or face a sharp tuition increase in the fifth year. A similar program at Western Illinois University since 1999 has resulted in a four-percent increase in the four-year graduation rate.

In New York, Governor George Pataki has proposed that the state give its public institutions a \$500 bonus for each student who graduates in four years. At the University of Houston, students can get tuition rebates if they successfully complete enough credit hours at the end of their first, second and third years.

The demand for more accountability, when backed by the threat of losing state funds, is likely to force colleges and universities to try new programs and abandon old ones.

One expert, Syracuse University education professor Vincent Tinto, argues that a program of incentives and disincentives will benefit schools populated by full-time students who already have the opportunity and the means to finish on time. Other schools, he said, will try to solve the problem by adding courses, hiring consultants, creating new offices.

The real answer, Tinto said, is to establish the right conditions and settings in which students, particularly new students, are expected to exist. The research shows, Tinto said, that students are more likely to stay in school and graduate in settings where advising is taken seriously, where there is a broad palette of support—academic, social and personal—that connects students to other aspects of the collegiate experience, and where there is frequent, high-quality contact among faculty, staff and students. One contributing factor to the

At East Carolina University, the focus on freshmen is unrelenting, beginning with summer orientation and a "Weeks of Welcome" program.

current situation, Tinto said, is that colleges depend too much on adjunct faculty and graduate students to teach first-year courses, when it should be assigning its most experienced professors to those classes.

“Simply put,” Tinto said, “involvement matters, and at no point does it matter more than the first year, when student attachments are so tenuous and the pull of the institution so weak.”

Here at East Carolina University, the focus on freshmen is unrelenting, beginning with summer orientation and a “Weeks of Welcome” program aimed at the first weeks on campus.

Said Joyner: “We have to create—in order to retain students—a sense of belonging, a sense of competence and a sense of progression. You’ve also got to have good quality advisers, and you’ve got to have a clear career direction. Those are the indices.”

“The first six weeks are critical,” said Kris Smith, director of institutional research and testing. “The students come in and they are so worried about fitting in... about the social aspect. And then about four weeks into the semester we start giving tests, and they are, like, ‘Oh, my god,’ because they have no clue what it means to take a test at this level, and have to cover so much material.”

“We know you need to tie them into the university in those first six to eight weeks,” said Joyner. “So we have all kinds of academic activities, out-of-class learning experience, engagement with faculty—all that outside the classroom during those weeks. And we know that someone in Student Life is coordinating that for a sense of belonging.”

Valeria Moore, a freshman track and field athlete from Newark, Delaware, had that experience in her first week this year.

“When mom and dad left I was happy,” she said. “And then a couple days later it hit me. I woke up in the morning and I was sad. I was, like, ‘I’m not in my bed! I’m used to going to

my mom in the morning and harassing her. I felt it in the morning when I woke up, and I felt it at night when I went to bed.”

But within two weeks, she said, she found plenty of things to keep her occupied. “You just have to be willing to go out and get involved in it,” she said. “It’s there, but you have to go and get involved.”

The university has set up a collaborative of professional advisers to help students with their career direction. And it created the Academic Enrichment Center for students who find themselves in academic difficulty, offering workshops that train them on basic study skills, explain academic rules and regulations, and identify other resources on campus that will be helpful. About 500 students attend these workshops in the fall, and as many as three times that number attend in the spring. It also provides tutoring for students falling behind in the “D and F” courses like chemistry, math, physics and biology.

The center, whose motto is “Let your efforts rise above your excuses,” also offers an array of brochures, with titles like “Test Anxiety—Tips for Success,” “Making the Grade as a Freshman Who Lives Off-Campus,” and “Learn about Getting Organized.”

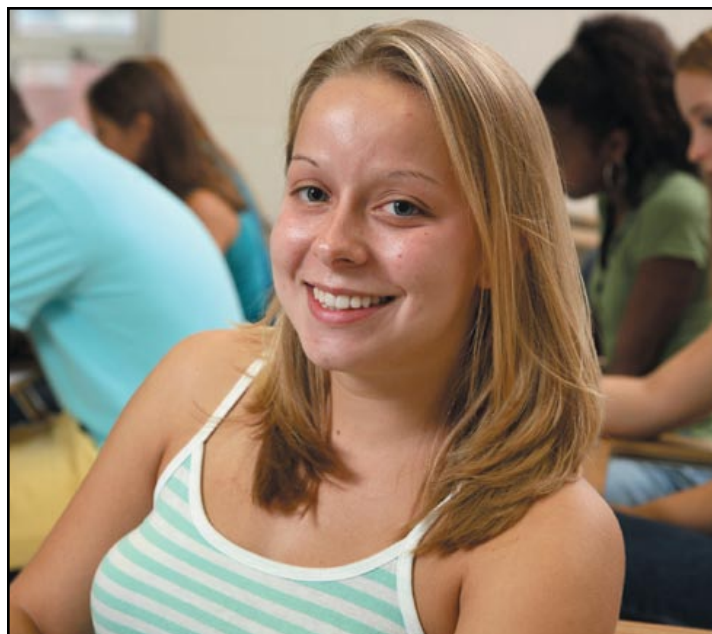
The centerpiece of the East Carolina retention effort, however, is the freshman seminar, a one-hour-credit course offered in the fall and spring that typically draws more than a third of ECU’s 3,600 freshmen. Admission is by self-selection, and the course is taught by instructors who apply for the job. Most sections of the course are offered to all freshmen, but one is designed for first-generation students, and some are reserved for freshmen who live off-campus nearby or who commute from home.

ECU, which has a waiting list of students who want to move on campus, long ago concluded that living off-campus was another possible impediment to retention. “Students who live off-campus are the first to say, ‘We aren’t plugged in like the kids on campus,’” said Kris Smith. “There’s a whole socialization that happens in residence halls that doesn’t happen off campus.”

Topics in the freshman seminar include understanding the transition from high school to college, motivation, goal-setting, learning styles, memory development, listening and note-taking,



Many entering freshmen are not prepared for rigorous college work, says Jayne Geissler, director of East Carolina’s Academic Advising and Support Center, which tries to help students survive the difficult first weeks.



Faculty and staff advisors, as well as student friends, helped East Carolina sophomore Lauren Moscar deal with the breakup of a long relationship with her boyfriend in Stem, North Carolina, her home town.

Some freshmen arrive poorly prepared, with the mistaken assumption that college is just high school writ large.

test-taking, critical-thinking skills and career development.

According to Smith, students who take the course in the fall are seven percent more likely to return to ECU the following fall, and those who take it in the spring are 13 percent more likely to return. Freshmen in summer orientation classes are also given a survey in which they are asked to list which

social organizations or interest groups they might want to join, giving administrators another avenue for getting the students engaged when they arrive for the fall semester.

The Academic Enrichment Center is also hiring a new staffer this year who will meet with students who want to withdraw from the university. “We want to get a sense not only of why they’re leaving, but also if they need to be one of those “stop-out” people, so we can make it easier for them to get back in,” director Shelly Myers said.

Residence hall coordinators and resident advisers are trained to spot students who may not be fitting in. They tend to be students who are constantly on the phone to their parents, “loners” who sit by themselves in the cafeteria or in dormitory lounges, and students who do not decorate their rooms.

Some efforts at retention are more spontaneous and unstructured. Jayne Geissler, director of the Academic Advising and Support Center, relates a story of a student who

arrived on campus in August and announced after less than a week that he was homesick and ready to quit.

“I asked him what one thing would make him feel better,” Geissler said. “He was a football player in high school and missed that terribly.” So, the young man’s freshman seminar class, taught by Geissler, organized a flag football team and made the young man the coach. “It was the first time that I saw a smile on his face!” said Geissler. “So for me, the challenge of any freshman seminar class is to find the one thing that can make a difference in a student adjusting and thriving in college. Even if it’s a football game.”

The challenge of retaining students, while acute in the first weeks, doesn’t get much easier down the road. When she first took her position three years ago, Geissler was immediately confronted with students who were having difficulty academically. “They would come in and say ‘I had three D’s and two F’s last semester.’ And my first question would be, ‘Well, what do you think happened?’ Ninety-nine percent of the time, their response would be, ‘I didn’t realize college would be so different from high school.’ Freshmen know it’s going to be different, but they don’t have a clue.”

Geissler’s office also faces a steady stream of students who can’t decide on a major, or who have been suspended academically and have returned to campus, or who have to reconsider their major or career goals because they can’t meet the requirements.

ECU, which has medical and nursing schools, and soon will have a dental school, attracts numerous students who find out after a couple of years that they can’t meet the grade

UPDATE
East Carolina University
July 2008

ENROLLMENT at East Carolina University continues to grow, and efforts to improve retention and graduation rates are still producing measurable results. “We have not increased as much as we would have hoped, but to change those rates takes multiple years,” said Judy Bailey, executive director of enrollment management at ECU. “You would expect to see that over a four- or five-year span,” she added, noting that *National CrossTalk’s* article about ECU had been published just two years earlier, in fall 2006.

Bailey served as president of Northern Michigan University and Western Michigan University for a total of nine years, before establishing a consulting firm in 2007. “ECU hired me to give a broad overview, an assessment of what they needed to do in terms of enrollment management,” she explained.

Following Bailey’s report in May 2007, which recommended several changes in policy, she was asked to “pull together a holistic approach across the campus, and lead a campus conversation on strategic enrollment management,” she said. “Chancellor Ballard asked me to come and begin working with them on looking at a broader understanding of how we accommodate the kind of growth we are seeing.”

Bailey described the growth as “phenomenal,” and said that enrollment at ECU in fall 2008 was expected to be the largest ever, close to 27,000. “We are estimating that our first-time full-time freshmen will

number around 4,700, compared to 4,222 last year,” she said.

The summer “tough love” sessions for incoming freshmen and their parents are still popular, boasting record attendance. An eighth session was added in summer 2008 to satisfy the demand. “It’s an outstanding program,” Bailey said. “It’s an academic as well as a social setting. They want to know that they will belong, and be a part of this exciting community. And of course the parents want to know about costs.” When the orientation is completed, each student has a schedule and an advisor.

ECU’s Academic Enrichment Center, which had just been established at the time of the 2006 article, has been expanded and

Enrollment at East Carolina University in fall 2008 was expected to be the largest ever, close to 27,000.

renamed the Center for Academic Enrichment and Allied Health. “When the center was brand new, our mission was working with academic skill development and the pre-health and pre-law programs,” said Shelly Myers, director of the center.

“Over that last couple of years we found such a need in the pre-professional areas, and we found that we couldn’t do all the things in our original mission,” Myers said. In response, a new tutoring center was opened to satisfy the demand. “The Pirate Center (named for the school mascot) is a campus-wide service that was developed to take on that component—to help all students with their academic skills, and offer workshops in note-taking and test-taking, that kind of academic

point average required for admission to those schools. “Some of them wanted to be a nurse all their lives,” said Geissler, “and they usually come to us pretty devastated.”

The pressure to increase retention and graduation numbers prompts an assortment of debates. Setting quotas for both, which some officials predict will happen in the North Carolina system, appeals to education experts like Haycock of The Education Trust. “It’s absolutely a good idea,” she said. “While it would have been hard years ago to say what’s a reasonable target for institutions, it doesn’t seem to be now. That is, if you look at an institution compared to institutions just like it, and if you look at what the top-performing institutions in that category are doing as a starting place, a goal that has a campus seeking to stretch out to the sort of best-in-class makes a lot of sense.

“Hopefully,” she added, “that will lead to something better than what we have, which is four in ten graduating after four years. That’s just crazy.”

But measuring requires reliable numbers. Right now, no one is able, with any confidence, to track students who move between institutions, especially if they move to another state.

The U.S. Department of Education and some private organizations, including The Education Trust, support the creation of a national database that would track students’ progress from admission to graduation, no matter how many institutions they attended.

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities vigorously opposes such a database as an invasion of privacy, and produced a poll last summer that



East Carolina’s Academic Enrichment Center, directed by Shelly Myers, assists many freshmen in making the difficult transition from high school to college.

found that 62 percent of the American people are similarly opposed. Haycock called that “the most evil poll” and added, “I’m worried, because if you want people to take graduation seriously, you have to have good data.”

Measuring graduation rates also leads to a debate over what constitutes a realistic timeframe, and whether programs

support.” A new director was hired to manage the Pirate Center, which began offering full-service tutoring in 2008.

Institutional involvement is critical to success, according to Kati Haycock, executive director of The Education Trust. “I think it’s fair to say that in the last couple of years there has been an increasing willingness on the part of leaders in higher education to assume some responsibility for improving student success,” she said, adding that the prevailing view still tends to blame student preparation for problems with retention and degree completion.

Haycock pointed out, however, that comparable institutions—serving the same types of students, in terms of preparation and program—do not reliably produce similar results. “You get very different graduation rates, even for institutions that serve the same types of students,” she said. “There’s a lot of finger pointing. Educational institutions at every level have wanted to make this about the students, or their parents, or preparation. But overwhelming boatloads of

“Evidence shows that what institutions do matters hugely to student success. Institutions must recognize the value of their own contribution.”

—Kati Haycock, executive director of The Education Trust

evidence shows that what institutions do matters hugely to student success. Institutions must recognize the value of their own contribution.”

ECU is a good example. “Their graduation rates have continued to climb, when you look at them over time,” Haycock said. “In 1999 they had a six-year rate of 50.2 percent; today it’s 56.4 percent, which is pretty substantial!” Comparable institutions have graduation rates ranging from 40 to 70 percent. “Where ECU drew our attention was for its success with African Americans,” Haycock said. “They had little or no gap between black and white students, and that is very unusual.”

Haycock does take issue with the idea that it should take six or more years to complete a degree. “There is a general belief that if we just lengthen the time to eight or ten years, the graduation data will look better,” she said. “Frankly, most parents are horrified that colleges are talking about six years. Most people are not saving enough money for six years. We are creeping longer and longer, and it’s not good for students. It is still true that the ones who are most likely to succeed are the ones who go full-time right out of high school.”

Regardless of whether students need six years or more to earn a degree, Shelly Myers is convinced that ECU’s outreach effort has yielded results. “Students are getting better service, in terms of the questions they have about academics,” she said. “Is that tied to retention? I would think so. The advisors that I work with here are so connected to their students. We follow up on grades, and we take note if faculty have a concern about a student. It’s much more of a personal touch, and I think that helps them in school. I really believe that we have made a difference to the students.”

—Todd Sallo



An ambitious program of visits to high schools has been organized by Al Smith, director of student development at East Carolina (shown with members of the university's student government). "You've got to get a dialogue going with the high schools," Smith says.

that reward progress will have the unintended effect of leaving students in lower economic classes behind. College populations are changing so rapidly that only the top-level schools attract students with the preparation, motivation and wherewithal to finish in four years.

Indeed, some educators, most notably Stanford's Michael Kirst, believe that even six years is too short a time to expect students to graduate.

"Forty-six percent of our students (in California) start in community colleges," said Kirst. "So finishing from there in six years is a dream. I think ten (years) is better. And how you arrange an accountability system with that kind of timeline and movement is difficult—because you want to be fair to these institutions"

Some dismiss the longer time frame. Haycock calls it "a crazy idea" because, she said, "If your career begins with a bachelor's degree at 22 or 23, you have an enormously different earnings trajectory than you do if you get a B.A. at 32 or 36. You don't want to signal to institutions, 'Oh, don't worry, slow it down.' Those students who are taking more time are taking up seats. And we're in a time in some institutions where we don't have enough seats to go around. Universities have made a virtue out of multiple paths to graduation, with stop outs, and so forth, and the fact of the matter is those are not equal paths."

That said, there is growing evidence, as noted in a recent *New York Times* report, that students entering community colleges—more often coming from lower-income backgrounds—are unprepared and need extensive remediation. This can have a snowball effect, as it extends the time required to graduate from the two-year college and move on to a four-year institution.

The macro issue becomes how to make higher education a

more seamless transition from high school to college, a K-16 process.

At East Carolina University, another new initiative is to send admissions counselors and other advisors into area high schools. Said Al Smith, ECU's director of student development, "You've got to get a dialogue going that says to the high schools, 'This is what we're seeing. This is what we're looking for. This is why students are not making it in math, English, whatever.' This is definitely a huge issue."

The solution, echoes Kirst, is to get K-12 and higher education working together on remediation and to jointly fund that effort. "You can't solve this with those two levels working separately," said Kirst. "You've got to look at joint products and pay them for joint outcomes."

Elaborate programs aside, nothing beats the personal touch for keeping students on campus. The story of Lauren Moscar, an ECU sophomore from the little town of Stem, North Carolina, demonstrates that fact and makes Don Joyner's welcoming address for freshmen prophetic.

Months into her freshman year, Moscar broke up with her high school sweetheart. "Four and a half years dating somebody," she recalled. "You come back from Christmas break and they're not there anymore. That support system you have is gone. It was almost enough for me to consider, you know, 'What am I doing here? I'm all by myself now, and I have no idea where to go from here.'"

Moscar credits friends she hardly knew she had, and advisor Jayne Geissler, for coming to her rescue. "A lot of people who were kind of in the background stepped forward, and I think that's what college is about—finding people that you didn't know were there.

"Actually, Dr. Geissler was a really big help. I'd go to her office and sit down. I was supposed to go to sign up for a class and I'd end up there two hours talking about my ex-boyfriend and what else was going on in my life. So those two things pretty much are what kept me here and pulled me through."

Moscar, who enrolled in ECU intending to transfer to UNC-Chapel Hill, has since changed those plans. "I'm going to stay here," she said. "I love it; I love the atmosphere here. And I have no doubt I'll finish on time." ♦

Growing debt prompts some students to give up, and others to "stop out" for a semester or more to earn tuition money.

Don Campbell is a freelance writer and a lecturer in journalism at Emory University.

Bringing “Dropouts” Back to College

The University of New Mexico's Graduation Project is the first of its kind among the nation's public universities

By Robert A. Jones

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

THE STORY OF ARELLANA CORDERO is all too common here: An honors student in high school, Ms. Cordero entered the University of New Mexico in 1993 with high expectations of becoming a college graduate. Five years later, with only 15 credits remaining to receive her baccalaureate degree, she abandoned her goal and dropped out.

Cordero's problem was not low grades or a lack of money. Rather, she left because, after five years, her college career had gone astray. She lived at home, felt disconnected from the university and had begun to doubt she would ever receive a degree, however close it might be. So when outside pressures of a job and marriage began to tug at her life, she walked away from college.

At the University of New Mexico and many other public universities, more than half of each freshman class will fail to graduate. Traditionally, these departures have been attributed to academic failure or personal problems, and dropouts have been regarded as the unfortunate losers in the Darwinian struggle for a higher education.

But recent surveys here and elsewhere suggest that a surprisingly large percentage of dropouts more closely resemble Cordero. These students—especially those who leave in their junior or senior years—maintain at least decent grades and lead otherwise productive lives while in college. They depart because something more subtle goes wrong: They get lost on the path to a degree, can't reconcile competing

pressures from jobs and families, and eventually surrender to the accumulated difficulties. The unraveling takes place slowly, ending not with a bang but a whimper.

Across the nation, little is done to rescue these students once they've left college.

But an innovative

An innovative project at the University of New Mexico is proving that many dropouts can be enticed into returning for a second shot at a degree.

project here at UNM is proving that many such dropouts can be enticed into returning for a second shot at a degree. And these students, once returned, are graduating at startling rates.

The Graduation Project, as it is called, is the brainchild of Associate Provost David E. Stuart. Founded in 1996 with a tiny budget and tinier staff, the program has systematically tracked down nearly 2,000 departed students and lured them back to campus. Thus far, fully 68 percent of the returnees are earning

their bachelor's degrees, and the program's graduate total has hit 1,068. In addition, 44 of the participants have gone on to graduate school or have earned a graduate degree.

Stuart, a burly 37-year veteran of the university who is also a professor of anthropology, says the high graduation rates prove that many of the myths about college dropouts are simply false. “We find that many of these people are good students and motivated,” he said. “They want that degree, and they will get it if given a decent chance.”

Because of the myths, Stuart says many of his colleagues were dubious when he first proposed the program eight years ago. “I'm sure the administration was humoring me when they said OK,” he explained. “They were thinking, ‘Here's Dave Stuart being himself again, so we'll play along. The program won't be successful, and we'll let Dave find that out for himself.’”

That skepticism has long since evaporated. The university's regents recently asked Stuart to expand his efforts, applying the techniques of the Graduation Project to current students who are in danger of dropping out. And university President Louis Caldera says that the Graduation Project's practice of forging personal relationships with its student participants, a key feature of the program, is “something that we need to clone in other areas.”

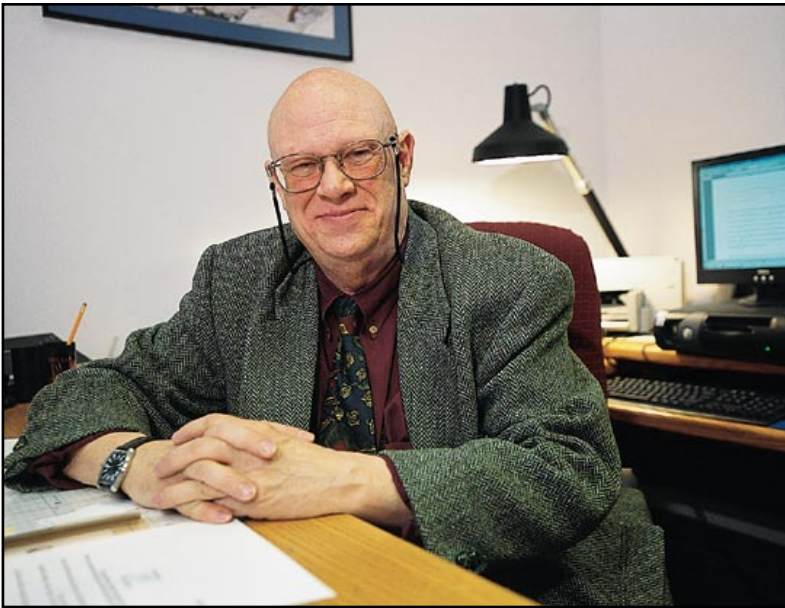
Caldera, who took over as president only last August, added, “I inherited the Graduation Project and can't take credit for it. But I can cheer them on. The program is so important because it helps us meet our mission, which is to educate young people and encourage them to think of their lives in the long-term and about the difference that a college degree can make.”

The Graduation Project has attracted attention not only because of its success but because it appears to be the first of its kind among the nation's public universities. In fact, when Stuart first began organizing the project in 1996 he searched for similar programs that could be used as models. He found

Photos by Jake Schoellkopf, Black Star, for CrossTalk



The University of New Mexico's dropout rescue program enabled Linda Marmon to return to campus and earn a bachelor's degree.



Associate Provost David Stuart has run the Graduation Project at the University of New Mexico since it began in 1996.

none and soon realized he would be forced to invent the program piece by piece.

The task was daunting. How would the university locate former students, some of whom had been gone for five years or more? What enticements would be effective in luring them back? And which dropouts would be recruited?

The last question was answered first. Stuart and senior program manager Danita Gomez decided they would seek only those dropouts who had earned 98 credit hours (124 are needed for graduation) and maintained a grade point average of 2.0 or better. The target group, in other words, would be composed of former students who were reasonably close to graduation and had left in good academic standing.

“Even with these cutoffs, we identified about 3,000 students that fit the model,” said Stuart. “We were surprised to see the group had an average GPA of 2.8, so clearly the students were not leaving for academic reasons.”

The trick of locating long-gone students turned out to be simpler than expected. The university contracted with TransUnion Inc., a credit reporting company, to run their student names through the company’s database. Because of the potential credit impact of such searches, the university required the company to construct a firewall that would separate the student search operations from its normal activity.

The approach worked. Soon the university had addresses and phone numbers for virtually all of its targeted walk-aways at a cost of \$1.90 each.

Then came the delicate business of approaching the former students. The university decided the first communication would be made via letter. But what should the letter say?

Stuart decided to offer a re-entry that would be as hassle-free and low-cost as possible. The strategy was based on his interpretation of university surveys of departing students taken in the mid-’90s. Those surveys showed some surprising results. Many students walked away because they felt defeated by the university bureaucracy and its complex, often shifting graduation requirements.

Many of these respondents fell into the “non-traditional” category, meaning they worked full-time, were married or had children, and usually lived off-campus. On many state university campuses such students are now the norm rather than the exception. It was these students, Stuart found, who were being defeated by the university bureaucracy.

Incredibly, said Stuart, many reported they often could not identify which courses they needed to graduate. And, even if the courses could be identified, the students frequently could not get into those classes because they were oversubscribed.

“They were befuddled, rudderless,” Stuart said. “They were saying, ‘I don’t know what it takes to get out of here and I’m tired of trying.’ And maybe they’d been offered a raise at their job and decided, ‘That’s what I’m doing, I’m outta here.’”

Stuart added, “I’m a UNM supporter, not a UNM slammer. But, boy, are we opaque. And there are a lot of other state universities out there, judging from their graduation rates of 36 percent to 42 percent, that have the same problem we do.”

So Stuart sat down to write his letter, in the belief that he had a fair understanding of the problems of the walk-away students. They needed to see a simple, direct path to a degree, and they needed a little help in getting there. He decided to offer them just that.

“We at the University of New Mexico care about the academic success of our students,” the letter began. “If you are still interested in pursuing that dream, we would like to help.”

The letter then detailed the enticements: a shortened re-admit application with no fee; a “degree summary” that would state exactly which courses were needed for graduation; priority enrollment in classes; and personal assistance when problems arose.

Then came the financial kicker. If the returning student had an old GPA of at least 2.5, or achieved it after returning, they would be eligible for a special Tuition Assistance Program whereby the university would pay half their tuition per year, up to \$800, over a two-year period.

The letter touched the right buttons, and in the weeks following, about 800 inquiries poured into the project office. Eventually 180 of those enrolled as returned students.

The project did not attempt to create a “class” of returnees. Rather, the strategy was to help each student individually and speed them toward a degree as fast as possible. One of the returnees was Linda Marmon, who now describes her dropout story as “classical.”

Marmon had left the university after getting married, with only 24 credit hours remaining for a degree. Financial problems had dictated the departure but she also felt stymied at the university. “Those 24 more hours had begun to seem huge,” she said. “You know, this is a big university and it can be overwhelming. There is an intimidating quality about it.

At the University of New Mexico and many other public universities, more than half of each freshman class will fail to graduate.

You're almost afraid to ask questions, and you don't know who to ask, anyway. So you get frustrated and you quit?"

For Marmon, the Graduation Project made good on its promise to ease those frustrations. The atmosphere of the project office was personal rather than bureaucratic, and it was oriented toward problem-solving.

"They showed an interest in me," Marmon said. "They called me, they sent letters. Their message was, 'You can do this, and we will help you.'"

Danny Hernandez, another member of the first class of returnees, said the experience was "like going from a class that has 40 kids to a class that has ten. They knew my name in the office, and they stayed in touch. Actually, they practiced a little light nagging that really helped."

Marmon graduated in May 2003, and Hernandez expects to receive his degree this year. Marmon says she is so enthusiastic about the Graduation Project that she has become an informal recruiter with friends who have dropped out. "I tell them, 'If you need me to take you by the hand and introduce you to the people in the office, I'll do it.' That piece of paper (the diploma) is really important to me, and I've learned how much it can mean to someone's self-confidence."

Several of the Graduation Project participants have especially poignant stories. One young woman believed she had actually graduated when, in fact, she had received an "incomplete" in a single course necessary for a degree. When she applied for a job she listed herself as a UNM graduate. Her boss checked and could find no record of a degree.

She was about to be fired for lying when she was contacted, coincidentally, by the Graduation Project. Staff members arranged for her to re-take the course and helped to smooth things over with the boss. She got her degree and kept her job.

In other cases—about 300, in fact—project participants have not actually attended classes at all. After entering the program, they discovered they had already satisfied all the requirements for a degree. Project staff members helped them move the paperwork through the bureaucracy, and they graduated.

And some participants need prodding. "Occasionally a student will come back to school, take one class, and leave again," said one project staff member. "They may be only three credit hours short of a degree. So we call him again and ask, 'What happened?' We don't give up."

The descriptions of letter-writing, hand-holding and problem-solving by the Graduation Project suggest an elaborate enterprise conducted by a sizable staff. After all, some 246 returned students are participating this year, and virtually all of them will lean on the office staff at one time or another.

But the project, in fact, operates on an extraordinarily lean budget. Besides Stuart, who also oversees the university's evening and extension classes, the staff now consists of a single project coordinator and two part-time student workers. A study conducted three years ago concluded that the project spent \$530 per student, excluding tuition aid.

Vanessa Shields, the project coordinator, laughs when asked how the small staff manages to convey such an impression of personal service. "You get very detail oriented.

You take care of many small things," she said. Besides, she added, everyone in the office has had his or her own problems in working toward a degree at the university. "The compassion level is high, you might say. Everybody knows what it's like," she said.

The benefits of the program extend not only to the returned students but also to the state as a whole, says university President Caldera. The difference in earning power between a high school graduate and a college graduate is dramatic, and higher wage earners pay higher taxes. In addition, he said, the state legislature in New Mexico is showing a renewed interest in getting the biggest bang for its education buck.

"The legislature wants to see a systematic increase in our six-year graduation rate. They've given us benchmarks, and some of our funding will be contingent on meeting those benchmarks," he said. "A program like the Graduation Project helps us along the road to meeting those goals."

Across the nation, many state universities face problems similar to New Mexico's. Nationally, the six-year graduation rate for public universities now averages about 54 percent, according to a University of Oklahoma study, and this figure has remained essentially flat over the last decade. But that average conceals sharp disparities between universities.

"That piece of paper (the diploma) is really important to me, and I've learned how much it can mean to someone's self-confidence."

—Linda Marmon, University of New Mexico graduate



University of New Mexico President Louis Caldera says the Graduation Project will help meet legislative demands that the six-year graduation rate be increased.

About 300 Graduation Project participants discovered they had already satisfied all the requirements for a degree. Project staff members helped with the paperwork, and they graduated.

The University of Virginia, for example, has a six-year graduation rate of 93 percent, and UCLA graduates 85 percent. In general, highly selective public universities such as these maintain graduation rates equal to those of top private universities.

The majority of public universities, however, fare considerably worse. In rural or poor states, public institutions have had difficulty raising their graduation rates above 43 percent.

According to John Gardner, director of the Policy Center

on the First Year of College at Brevard College, in North Carolina, many factors contribute to a high dropout rate, but the demographics of poor, rural states such as New Mexico put them at a distinct disadvantage.

"In these states the universities have large percentages of students who come from minorities, who are the first generation in their family to attend college, who must work

to pay their college costs, who do not live on-campus," said Gardner. "All of those factors affect retention. The white, male, residential student is a distinct minority at these schools."

Many public universities have now initiated programs encouraging students to remain in school. Those attempts range from the creation of cohort groups among freshmen, to mentor programs and special advisers for students in trouble.

But few, if any, universities have imitated New Mexico's program of retrieving dropouts from the larger community. Nor have they adopted the Graduation Project's strategy of helping students cope with jobs, marriages and children while they struggle their way toward a degree.

Stuart admits his frustration. "The problem of these kids trying to cope is national, and that is evident from the graduation rates," he said. "But I haven't been able to sell the idea. The conversation isn't being taken up at the large publics who are having versions of the same problem."

Stuart attributes the lack of interest to several factors, including the increasing focus on research at large public universities and the resulting lack of exposure among senior faculty to undergraduates. In addition, he says, there is "convenient denial" of the reality that many departing students are high-performing.

UPDATE **Back to College** **July 2007**

THE GRADUATION PROJECT at the University of New Mexico has been in operation for ten years now. Although David Stuart, who founded the project, is no longer there, his "brainchild" is still going strong. Vanessa Shields, the project coordinator, said that since Stuart retired, "new staff have to be constantly reminded to keep the word out there about the project, so students know that we're there for them."

The Graduation Project now has a few imitators, including programs at California State University, Long Beach, the University of Texas at San Antonio, and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

Shields, who has been with the project since 2003, said that 69 percent of returning students go on to complete a bachelor's degree, and that their number will have grown from 1,068, at the time of *National CrossTalk's* original article in 2004, to more than 1,500 this year. "Each semester we have between 180 and 260 currently enrolled students," Shields said.

The Tuition Assistance Program, for returning students who meet specific academic standards, has

also expanded. "We increased the amounts because tuition has gone up significantly," Shields explained. "We give 50 percent of tuition, to a maximum of \$500 per semester, up to a total benefit to the student of \$2,000." And there are plans to increase those contributions further.

When Stuart began the project in 1996, he could not find any

examples in the country of existing programs of the type he envisioned. But the Graduation Project now has a few imitators, including programs at California State University, Long Beach, the University of Texas at San Antonio, and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, according to Shields.

Three years ago we reported that some 300 students had been helped by the project to receive their degrees without even taking any additional courses. With the right guidance, they were able to graduate with the credits they had already earned. Since then, more than 80 additional students have fallen into that category.

Attempts to create an "early warning" system that could preemptively identify students who are at risk of dropping out have not yielded useful results. "It's still in the works," Shields said. "Right now there isn't a pattern that we can identify." And there are few resources to commit to such research. The Graduation Project has a minimal staff that includes one full-time person, a work-study intern, and a woman who came to work there quarter-time after she retired from the registrar's office.

"When this program started, they thought it would fizzle out, but it didn't," Shields said. "They thought that we would catch up to the demand, but it is steady business, good and bad. This project shows that there are some kinks, where the university is losing students. But those students want to come back."

—Todd Sallo

Attempts to create an "early warning" system that could preemptively identify students who are at risk of dropping out have not yet yielded useful results.



The University of New Mexico Graduation Project has a lean budget and a small staff, one of whom is Project Coordinator Vanessa Shields.

“If you don’t admit that they can be good students, you don’t have to take them seriously,” he said.

Another factor may be the traditional mindset of college administrators. “Universities tend to focus on recruitment of good students as a way of ensuring academic success,” said Jack Kay, associate provost at Wayne State University. “They’re not in the habit of thinking about stop-outs or dropouts as a source of graduates.”

But at UNM the enthusiasm for Stuart’s approach remains high. At the request of the university’s regents, his office has begun to investigate whether its dropout strategy can be expanded to include current students who are in danger of leaving.

As the first stage, Stuart has proposed an analysis of hundreds of dropout transcripts to search for telltale academic patterns that preceded the decision to drop out. Already, an informal survey of transcripts has suggested that such patterns

exist. Cynthia Stuart, David Stuart’s wife and the dean of admissions at New Mexico, joined in the informal survey and described the results.

“You see a gradual process,” she said. “It’s not like you’re looking at the transcript of a great student and then suddenly—boom—he’s gone. You see the student

taking some incompletes, cutting back his hours, the grades falling a notch. The student is reducing his involvement in the university. He is giving these signals long before he finally leaves, which means there’s an opportunity to take corrective action.”

If the early warning system succeeds, Cynthia Stuart says,

the student’s adviser could be notified in time to take that action and perhaps forestall the departure.

At present, David Stuart said, that preemptive move is not possible. “Right now, no one at the university is calling them up and asking, ‘What’s going on here? Is there a problem that we can help you with?’” he said. “We want to change that.”

In the meantime, the Graduation Project itself continues to feed returned students back into the system. The current group of 246 students includes Arellana Cordero, the honors student who dropped out needing only 15 credits to graduate.

After she left the university, Cordero began raising a family and built a real estate business in Albuquerque. By any standard measure, her life was successful. But the lack of a degree nagged at her.

“I have always been an overachiever type, and the idea that I never finished college just bothered me,” she said. “But re-applying to UNM presented so many obstacles. Once I even thought of trying the University of Phoenix (a commercial institution that offers degrees through correspondence courses) and then thought, ‘Nah, I can’t do that.’”

When Cordero learned about the Graduation Project she was startled to learn that it seemed designed to solve the problems she was facing at UNM. She quickly enrolled and began taking the classes she needed for a degree. She now expects to graduate in May.

And then? “I plan to get my master’s in business administration,” she said, and laughed. “And right away, this time.” ♦

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

Nationally, the six-year graduation rate for public universities now averages about 54 percent.



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 publisher 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."

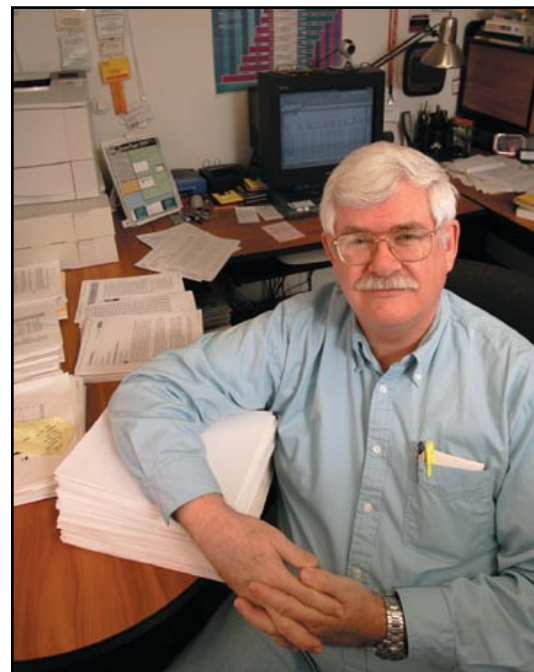
Today, the erosion of male presence on campuses is widely acknowledged by the education establishment and has been the subject of extensive media attention. Indeed, the evidence of the decline continues to be compelling and, in fact, has grown worse since Mortenson's original article.

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.

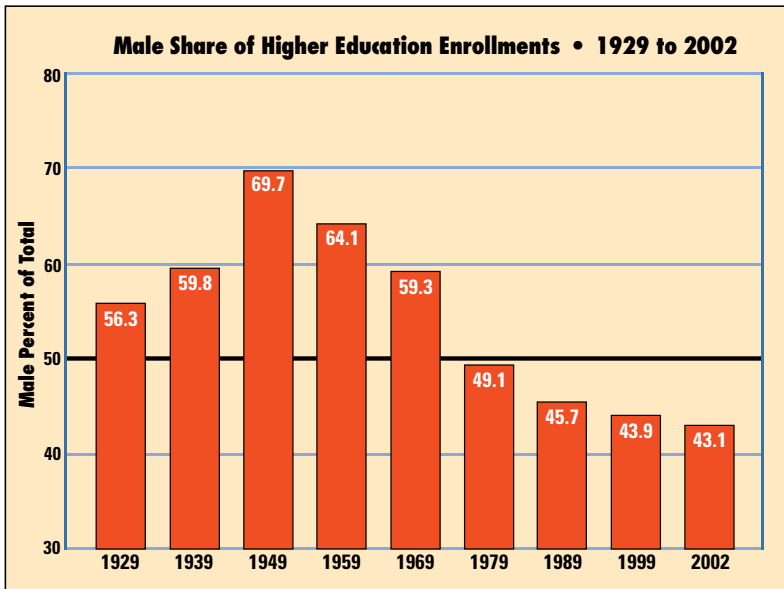
For boys, the downward spiral actually begins in middle and high school. Recent surveys have shown that boys study less than girls, make lower grades, participate in fewer extracurricular activities and take fewer college-prep courses. By the time senior year arrives, a large percentage of boys have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



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

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



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 science 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 coming 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 newspapers 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 ’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 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,

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

had grown steeper. Something big was happening. Mortenson began writing 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 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.

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

UPDATE

A Growing Gender Gap

May 2008

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL of academic achievement among young males was already a clear trend in 2005, when *National CrossTalk* published an article about this growing gender gap in higher education. At the time, Tom Mortenson, editor and publisher of the newsletter *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, sounded a decidedly pessimistic note, and suggested that matters were likely to worsen.

The issue has continued to receive scant media attention, at best, and Mortenson has seen nothing to signal an improvement in the numbers. In fact, the trend might even have accelerated. "The girls keep pulling away from the boys," Mortenson said. "We were looking at our data, state by state, and the share of bachelor's degrees going to men is the smallest it's ever been—much less than for women."

Mortenson is a fount of information about this issue, and can provide a ready stream of data. "What seems to have happened is that, over many decades, there is a constant share of males that earn bachelor's degrees, so all the educational progress has gone to women," he said. "They started way behind men, but today there are 2.7 million more women than men in higher education."

Across the board, male participation and degree completion hovers at around 40 percent. Men hold the lead only in doctoral degrees, of which they earn slightly more than half.

Mortenson's newsletter has increased its presence on the Internet substantially in recent years, and can be found at postsecondary.org. However, interest does not seem to be building. "We have been slowly losing subscribers since about 2003," Mortenson said.

"Last year we had to redesign our website to limit access to those who support our activities—paid subscribers. But we still let media people in all the time." In part, this is the result of Mortenson's decision to forgo advertising to subsidize the website. "I was contacted early on by one of the big student loan businesses," he said. "But I decided to do it without ads."

Gender disparities in higher education are an issue outside the U.S.

as well, and Mortenson recently attended a conference in Toronto on the subject, sponsored by the Canada Millennium Scholarship foundation and the European Access Network. "So much is happening in Europe," he said. "They are experiencing the same thing. Frankly, in a majority of countries in the world, there are more women than men in higher education. The Scandinavians have the worst gender imbalance." And while the notion persists that women are disadvantaged in education, Mortenson said, "it's males who are performing poorly."

"The Europeans are not really paying attention to this either," Mortenson added. "The problem of gender politics we have in this country, as far as I can tell, exists everywhere else as well. But the data are clear—the women keep pulling farther and farther away."

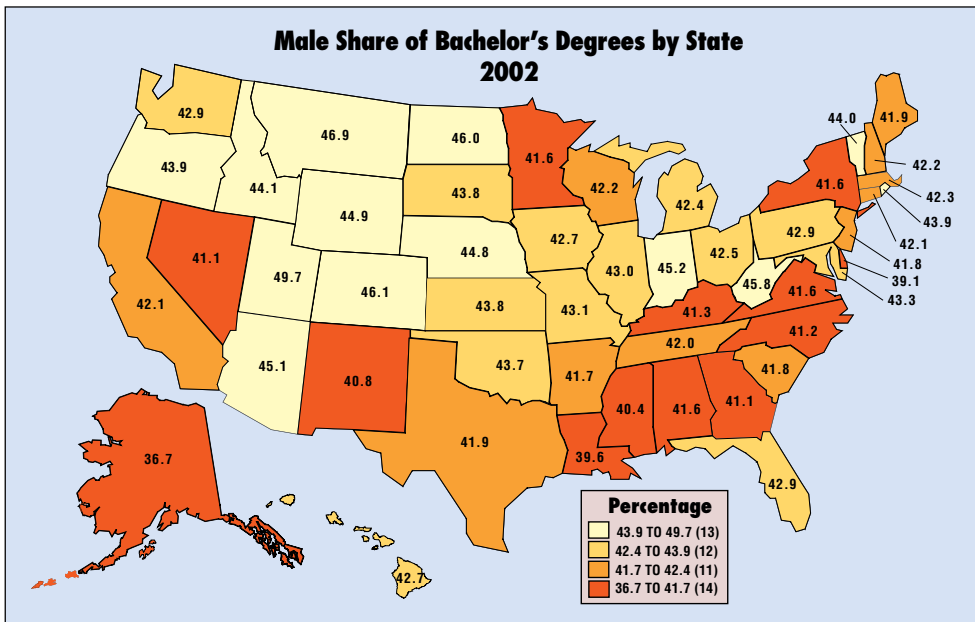
What's to be done? In Mortenson's view, women have been more successful than men in adapting to an expanding service-based economy, dominated by jobs in healthcare, business and professional services. "We are preparing our girls far better for the jobs that are out there than we are our boys," Mortenson said. "By and large, the jobs men have done continue to disappear, but the men don't seem to understand that agriculture and manufacturing are not coming back. Things can always be produced at a lower cost elsewhere in the world. There is nothing to suggest that men are going to be able to make it unless they get their act together and stay in school."

Any meaningful remedies will have to involve the K-12 system. "It's too late to practice affirmative action for boys who are already at the college level," Mortenson said. "You have to start asking why the colleges can't prepare teachers for the classroom who can engage the boys. I think it's fair to hold the colleges accountable for that."

While Mortenson's experience has made him a believer that change is possible, he has no illusions, and he remains dubious. When asked if he holds out hope for the future, his response was quick and terse. "Nope."

—Todd Sallo

Male participation and degree completion hovers at around 40 percent. Men hold the lead only in doctoral degrees, of which they earn slightly more than half.



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 participant 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 might reflect an unspoken affirmative action policy on the part of first-tier schools that 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 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.”

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

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

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,”

“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

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

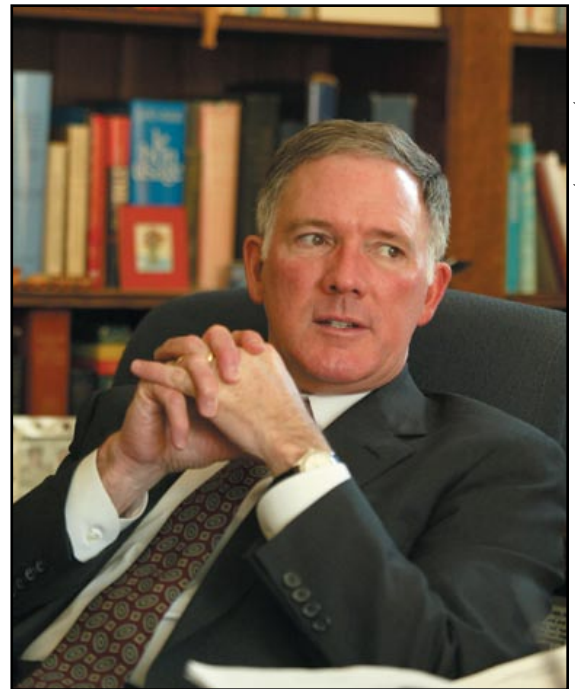
abuse,” Mortenson recalls. “The men were treating women badly, playing them off each other. Women were getting into fistfights over men. The social conditions were totally unacceptable.”

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.” ♦



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

Janet Durran, Black Star, for CrossTalk

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



Charles B. Reed

Cal State chancellor strives to promote quality and diversity in the nation's largest four-year college system

By Kathy Witkowsky

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

THERE ARE TWO THINGS you need to know about Charlie Reed, chancellor of the massive California State University and one of the nation's most respected higher education administrators. For eight years now, Reed has headed the largest four-year system in the country, using his unique blend of political instincts, competitive drive and direct, plain-spoken manner to keep Cal State "on the move," as he likes to put it.

Number one, Charles Bass Reed loves to work. "I don't think anyone can outwork me," he said during a recent interview. This is not a boast so much as a statement of fact, one that comes up in nearly every conversation you have about Reed. "His biggest strength is his dedication to the system, his willingness to work unbelievable hours, and his tremendous energy," said Murray Galinson, immediate past chair of the Cal State Board of Trustees.

Even non-fans—and there aren't many—concede that point. As president of the Cal State Faculty Association, the faculty union that has been in protracted and contentious negotiations with the administration for more than a year, John Travis has been one of Reed's harshest and most vocal critics. Nonetheless, Travis acknowledged, "Charlie has worked very hard to promote his vision. And I will give him credit for that."

Charlie Reed's vision, like the man himself, is at once both extraordinarily straightforward and extremely ambitious. He wants his 23-campus, 44,000-employee system to serve more students, because education is their ticket to better jobs and better health, which in turn will create a better economy. "That's what universities are supposed to do, is improve the quality of life of its citizens," said Reed.

And to do that, Reed says, Cal State must reach beyond its 405,000 students and into the state's K-12 classrooms, where many students aren't getting the education they need to succeed in college. More than half of all incoming Cal State freshmen need remedial coursework in English or math, or both.

Because Cal State prepares 55 to 60 percent of the state's public school teachers, it is in a position to improve that dismal remedial statistic. That is why Reed has been so focused on improving and expanding the institution's teacher training programs, which have grown 65 percent since he arrived. Cal State now graduates 15,000 teachers a year, but the state still faces a critical shortage of math and science teachers. So Cal State has undertaken a \$2 million, five-year effort to double the number of math and science teachers it prepares, from 800 to 1,600.

But numbers aren't enough, said Reed: Cal State must also improve the quality of teaching. It has begun to offer a free 80-hour retraining program for math and English teachers. Next year, it will compare reading scores of Cal State-trained

teacher classrooms to those of teachers trained elsewhere.

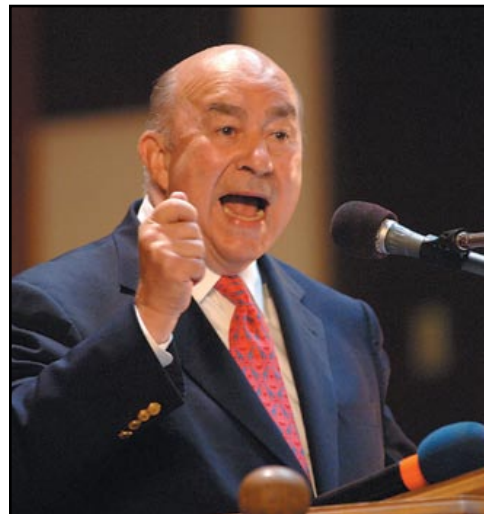
Also under Reed's leadership, Cal State has garnered national attention for innovative programs designed to help students prepare for college. One of the simplest is also among the best known: Cal State has distributed more than 70,000 copies of its free "Steps to College" poster, a Reed brainchild that spells out what middle school and high school students need to do to get there. It is available in five languages.

Meanwhile, more than 150,000 high school juniors have used Cal State's voluntary early assessment program, or EAP, which allows them to take an augmented version of a mandatory 11th-grade standardized exam so they can find out if they're ready for college-level work; if not, they still have a chance to catch up during their senior year. Should they choose, they can do so online, through tutorial websites Cal State has developed.

"He's one of the most important players in K-12 education," said Jack O'Connell, California state superintendent of public instruction, who refers to himself as chairman of the Charlie Reed fan club. "He's helped us break down the walls of all the segments of education."

Reed is trying to bust through racial and ethnic barriers as well. Fifty-five percent of Cal State students are minorities. That sounds like a lot, but the figure is still far less than it should be, said Reed, who wants the Cal State population to better reflect the population in the state's high schools, where more than two-thirds of students are minorities. So this year, Reed has stepped up the outreach, going beyond the public schools and into the communities of underrepresented students.

Top administrators from Cal State, including university presidents and Reed himself, have made presentations during Sunday services at 19 African American churches in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area to persuade potential students and their families that college is an important goal. Just seven percent of Cal State students are



Chancellor Charles B. Reed addresses the congregation at Oakland's Allen Temple Baptist Church, part of Cal State's extensive outreach effort.

Rod Searey for CrossTalk

Charlie Reed's vision for the California State University system, like the man himself, is at once both extraordinarily straightforward and extremely ambitious.



Tom Cogilli for CrossTalk

California Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally called Reed's church appearance "an act of political genius."

African American; only one third of these are male.

More than 30,000 people attended these two so-called Super Sunday events; afterwards, some people stood in line for nearly half an hour to collect the materials that Cal State was handing out. The enthusiastic response thrilled Reed. "If you've never had a grandparent or parent, brother or sister, who's been to a university, what the hell do you think you'd know about college?" he said. "They were starved for information."

The events garnered praise from the church pastors and congregation members. And Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally, who has been involved in politics for nearly half a century and currently chairs the California Legislative Black Caucus, called them, "an act of political genius."

"That was a coup," said Dymally. "I've never known a white college administrator to get into a black church."

Administrators from Cal State have also met with Vietnamese American, Native American and Hispanic community leaders. Cal State plans to continue the outreach, which will include two more Super Sundays next year.

In the meantime, Reed said, Cal State must also continue to improve articulation agreements with community colleges, the gateway for 55 percent of Cal State undergraduates. It must make better use of technology to help reduce the time it takes for students to graduate—currently about five and a half years for first-time freshmen—so it can accommodate more students. It must partner with industry to ensure that it is teaching the right job skills and providing internships.

And, armed with a recent economic impact study that quantifies the jobs and

the money Cal State generates for the state (82,000 annual graduates, 1.7 million alumni, earning \$89 billion annually), it must convince Californians of its value so it can raise more money from the private sector. The system still has not recovered from more than \$500 million in cuts it suffered

during California's recent budget crisis.

The success of the institution rides on its ability to make progress in all those areas, Reed said, because they're inextricably intertwined. It's a tough juggling act, but Reed thrives on the challenge. "I like keeping all those balls in the air," he said.

That he is able to do so makes him a rare talent, said David Ward, president of the American Council on Education. "He's without question one of the big thinkers about big solutions," said Ward. "As system president, he really does look at things from the broad social perspective rather than an institutional or campus perspective. And he does that very, very well."

Reed is up at five o'clock and at his Long Beach office by 6:30, where he prepares two pots of coffee for his staff before he attacks his lengthy "working list" of priorities, which is updated every couple of months, and which he has whittled down from 56 when he first took the job to a mere 30 today. In his eight years as chancellor, Reed has never missed a single workday; what's more, he routinely works weekends, putting in three weeks straight before taking a day off.

On his office shelves, surrounded by photographs and autographed sports paraphernalia, is a framed motto that sums up Reed's approach to life: "You work as hard as you can all day, and if you make a mistake, you fix it. That's all you can do." Now 64, Reed has lived by that creed ever since he was a child growing up in the tiny coal mining town of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, where he was the oldest of eight siblings, and where he met his wife of 42 years, Catherine.

She first noticed him when they were both in junior high. Reed had a job at a produce stand, and she and her friends would see him as they drove past on their way to the swimming pool. "One day I got my mother to stop at the fruit market and I asked why he didn't want to go to the swimming pool," recalled Catherine Reed. "And he said he really liked to work, and that was more fun for him than going to the swimming pool."

As much as Charlie Reed loves to work, he hates to lose. And that's the second thing you need to know about him. "He will never lose," said Catherine Reed. "It might appear that he loses, but he'll be back." And back. And back. And back. Until eventually, she said, he'll win.

Reed developed his competitive instincts on the gridiron, where he played both offense and defense. First he was quarterback and linebacker for his high school football team, which he led to the state finals. Then he played halfback and defensive cornerback for George Washington University, which he attended on a football scholarship, majoring in health and physical education, and where he later earned his master's degree in secondary education and an Ed.D. in teacher education.

Reed honed his political skills as education policy coordinator for former Florida Governor (and later U.S. Senator) Bob Graham, who came to value Reed's dedication and political instincts so much that he eventually promoted him through the ranks to chief of staff. Before Graham traded the governor's office for the Senate, Reed accepted the position of chancellor of the Florida State University system. He held the job for an unprecedented 12 and a half years in a state where, as Reed describes it, "universities are a political sport."

Reed has been focused on improving and expanding Cal State's teacher training programs, which have grown 65 percent since he arrived.

And like football, it's a game he learned to play exceptionally well.

"Football shaped his competitive, blunt personality," said Graham, who considers Reed a close friend. "He was not just a football player, he was a linebacker, which meant when the runner got through the defensive line, his job was to be at the right place at the right time and knock the guy's head off. That's kind of the way he works."

Just ask Carol Liu, chair of the state Assembly's Committee on Higher Education, who ran smack into Charlie Reed last summer. Reed had arrived one afternoon at his second home in North Carolina for some rest and relaxation with his wife, only to turn around and head straight back to California at five o'clock the next morning when he heard that a key legislative bill might die in Liu's committee. "I'd never, never forgive myself if I'd have stayed there and lost it," said Reed.

The bill authorized Cal State to offer independent doctoral degrees for the first time, in audiology (Au.D.) and education (Ed.D.). That was highly controversial, because California's 45-year-old Master Plan for Higher Education reserved the right to offer doctoral degrees for the more selective, research-oriented University of California system. Cal State is meant to focus on providing undergraduate education to the top one-third of the state's high school graduates; it also offers master's degrees. The bill was staunchly opposed by UC, which already had joint Ed.D. and Au.D. programs with Cal State, and by Liu, who also chairs the advisory committee for the School of Education at UC Berkeley.

But at the eleventh hour, Reed persuaded UC President Robert Dynes to remove his opposition to the bill if it was limited to the Ed.D. and did not include the Au.D. That was part of a calculated strategy on Reed's part. "The idea was to get as much as we could, but we said if we have to give up something, we'll give up the Au.D.," he said.

"I don't think of it as a horse trade so much as the best way to go about it," Dynes explained. "And once we got our egos out of the way, we both came to the same conclusion," he said: that it made sense for Cal State to offer the Ed.D., but that UC, with its medical facilities and healthcare expertise, should continue to partner with Cal State for the audiology degree.

After an intense lobbying effort orchestrated by Reed and the bill's sponsor, state Senator Jack Scott, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, it passed out of Liu's committee on a 5-2 vote. "I expected it to be a very hard fight. And it was a very hard fight," said Scott, who was subsequently named one of two "legislators of the year" by Cal State. Later, much to Scott's delight, the entire Assembly and the Senate approved it by overwhelming margins. "[Reed] knows how to get things done politically," said Scott, who, like Reed, is a veteran of both politics and higher education (he served as president of two community colleges). "He's quite indefatigable in the pursuit of things."

People who know him say the deal was quintessential Charlie Reed.

"The average college administrator, the best you can get is Poly Sci 101," said Assemblyman Dymally. As chair of the Assembly's Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, he has been impressed by Reed's accessibility, responsiveness and savvy. "But he's Poly Sci Pragmatic 101."

"He's a consummate politician," said California Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, who also counts himself among Reed's many fans. "Even when you end up being in a big dispute with him, he's a good competitor. He could persuade you that something was in your interests even when you didn't think so originally."

That was not the case with Carol Liu. She still believes that the bill was a mistake, and that the new degree will suck precious resources from Cal State's undergraduate programs. "This is an end run by Charlie Reed to get around the Master Plan," said Liu, who saw herself as its protector and was peeved that the UC administration abandoned the fight. "It's the camel's nose under the tent."

Exactly, said Reed, adding that it's about time the Master Plan was revisited. After all, he noted dryly, "The U.S. Constitution has been changed a few times, too." He is happy to leave the Ph.D. programs to the University of California system, but he hopes Cal State's Ed.D. program will lead to approval of more Cal State applied doctoral degrees. "That's going to change the character of Cal State," he said, by adding prestige and name recognition to the institution. (It could use some: When Reed introduces himself as chancellor of Cal State, people often assume he means the University of California.)

So was it a win, a loss or a draw for Cal State? "We won," Reed declared without hesitation. "Absolutely."

And winning, to Charlie Reed, means scoring one for the students. That is why Reed was at the state capitol in May, lobbying alongside students, presidents and other Cal State officials for a financial aid bill that Cal State and the California State Student Association had co-sponsored. "I think he works hard for the students and really tries to do what's best for the institution," said Jennifer Reimer, CSSA chair for the past year, explaining why the CSSA gave Reed its most recent Administrator of the Year award.

Reed is equally popular with the university system's presidents, who say he is a leader they can trust. Yes, he's brusque. Yes, he's impatient. Yes, he's demanding. But, they say, he's also honest, reliable and open to hearing their ideas. Ruben Armiñana, president of Sonoma State University, calls him "a pussycat with a really loud meow."

Paul Zingg, president of Cal State Chico (also known as Chico State) uses a different

Under Reed's leadership, Cal State has garnered national attention for innovative programs designed to help students prepare for college.



California Assemblywoman Carol Liu failed in an attempt to keep Cal State from offering doctoral degrees.

Paul Saarey for CrossTalk



John Travis, president of the Cal State Faculty Association, says Chancellor Reed largely ignores advice from faculty members.

animal analogy to describe Reed. “He’s something of a bull in a china closet,” Zingg said. “But I mean that positively. You know he’s in the room. And that’s good: to have folks be aware when Cal State is in the room. Charlie’s been very effective in announcing our presence and tying our presence to the agenda for the state of California.”

Reed does not receive such high marks from some Cal State faculty and the Cal State unions. But the days of faculty picketers and votes of no confidence—in Reed’s first year on the job, they were passed by more than a dozen campus faculties, incensed over what they

perceived as his disrespect for them—are long gone.

Still, there’s no love lost between the Cal State administration and the faculty, who feel they are overworked and underpaid. “Certainly there’s a lot of faculty anger over the salary and workload situation,” said Ted Anagnoson, immediate past vice chair of the statewide Academic Senate and a professor of political science at Cal State Los Angeles. “Probably too much of it is directed at the board of trustees and Charlie. Probably it ought to be directed more at the state.”

In the coming academic year, Cal State officials say, average faculty salaries are projected to lag 18 percent behind those at comparable institutions, more than 26 percent for full

professors. That is in large part due to the hit Cal State took during California’s budget crisis: Between 2002 and 2005, the Cal State budget was slashed by \$522 million, about 12.5 percent of its current \$4 billion budget.

At the behest of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Reed and UC President Dynes negotiated a six-year higher education compact that provided an additional \$218 million to Cal State this year, but that only covered a 2.5 percent increase in enrollment and a 3.5 percent increase in salaries, the first in three years. The compact also provides for continued funding for the projected 2.5 percent annual enrollment growth, as well as steady increases in base

funding of three percent next year, four percent the following year and five percent during the last three years of the agreement.

Some legislators were miffed that they weren’t included in the compact negotiations, and thought Reed and Dynes might have done better. But Reed defended the compact as fair. And California Secretary of Education Bersin praised it as

politically pragmatic, given the state’s dire fiscal situation at the time. “Charlie’s been around the block enough to know that pigs get fed and hogs get slaughtered,” Bersin said. Translation: You won’t survive long if you try to grab more than your share.

But now that the state’s economy is improving, union leadership has been critical of Reed for failing to advocate for additional funding. “Initially they said it would just be a floor,” said John Travis, professor of government at Humboldt State University and Cal State Faculty Association president. “They have treated it as a ceiling. They do not ask for anything more than the compact, and we believe that is just not enough.”

Travis doesn’t have many kind words to say about Reed, whom he criticized for not listening to the faculty, and for raising annual tuition and fees. “It’s always been kind of surprising to us that he distrusts the advice that comes from the people who are doing the business of the university,” he said.

But even Travis acknowledged that Reed isn’t completely to blame for what he characterized as the union’s “dysfunctional relationship” with the administration. “This predates Charlie. It’s always been very difficult to bargain with the administration.” And he said he was pleased that Reed recently hired a consultant to help improve his relationships with Cal State employee unions. “I think all of the labor unions see this as a positive development. It’s a recognition of a problem,” said Travis.

Reed, for his part, said he thinks the relationship has already improved somewhat; he also has said that he recognizes the need to close the salary gaps lest they jeopardize the future quality of Cal State. And in fact, the Cal State Board of Trustees has approved a five-year plan that begins to address the issue.

But Reed said that the union leadership is not grounded in fiscal reality. “They think there’s some money machine somewhere,” he said, with exasperation.

Reed doesn’t have a money machine, but he has told his presidents they must raise more funds from the private sector, which he says has been largely untapped by Cal State. “California has so much wealth compared to most other states,” said Reed. “And we have to figure out how to access that wealth.”

Meanwhile, he believes student tuition and fees should continue to increase ten percent a year until students are picking up 25 percent of the total cost of their education. Currently, he said, tuition accounts for about 23 percent. Even with substantial tuition hikes over the past few years, the \$3,164 average annual cost of attending Cal State remains far below the national average cost of attending a public four-year institution, which this year was \$5,491.

Reed could not say how much longer he would remain at the helm of Cal State. But he clearly is in no hurry to step down. Because California is ten to 15 years ahead of the rest of the country in terms of population trends, he believes that Cal State can serve as a national model. And he wants to make it a good one.

Besides, said Reed, “I think I would die if I didn’t go to work.” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

The Cal State system still has not recovered from more than \$500 million in cuts it suffered during California’s recent budget crisis.

The Engaged University

Northern Kentucky University is building closer links to its community

By Jon Marcus

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, KENTUCKY

THE INTRODUCTIONS have been made, the speeches finished, the endless litany of benefactors thanked when the blast of an unseen and unmuffled engine suddenly revs to life, shaking the arena and the polite crowd gathered in it with an ear-blasting, methanol-fueled roar.

James Votruba smiles. “It’s the faculty senate,” he jokes.

Nothing could ruin this day. Wielding a giant pair of scissors, Votruba is about to cut the ceremonial ribbon on the new \$69 million, 10,000-seat Bank of Kentucky Center at Northern Kentucky University, where he is the president. In addition to the university’s NCAA Division II men’s and women’s basketball teams, the arena is designed to host events including Cirque du Soleil, performers such as Carrie Underwood, and the Monster Truck Tour (which accounts for the interruption from the monster truck concealed from the audience behind a curtain).

The week before, Votruba had presided at the opening of a sleek new \$37 million student union with a Starbucks, a sushi bar and plasma-screen TVs. They showed, in continuous loops, the progress of the nearly \$300 million worth of building projects on his campus, which, just 40 years before that, was a farm where cows grazed on 400 acres of empty, rolling fields seven miles southeast of Cincinnati.

The youngest of Kentucky’s eight state universities, NKU began as a community college that didn’t formally become a university until 1976, but has since seen growth that seems methanol fueled itself, racing to an enrollment of 15,000—up 50 percent in just the last ten years. And it plans to add about as many undergraduates in the next 12 years as it did in its first 25, toward a goal of 26,000 by 2020.

What has put this once-provincial campus on the higher education map is its seemingly single-minded push to improve the lot of its surrounding region. It’s not some vague pledge. (Nor is it purely altruistic; if the public university helps the community, this perfectly reasonable strategy goes, the community will stand behind it.) A lynchpin of a regional development plan Votruba and others at the school coauthored, NKU has promised to help create some 50,000 new, high-paying jobs by 2015 and also help to double the number of Kentuckians with bachelor’s degrees to 800,000, as a means of supplanting the state’s traditional economic mainstays of coal-mining, horse-breeding, bourbon and tobacco, with advanced manufacturing, finance, healthcare, business services, and technology. That’s the reason for the push to boost enrollment—and the attraction, it seems, for rising numbers of arriving students.

To make the area more economically competitive, the university has taken on uncommon and audacious roles, beginning not with entering freshmen, but with elementary-

school children; training local teachers in such areas as math and science; recruiting high-performing high school graduates to attend the university; nudging its own students toward programs that meet the needs of local business—information, finance, science and technology, healthcare and social services; and working to attract bachelor’s degree holders from other states by beefing up its graduate-level offerings and enrollment, in a “brain-gain” strategy meant to reverse Kentucky’s brain drain by attracting some 8,600 college graduates from outside the region by 2020.

Lots of taxpayer-supported universities mumble about contributing to economic development but don’t follow through—a survey of American Association of State Colleges and Universities presidents and chancellors found that fewer than half believe their schools are closely linked to their communities. But NKU is making a name for itself by adding programs in such eminently practical disciplines as entrepreneurship and information technology management, opening a Center for Civic Engagement, even making faculty hiring, tenure and promotion contingent on community service along with teaching and research.

“Regions that make talent a central priority are anchored by high-performing universities that not only nurture talent in their classrooms and laboratories but also apply their knowledge to advance regional economic and social progress,” asserts the school’s strategic plan, which was the subject of a case study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “They are stewards of their regions.”

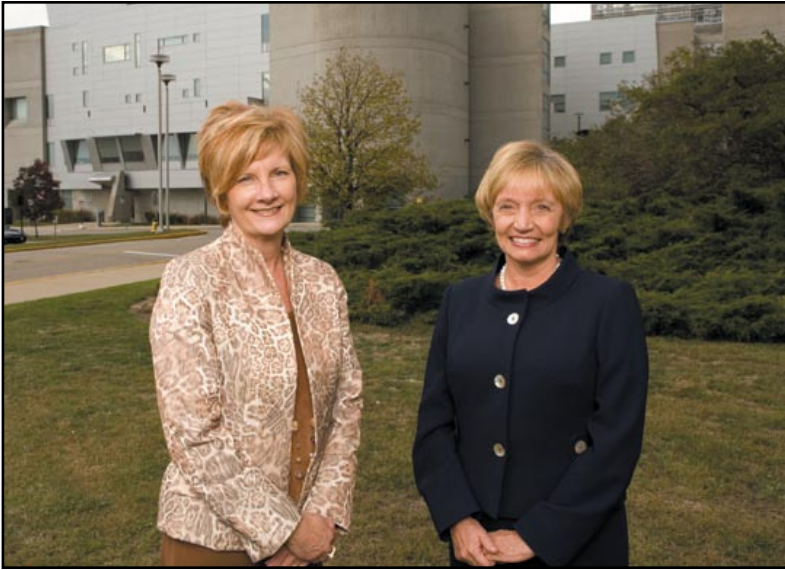
NKU was singled out by George W. Bush as an example of how public universities can be partners in economic competitiveness with businesses and civic institutions. It was one of 13 universities that helped the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to devise a voluntary higher education classification of “community engaged,” and was one



Robin Nelson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

President James Votruba of Northern Kentucky University has vigorously promoted ties between the university and the surrounding region.

Just 40 years ago, Northern Kentucky University was a farm where cows grazed on 400 acres of empty, rolling fields seven miles southeast of Cincinnati.



Sue Hodges Moore, Northern Kentucky University vice president for planning, policy and budget, and Gail W. Wells, vice president for academic affairs, say the university cannot suffer more budget cuts and still play a key role in regional economic development.

of 76 institutions ultimately granted that distinction.

Noting that its new arena “testifies to the university’s growing prominence in the economy of this region,” the *Cincinnati Enquirer* lauded NKU as a major local asset—this at a time when many other universities have yet to lower the fences that divide them from their neighborhoods. Votruba chaired an AASCU task force on public engagement (it found, among other things, that most universities were more concerned with adding programs, faculty and buildings than contributing to local social or economic well being) and delivered the annual AASCU President-to-Presidents lecture on the topic, “Leading the Engaged University.” He has been nicknamed “the mayor of Northern Kentucky” and was ranked the region’s eighth most influential person by *Cincinnati Magazine*.

Northern Kentucky seems a fertile place for such collaboration. Medium-sized metropolitan areas like greater Cincinnati are attractive to business, with low costs of living (Cincinnati’s is fully ten percent below the national average, and its housing prices 20 percent below), and with services employers need, including law firms and advertising agencies—without the unions and big-city social problems businesses don’t want. Cincinnati is already home to major companies, including Procter & Gamble, May Department Stores, and Fidelity Investments’ largest branch outside its Boston headquarters. Its new football and baseball stadiums for the Bengals and the Reds huddle up to the Ohio River, which divides Ohio from Kentucky. The area also has creditable cultural activities, and boasts a less-than-24-minute average commute, one

of the fastest in the country—an odd thing to promote, it seems, until you experience the unaccustomed bliss of coasting through a weekday rush hour without ever stepping on the brakes.

There are also significant challenges. The percentage of people with bachelor’s degrees in northern Kentucky is as low as ten percent in the western fringes of the university’s service area, far short of the national average of 27 percent. In some districts, the high school graduation rate sags below 62 percent. Per-capita income is \$28,513, putting Kentucky 43rd among the 50 states. The population is aging, as 25- to 34-year-olds move away in search of higher-paying jobs. Rural Kentucky remains largely agricultural, and what industry does exist is singularly vulnerable to larger economic shifts. Kentucky is fourth in the United States in the number of cars and trucks assembled, for example, and also makes car parts and jet engines, at a time when demand for those things is drying up.

The story of NKU is a cautionary tale in other ways, too. The university’s community-engagement crusade has stumbled against impediments both practical and cultural. For one thing, setting goals risks falling short of them when resources fail to keep pace, as they did here even before the current economic crisis. Kentucky’s higher education system got a surge of cash when it was overhauled under the groundbreaking Postsecondary Improvement Act of 1997, more commonly called House Bill 1, the goal of which was to increase enrollment and improve standards.

But budget shortfalls threaten to erode any gains. The state allocation for public universities had already been cut by \$23 million last year when it was learned it would be slashed by \$41 million more. Now state tax revenue is projected to decline by yet another \$900 million this year and next, out of a budget of \$20 billion. The governor already has proposed reducing higher-education funding by another 12 percent, putting even more of the burden on tuition, which now accounts for nearly two-thirds of NKU’s operating budget, and has been rising steeply.

Raising tuition, of course, makes it harder to increase enrollment. The regional economic plan, Vision 2015, calls for 4,005 graduates per year to be produced by NKU and other local colleges and universities. The state’s Council on Postsecondary Education has an even more ambitious target of 3,149 graduates per year by 2020 from NKU alone, which now produces 1,624. That would require an average annual enrollment growth of five percent, and an increase in the budget from the current \$186 million a year to \$571 million by 2020. It also means adding 460 tenure-track faculty and a million more square feet of space.

NKU has begun to warn that if the budget cuts continue, it will have to readjust, or at least push back, its enrollment targets. And with seven years to go, the closest answer anyone will give to the question of how many jobs have been created toward that goal of 50,000 is 2,540, an estimate made by the Northern Kentucky Tri-County Economic Development Corporation. “If we ask ourselves whether the campus is positioned to provide what both the state and the region require of us, the honest answer is no,” Votruba said last year in a somber state-of-the-university address.

NKU has publicly forged a united front with its fellow public universities to make a case for holding firm on funding, but there is growing friction as they all vie for the same finite resources. The well-connected flagship University of Kentucky has an ambitious plan itself, to become a top-20 public research

What has put this once-provincial campus on the higher education map is its seemingly single-minded push to improve the lot of its surrounding region.

university by 2020, by increasing enrollment, hiring new faculty, and increasing research spending. This would require an annual budget reaching \$1 billion, \$421 million of which would be requested from the already stretched state legislature.

Meanwhile, despite the attempt of House Bill 1 to foil costly duplication by giving each state university an explicit mission (the University of Louisville's, for example, is urban research), the universities have their own ideas. The University of Louisville angered frustrated legislators by planning a research center in *rural* health, and Western Kentucky University asked for a saltwater shrimp biotechnology program, even though Kentucky State already has a freshwater shrimp production center, and Western Kentucky University is 727 miles from the nearest ocean. Meanwhile, other areas, like Austin and Charlotte, threaten to surpass Kentucky with their own ascendant university-community alliances, to the frustration of Votruba. "The risk is that we lose momentum and become like everyone else," he said, gazing at the Cincinnati skyline through the windows of his office.

And everyone else seems busy hoarding what they have. Universities often measure their success by how many programs they can add—how many buildings they can build, how much grant money they can get—all to build up their prestige, Votruba said. Yet, from their beginnings, public universities "were never meant to be ends in themselves. They were seen as vehicles to achieve a larger end, an important partner in nation-building, or, more to the point, in region-building. As any industry matures, it runs the risk of losing touch with the constituency it serves," Votruba explained, citing the American auto industry as an example. "I think that has happened with higher education."

Have faculty been universally enthusiastic about community service? "The answer to that is unequivocally no," said Dale Elifrits, a veteran professor and NKU's director of pre-engineering and outreach. Even there, he said, some faculty just won't do it—even though the university has made "public engagement" a condition of hiring, tenure and promotion. Votruba's quip about the faculty senate notwithstanding, Elifrits said, "We have our group of faculty members who we know, no matter what we call and ask for, if they have time, they'll do it. And we know who we shouldn't even bother calling. The fundamental drive by universities to require or encourage faculty to publish and get outside research money is all-consuming." As for himself, Elifrits said, "My own view of a faculty member is you have a responsibility to the public to expand the body of knowledge, which includes reaching out to your community and helping to improve their lives and their productivity." He urges his colleagues, "Please, open up your ears and your eyes to the world that's out there and how you fit into it"

While, as Votruba puts it, other universities and many faculty are doing things the way they always have, NKU has found it slightly easier to do things differently. For one thing, while research is conducted there, it is not primarily a research university like those at which Votruba spent his earlier career (Michigan State and SUNY Binghamton). And NKU is such a relatively young school that there is less deep-rooted tradition to overcome. The first group of faculty members arrived to find one building in a field of mud. They held dual jobs (the

registrar also was a chemistry professor), and even planted a community garden. "A lot of universities are trying to move to this community-engagement idea without having had a history of it," said Gail Weils, the provost. "It's in our DNA."

The university's Center for Integrative Science and Math helps to train math and science teachers. Faculty and students from the music and theater departments teach and perform in local schools. In conjunction with the University of Cincinnati, NKU counsels low-income urban high school students to consider going on to college, and gives full scholarships to any qualified graduate from schools in two border cities where about a fifth of families live below the poverty line. This year it began a Ph.D. program that focuses on educational leadership, its first doctorate outside of law.

All of these things stem directly from Vision 2015, the regional development blueprint whose steering committee Votruba co-chaired and which he calls "a textbook example of how a university can graft itself onto an economic-planning process." Vision 2015 is aimed at trying to stop young talent from leaving, by adding high-paying jobs and improving quality of life with parks and green space, better schools, walkable business districts, even free wi-fi in the airport. And, in a region that is homogeneously white and Catholic, Vision 2015 seeks to produce the kind of racial and ethnic diversity employers want. (NKU has pushed for this last goal by, among other things, granting domestic partner benefits to unmarried employees, and by sponsoring public discussions of such controversial issues as evolution in a Bible Belt state that is home to America's only "museum of creationism.")

"One barrier to progress in a community is if it's insular," said Mike Hammons, Vision 2015's president, whose office overlooks the Ohio River from the Kentucky side. "It's helpful when a university takes the lead in establishing policies that are tolerant and welcoming."

NKU has done things on its campus, too, that dovetail with the economic growth plan. In only its eighth year, the university's Fifth Third Bank Entrepreneurship Institute is ranked among the top 25 undergraduate programs for entrepreneurs by *Entrepreneur* magazine, and has been lauded by the *Princeton Review* for the applied nature of the classes. The Infrastructure Management Institute

To make the area more economically competitive, the university has taken on uncommon and audacious roles.



Amanda Neace and Keith Wilson, editors of the Northern Kentucky University student newspaper, wonder if the campus can continue its rapid growth in the face of state budget cuts.

Chris Cone, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Douglas Perry, a cell biologist, is founding dean of the new College of Informatics at Northern Kentucky University.

researches management techniques in information technology. The university lured Douglas Perry, a cell biologist who helped create the nation's first entirely new school of informatics at Indiana University, to be founding dean of its own new College of Informatics, which encompasses information management, communication and media, computer science, information technology, and other fields important to the kinds of businesses northern Kentucky is trying to attract. All of the first 235 graduates got jobs, with average annual starting salaries above \$50,000.

Word of this is getting out. Since 2005, the number of freshman applicants has jumped 22 percent in spite of higher tuition and heightened

entrance requirements, at a school whose previous open-enrollment policy earned it the nickname "No Knowledge University," and whose most famous alumnus is actor George Clooney, who studied journalism before he dropped out. Forty percent of students are the first in their families to go to college. "We visited a lot of schools where nothing was happening," said freshman Michael Mann, who chose NKU over the University of Kentucky. "Here they're really doing things."

While more than four out of five NKU students are commuters, more, like Mann, are living in new dorms or sticking around between classes in the new student union. Students sipping Starbucks lattes browse brochures on tables set up by recruiters for FedEx and Procter & Gamble. "I see tons of people just walking around," said Keith Wilson, a

senior and opinion editor of the student newspaper, the *Northerner*. "When I first came here, people just didn't hang out." Amanda Neace, a junior and the paper's co-editor in chief, added, "People who came here like me just a few years ago wouldn't believe how much this place has changed."

Now the question is whether that momentum can continue. The university is trying to offset its continuing budget hits by finding new ways to save money—and to make it. Despite the \$3.3 million cut in its \$55 million state allocation this year, it shuffled the budget enough to pay for 61 new full-time and 116 part-time faculty. It plans to earn a profit from the Bank of Kentucky Center, and to add a

money-making \$30 million hotel, retail, restaurant and office complex at the entrance to the campus. It built the student center with the proceeds of a fee that students levied on themselves (in a poll by the *Northerner*, 83 percent said they considered it a good investment), saved \$20 million that was to have been spent on a new dorm by converting a nearby former nursing home instead, and opted to forgo moving to NCAA Division I, which would have required \$25 million in facility improvements. (Western Kentucky University had to increase student fees by \$70 a semester to pay for doubling its football budget, and spent \$49 million on its stadium when it moved from Division IAA to Division IA.)

NKU also has eliminated majors such as aviation management, and though local economic-development types are pushing for an expensive engineering major, it so far has not added one, teaming up instead to run dual engineering programs with the universities of Kentucky, Louisville and Cincinnati.

Even all of that might not be enough maintain momentum. "The reallocation was our attempt to say, 'What can we do to keep on track?'" said Sue Hodges Moore, vice president for planning, policy and budget. "But that cannot go on forever. Something's got to give."

Or, say university officials, the community will have to stand up for the university the way they say the university has stood up for the community. "It's not all about the institution. It's about what the state needs and what this region needs," Moore said. Now comes the biggest test of his community-engagement strategy, Votruba said. "The more tangible benefits they see accruing to them, their families, their communities, their lives, the more likely people should be to support us at budget time, at advocacy time," he said.

Hammons, the Visions 2015 president, is a believer. "We were the last regional university established in Kentucky, and in a sense we accepted that," he said. "Whatever we got, we felt we were lucky to get it. But about ten years ago that changed. We became a whole lot more aggressive, and we spoke as a community. And it's really important for the state to keep focused not on how we can cut the pie more, but how we can increase the pie."

Back at the ribbon-cutting for the Bank of Kentucky Center, which is connected to the rest of the campus by a pedestrian bridge, Votruba wields his giant scissors again and again with various groups of political and financial backers. "Last night, I got served a little bit too much of that poison, baby," Carrie Underwood's voice croons from the speakers. "Last night, I did things I'm not proud of/And I got a little crazy." The concessions are in full operation, and there are cheerleaders and an a cappella group to sing the national anthem. The air is thick with optimism.

"We need more Kentuckians to go to college. We need more Kentuckians to finish college if we're going to thrive as a community and as a region," Votruba says to the assembled. "Tens of thousands of visitors will come here each year. And they'll see this bridge as a bridge to their future." ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston, who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Reductions in state funding for higher education are putting even more of the burden on tuition, which now accounts for nearly two-thirds of NKU's budget, and has been rising steeply.

Investing the Stimulus

Metropolitan State College of Denver uses federal funding to reposition itself for the future

Photos by Eric Lars Bakke, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kathy Witkowsky

DENVER, COLORADO

METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE of Denver President Stephen M. Jordan didn't have to look far to find a playbook for dealing with the current recession. It sits on his bookshelf, in the form of a large black binder that contains materials from a graduate course he taught for seven years at Eastern Washington University, where he also served as president.

As part of the course entitled "Administrators as Change Agents," Jordan laid out two different strategies for coping with financial stress.

The first: Resist. In other words, continue, inasmuch as possible, to do business as usual. That, Jordan said, is the path to take if you think the financial crunch is short-term.

But if you suspect that the fiscal crisis you face is long-term, the better option, Jordan said, is the second of the two strategies: "Realign your institution." Translation: Suck it up and make the changes that are necessary to ensure your organization can survive in the new environment. That's the tack that Metro State is taking—or is trying to take, said Jordan, explaining why he chose not to rely on stimulus monies to backfill state budget cuts.

"I've had this philosophical construct in my mind for a very long time," Jordan said during a recent interview. But when the state of Colorado began to suffer from the economic downturn, the exercise was no longer an academic one. "Now I've found myself having to live it."

Thirty-seven projects, ranging from creating a bilingual website to tracking student success, are now in the works as part of Metro State's "Rightsizing with Technology" initiative.

he found out that federal stimulus funding would temporarily cover the entire shortfall from the state.

"I never had a doubt in my mind that we needed to do this," said Jordan. So the next question he asked himself was

this: "How can we use the stimulus money to make investments that will leave this institution better off?"

One historical lesson Jordan had absorbed came from the recession of the 1970s, when, he said, higher education administrators missed an opportunity to substitute technology for labor because they didn't have the cash. With stimulus dollars at his disposal, Jordan determined that he was not going to make the same mistake.

Quickly, he set the wheels in motion to improve the school's use of technology. Thirty-seven projects, ranging from creating a bilingual website, to tracking student

success, to creating an in-house call center for fundraising, are now in the works as part of the school's "Rightsizing with Technology" initiative. Some of the projects are expected to save or even generate money, while others are intended to improve the overall student and faculty experience, which, the thinking goes, should ultimately benefit the institution through improved retention and graduation rates.

Metro State is also using stimulus funds for an innovative retirement-incentive program for senior faculty, which will save money, and has fast-tracked plans to offer master's degree programs, which are expected to make money.

"Once this whole thing came down, and we started talking about the stimulus money, it didn't take long for Steve to say, 'All we, and every other institution, are doing is putting off the inevitable—because eventually the stimulus money is going to go away,'" recalled Robert Cohen, vice chair of Metro State's board of trustees. "So rather than take the money and do business as usual, and then fall off the cliff in a year or two, he said, 'Why don't we take this money and use it to retool ourselves?'"

In hindsight, Jordan's approach may seem like a no-brainer. But Dennis Jones, president of the National Center



Stephen M. Jordan, president of Metropolitan State College of Denver, chose not to rely on federal stimulus monies to backfill state budget cuts.



Adele Phelan, who chairs Metro State's board of trustees, says that college-wide discussions about how to deal with cuts in state funding were a useful, if painful, exercise.

for Higher Education Management Systems, said it's a departure from what he has seen at other higher education institutions. Based on previous experiences, Jones said, college and university administrators seemed to view this recession as a short-term problem, and the stimulus dollars as a viable solution to it. As in the past, the prevailing attitude, said Jones, has been: "If we just hunker down for a year—at most two—the economy will come back."

That was the sense Jordan got from the leaders of other public

Colorado institutions he encountered, who seemed "puzzled" by Metro State's response. "Clearly we were at variance with everybody," Jordan said.

In fact, Carl Powell, who as vice president of information technology helped design and implement Metro State's technology initiative, said that when he spoke with his peers from public Colorado institutions at one of their monthly

meetings last summer, many didn't even realize the fiscal realities on their campuses. "A lot of them weren't aware that they'd been cut or had gotten federal money and that it was just used to make up for those cuts," Powell said.

When Powell described Metro State's Rightsizing with Technology initiative, he was met with blank stares. "It was like I was a Martian or something," said Powell, who has since taken a position at Eastern Michigan University. "They all just looked at me like I'd grown a third arm."

By September, said Powell, those same information technology people, many of whom were being asked to terminate systems, clearly understood the seriousness of the situation. Their response to what Powell was doing at Metro State had changed from one of incredulity to one of interest. "But by then, the train had left the station, and they were all very much in react mode," Powell said.

Exactly how effective the initiative will be is an open question. But it will be answered. At the insistence of the board of trustees, Jordan has hired a consultant to track the investments and the results. Board member Ellen Robinson said that gave her the reassurance she wanted that the money would be well managed.

"Spending like this could be a deep dark hole and an excuse to spend lots more money if you get halfway through

projects that don't get finished on time or go over budget," said Robinson. She speaks from experience: In the late '90s, she founded a startup company that didn't get past the software development phase.

"That was my education, in terms of the school of hard knocks, as it relates to how difficult it is to be on time and on budget with technology," Robinson said.

The proof, as the saying goes, will be in the pudding. But at this point, Jordan is being hailed as a visionary by both his faculty and his board of trustees. "I would have to say that he is brilliant at moving things forward—at seeing what the next step is, and moving there," said Lynn Kaersvang, faculty senate president. "I am very grateful, as the chair of the board, to have an innovative, entrepreneurial, not-afraid-of-change thinker," said Adele Phelan, who chairs Metro State's board of trustees.

That was exactly what the board was looking for back in 2005, when it hired Jordan to rebuild the institution after years of budget cuts and administrative uncertainty. Founded in 1965, Metro State, which shares a campus in downtown Denver with the University of Colorado Denver and Community College of Denver, is not well known outside the city. But it is one of the nation's largest undergraduate-only institutions, with a steadily growing enrollment of just over 23,000, nearly a quarter of whom are minorities.

Jordan didn't waste any time as he set out to improve student and faculty morale and raise the school's profile. To date, he has added nearly 200 additional full-time faculty, 25 percent of whom are minorities; boosted faculty salaries; and become a strong voice for the school at the legislature and in the business community. He has set a goal to increase Metro State's Hispanic enrollment from 13 to 25 percent, a benchmark that would earn the school a designation as an Hispanic Serving Institution, thus rendering it eligible for millions of dollars in federal grants. And he has spoken frequently and without irony about improving the school's dismal graduation and retention rates and making

Federal Stimulus Funds Projects at Metropolitan State College of Denver

- An early-retirement incentive program
- Developing and implementing master's degrees programs that are expected to generate revenue
- Hiring additional grant writers
- Thirty-seven technology projects, including:
 - Creating a Spanish-language website
 - Software that will allow students and faculty to remotely access their courseware
 - Tracking student success to enhance retention
 - Phones and software for in-house fundraising
 - An online alumni tracking system
 - Integrating social media and networking for alumni and development offices

In 2005, Stephen M. Jordan was hired as president of Metro State to rebuild the institution after years of budget cuts and administrative uncertainty.

Given that Metro State was already the lowest funded four-year institution in one of the nation's lowest funded states, making further cuts was not going to be easy.

Metro State the preeminent public urban baccalaureate college, a western version of City College of New York.

And Jordan had no intention of letting a recession get in the way.

So in December of 2008, with the state facing a massive budget shortfall, Jordan

and his team began drawing up a three-tiered plan that would allow the school to deal with an expected cut in state funding the following year.

They designed three options: one if, as predicted, their budget took a ten percent hit; another if the cuts were deeper; and a third for what administrators considered a worst-case scenario. Those were established “with impressively college-wide discussions,” said Kaersvang, who said Jordan has earned widespread respect for his commitment to both the institution and the faculty.

It was a useful, if painful, exercise, according to Phelan. “You learn where your priorities are,” she said.

In May 2009, the school learned that the worst-case scenario had come to pass: Metro State lost \$9.9 million in state appropriations—about 20 percent of its state funding—for this fiscal year.

Yet even though they knew that federal stimulus funding would cover the shortfalls, Jordan and his board resisted the temptation to, as his academic model put it, simply resist. Instead, they followed their plan to absorb the cuts. The good news: The school managed to avoid layoffs. The bad news: It had to eliminate about 100 positions (they had gone unfilled due to a hiring freeze Jordan had imposed previously) and ax a faculty pay-for-performance system that had been in the works for three years.

But by doing so, Metro State has been able to allocate the \$10 million in stimulus money it has received this year to reposition itself for the future. Metro State is anticipating another \$4 million in stimulus funds for the fiscal year that begins in July 2010; if that funding comes through, it will also be spent on these new programs. “It was, in some sense, an opportunity for us,” said Jordan.

The Rightsizing with Technology initiative, designed to increase efficiency by saving time, money and resources, is receiving \$2.6 million in stimulus funds. (Because of restrictions on the use of stimulus funds, the school is spending an additional million dollars out of its general operating budget for associated hardware and software costs.) The ideas for the initiative’s 37 individual projects came from faculty, staff and students. They were chosen from a list of nearly 100 submitted proposals based on two factors: ease of implementation, which was paramount, because the stimulus money has to be spent by July 2011; and projected benefits.

The latter are more difficult to quantify. “Some of these [outcomes] will not be clear for a number of years,” said Robert Williams, who was hired to track the projects’ implementation and results. “Savings is just one aspect of it. We’re also creating new services and increasing efficiency.”

The initiative itself is going well, Williams said, with about half a dozen projects already up and running, including one that makes 3,000 professional development courses available online, free of charge to faculty and staff. But its name was an unfortunate choice, because it led some to suspect the school was in fact planning to downsize. (In the fall, as faculty were just returning to campus and learning the details of the initiative, Williams became accustomed to hearing himself referred to in hushed tones as “the Grim Reaper.”)

In addition, according to Carl Powell, the former vice president of information technology, the initiative faced political pushback from people who felt it was too time-consuming, and that Metro State should simply use the stimulus money as backfill. But Jordan’s support helped minimize the criticisms. “Having the president as chief cheerleader on this helped cut some of the naysayers to the side,” Powell said. “We always kept this as a presidential initiative and didn’t let it slide into being an IT initiative. We always said that would be the kiss of death.”

Jordan and his staff have also held numerous meetings to assure faculty and staff that, rather than reducing personnel, the initiative actually provides for additional hires. At least 17 of the projects will require one or more new employees. “What we did right was being very public about it,” Jordan said.

Now that those concerns have been addressed, Kaersvang said, many faculty members are excited about the addition of new technology, such as a system that will allow them to remotely access their work files and software. “At this point, I



“Savings is just one aspect of it,” says Robert Williams, a consultant for Metro State’s “Rightsizing with Technology” initiative. “We’re also creating new services and increasing efficiency.”

think faculty are pleased about the process,” she said.

Faculty are also happy that Metro State has earmarked stimulus funding for a retirement-incentive program, the idea for which originated from the faculty. The voluntary program, called Capstone, allows senior faculty who want to retire by July 2011 to shift out of the classroom and work on special projects that will be of long-term benefit to the school. Meanwhile, their salaries will be paid out of stimulus funding—the total cost is anticipated to be between \$1 million and \$2 million, depending on the response—and Metro State can hire less expensive faculty to fill their tenure-track positions.

Anne Hatcher, professor of human services and co-director of the school’s Center for Addiction Studies, is one of three faculty members who have signed up to participate. Thanks to the stimulus funding, Hatcher has been able to drastically reduce her teaching load and devote her time to designing a master’s program in her field that she hopes will be approved and implemented within a few years.

“I’m pleased to have the opportunity to do this, because I worked really hard to build this program, and I think this will just make it stronger,” said Hatcher, adding that many people have told her this is the best legacy she could leave the school.

Metro State also spent stimulus money designing curricula so it could fast-track plans for its very first master’s degree programs. Pending final approval by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, all three programs—in teacher education, accountancy and social work—are slated to be offered starting in fall 2010; they are expected to generate income within three years.

Other uses of the stimulus monies include hiring grant writers, who are expected to be self-supporting, and paying for scholarships and some adjunct faculty, which frees up money from the general operating budget for different expenditures, such as replacing outdated equipment.

“At the very time when you would expect the institution to be contracting at all levels, we’ve used this as an opportunity to re-look at ourselves and make ourselves better,” said Cohen, the board vice chair.

Indeed, on the Metro State campus, there is a sense that the school is gaining rather than losing ground. In addition to the stimulus-funded projects, Metro State is proceeding with plans to construct both a new student services building and a hotel where students majoring in hospitality will train. It is working to better serve and recruit Hispanic students en route to its goal of earning Hispanic Serving Institution

designation. It is laying the groundwork for its first-ever capital campaign. And, in the interest of branding, it is exploring the idea of changing its name to something less generic.

“Despite everything going on around us, it feels like we’re really moving forward,” said Sandra Haynes, dean of the school of professional studies.

If there is a downside to Jordan’s entrepreneurial



Lynn Kaersvang, president of Metro State’s faculty senate, says many faculty members are excited about the addition of new technology.

leadership, said Phelan, it’s that Metro State may wind up being a victim of its own success. “My worry is that if you present yourself as too self-sufficient, the politicians will latch onto that,” she said.

Lynn Kaersvang, the faculty senate president, shares that concern. She gives Steve Jordan credit for going to bat for the college, and for making the most of scarce resources. But she wonders: “At what point does it become impossible to do more with less? At what point does the infrastructure get thin enough so that it just breaks?” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowski lives in Missoula, Montana.

Founded in 1965, Metro State is one of the nation’s largest undergraduate-only institutions, with a steadily growing enrollment of just over 23,000.

Policy



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Diminishing State Support Pennsylvania reduces state aid amid recent tuition hikes and record enrollment

By Kay Mills
UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

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Vol. 18 No. 1 May 2010

Ohio's Brain Drain Reform of public higher education is intended to change perceptions and retain graduates

By Jon Marcus
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

THREE HANDS RISE tentatively into the air from among nine students in a lecture hall at Bowling Green State University in rural northwest Ohio.

That's the number of them—these three out of nine—who say that they expect to stay in Ohio when they graduate.

"Too cold," says one of the students who didn't raise his hand, as the others chuckle.

"Too boring," pipes in another, provoking more giggles.

"No jobs," says a third, much more seriously, eliciting a somber murmur of agreement.

Changing these students' perception of Ohio, and Ohio's about them, is at the heart of one of the most high-stakes and far-reaching reforms of public higher education in America—more dramatic still for

economic recession is particularly severe, and at a time when even healthier states are shrugging off huge budget cuts to public universities and colleges.

Ohio's governor, Democrat Ted Strickland, has backed the trend by making public higher education a financial and political priority, on the grounds that educated graduates and laboratory research with commercial potential are the lynchpins of an economic comeback. And the universities

The universities in Ohio—unusually independent of each other, and traditionally fiercely competitive—have slowly bowed to the pragmatism of collaboration.

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Ohio State University, with its main campus in Columbus, is part of the University System of Ohio, which was created in 2007 and includes 13 public universities, a medical college, and 23 community colleges.

themselves—unusually independent of each other in Ohio, and traditionally fiercely competitive—have slowly bowed to the pragmatism of collaboration, steered by a chancellor who is not shy about using new financial realities to prod them into it

barrasing any campuses that fail to meet his goals).

"The University System of Ohio is going to be the model of the 21st-century university system," vowed the chancellor, Eric Fingerhut, a former state senator and con-

Does California's Master Plan Still Work?

Separate higher education systems pursue different mandates, while participation and graduation rates decline

By Pamela Burdman

IN THE LATTER HALF of the 1990s, a series of reports urged California policymakers to prepare for the imminent arrival of baby-boomers' children at the doors of California's colleges and universities. The consequences of the predicted surge in enrollments would be dire if the state was not ready, said the reports, which bore somber titles like "Breaking the Social Contract" and "California at the Crossroads." Another report referred to a "hurricane" threatening "California's historic commitment to college opportunity." Amid the metaphors, one took hold as the symbol of the coming generation of college students: It was Tidal Wave II, coined by Clark Kerr, the architect of California's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education.

Some, most notably the state's Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), dismissed the predictions. "I don't know who's calling it a tidal wave. It's a catchy word. But it's a poor metaphor. A tidal wave is uncontrollable," an LAO staffer told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, accusing higher education leaders of inflating the projections for their own benefit. "For every student, they hire faculty, they get money," he said. In its report, the LAO insisted that college-going rates of the various ethnic groups would remain constant. Because Latinos, with historically low college-going rates, were the fastest-growing segment of the population, California would see only modest enrollment growth—and a decline in actual participation rates, the agency concluded.

The assumption that those low participation rates could not be nudged up by public policy action was sharply countered by higher education experts, as was the report's recommendation that enrollment be "managed" by increasing fees and tightening admissions requirements. "Anybody who would say, as a matter of public policy, that the participation rates among blacks and Latinos are okay, is not being realistic about the needs of this state," noted Jerry Hayward, then-director of Policy Analysis for California Education and a retired chancellor of the state's community college system. Others warned that a failure to reduce ethnic gaps in participation rates could leave the state sitting on a keg of "social dynamite."

A decade later, the tidal wave had yet to hit shore. By 2005, the year that many of the reports used in their analyses, California's public higher education institutions were enrolling roughly 200,000 students fewer than the higher projections had suggested. And in early 2008, as the state prepared to address what a higher education advocate called "one of the most difficult and contentious budget cycles in the state's history," the accumulation of trends was worrisome:

- **A sharp drop in the percentage of students going to college directly after high school.** In 1985, about 62 percent of high school students went straight to a public institution of higher education (with the majority going to community colleges). By 2005, the figure was just 46 percent, according

to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC). The trend is of concern because direct enrollment is linked to success in college.

- **A continued racial gap in both high school graduation and college participation.** In 2005, only 26 percent of Latino ninth-graders and 29 percent of African Americans entered college within four years, compared to 37 percent of whites and 63 percent of Asians. With Latinos the fastest-growing population, the pattern is not a good omen.
- **A decline in the state's overall education level.** According to an analysis by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, WICHE, each successive California generation is less educated than the preceding generation. While nationally, 25-to-34-year-olds are better-educated than the 55-to-64-year-old cohort, in California the opposite is true. The decline looks even more stark when compared with international trends.

"People are having a hard time understanding that California is not still at the top of the heap," said John Douglass, an educational historian at UC Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education. "Most people have no idea that we have such low BA production rates. In the last thirty years, the state has basically not done anything innovative to its higher education system. We're at the bottom of the barrel, where we used to always be at the top."

Averting this particular tidal wave is not necessarily a good sign, but how to explain its absence is unclear: Was the analyst right in denying the imminence of a crisis? Did actual fee increases and greater admissions restrictions at the state's four-year universities effectively "manage" enrollments away? Or were the lower numbers a case of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the state's failure to prepare for escalating enrollments or stimulate minority college-going effectively curtailed access, as the reports had warned?

And is the tidal wave's absence largely responsible for the



Clark Kerr, the first chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, and 12th president of the University of California, was the architect of California's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education.

Each successive California generation is less educated than the preceding generation, according to an analysis by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.



“California’s economic future, its cultural and community future, is tied to how well-educated its citizens are going to be,” says Charles Reed, chancellor of the 23-campus California State University system.

declining education levels in the state? Or are low completion rates to blame? Each of the suppositions has some merit—and several of them might be true. But to higher education insiders, perhaps the most troubling trend of all is the fact that so few have even noticed, let alone responded to, California’s slide. Indeed, in the years that California would have been addressing the crisis, the state’s higher education establishment appeared to be fraying.

For nearly 50 years, California’s higher education system had been defined by the state’s vaunted Master Plan and its tripartite system. The plan’s bold vision of access and quality safeguarded a system of selective research universities and provided baccalaureate education through the less-selective California State University system, while simultaneously ensuring broad access to higher education through a far-flung network of community colleges.

For decades, the Master Plan had been credited for the state’s superior education level and strong public research universities.

But by early 2008, even before the extent of the budget deficit was known, there were visible signs of strain. Interim CEOs were leading two of the systems after the abrupt resignations of incumbents the year before: At the ten-campus University of California, Robert Dynes retained the president’s title, but had been effectively pushed aside after a series of executive compensation scandals. The university’s operations were officially in the hands of the provost, but some insiders alleged that a “shadow government” of the university’s regents was really in charge.

While UC was trying to address the effects of ten years of bureaucratic accretion—the president’s office staff had grown by more than 25 percent over that period—the community colleges were facing the opposite problem. The system office had been forced to cut its Sacramento staff by 25 percent over the same period, to the point that it employed 130 full-time individuals—fewer than the UC president’s office information technology staff alone. When Chancellor Marshall Drummond vacated his job at the helm of the 109-campus community college system in the summer of 2007 to return to his prior post with Los Angeles’ community college district, he made it clear that the minimal staff and lack of authority made the job hard to bear. A salary under \$200,000—less than many district chancellors—apparently didn’t help.

While the challenges in the two systems complicated the search for strong leaders, the 23-campus California State University retained stable central leadership in Charlie Reed, an aggressive and policy-savvy leader with increasing clout in Sacramento after ten years on the job. Yet his straight-talking ways had earned him some enemies, especially among his own faculty and within the community college ranks, where he had become something of a lightning rod.

But other leadership was scarce. CPEC, never a powerful coordinating body, had dwindled from a staffing level of 52 in the

early 1990s to just 22 by 2007. Only sporadically had a series of education secretaries appointed by Schwarzenegger even hired a higher education specialist. In the legislature, leadership was also a problem: Committee service in a sector dominated by public institutions unable to make political contributions was attractive only to those with the purest of motives, noted Christopher Cabaldon, an education lobbyist and former aide in the state assembly and the community college system. Even for those dedicated to policy, higher education was a challenge, because of the dominance of three independent segments, especially the University of California, which often touted its “constitutional autonomy.”

In the legislature, the primary remaining stalwart for higher education, Democratic Senator Jack Scott, was entering his final year in office, with the ranks of lawmakers devoted to improving higher education having been winnowed by a 1990 term limit law. “Where’s Gary Hart and Alquist and John Vasconcellos and Becky Morgan?” asked former Cal State Chancellor Barry Munitz, now a professor at Cal State Los Angeles, referring to some of the “legislative lions” who had championed higher education issues in previous eras. “There are too many people confused about with whom to even speak to get something done at the state level,” said Munitz, who now heads the state’s P–16 council.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had proclaimed 2008 the “year of education.” But whether that year would include postsecondary education remained a topic of frequent speculation among higher ed insiders even before the budget projections cast a pall on the whole endeavor. It was not at all clear what comprehensive statewide agenda for higher education could emerge, since no serious statewide policy discussion had occurred.

“We have seen state policymaking in the last decade continue to go from pillar to post based solely on short-term political pressures and how many dollars are in the state treasury,” noted Steve Weiner, a retired higher education official who has held leadership positions at UC, the community colleges, as well as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. “As far as I can tell, the leadership of the state of California is completely asleep at the switch, when it comes to education, and particularly higher education.”

Weiner and other higher education observers have puzzled over why there has been so little appetite for addressing a crisis long in the making, visible to analysts for at least a decade. Instead of focusing on the pressing need to maintain and increase education levels, higher education policy discussions have been consumed with narrower issues: the unraveling of affirmative action at UC in the late 1990s, a series of fee increases that shocked students beginning in 2003, and controversies related to executive pay at UC and Cal State, to name a few.

Each of these concerns is a sign of the state’s changing demographics, and also of its declining commitment to higher education, a decline that is at odds with the increasing necessity of postsecondary education to sustain both individuals and states. But the state’s biggest challenges have not been the focus of concerted attention, let alone a state-level policy response.

“For a state that is facing some serious issues, relatively little has changed,” said David Longanecker, director of WICHE. “In the mid-1990s, the state was projected to face a huge tidal wave

of new students. So they responded by creating an elite campus in Merced, serving an enrollment of only a few thousand for the foreseeable future, and a specialized campus in Monterey Bay. It didn't seem to me to be critical to the state's most pressing needs. If you were to have a good policy analyst from the moon come down, they would take a look and say there is not a heck of a lot that has changed over the last ten years."

In addition to the two campuses cited by Longanecker—UC's Merced campus and Cal State Monterey Bay (which opened in 1994)—Cal State has added its Channel Islands campus, and four community colleges have opened. To serve an influx of 400,000 students over a decade, the state has added seven campuses—plus a series of satellite campuses and off-campus centers.

The absent sense of urgency may be partly attributable to the fact that the trends are not clearly visible in indicators that seem important. As Longanecker noted in a presentation to CPEC commissioners in September 2007, "You're still third on the New Economy Index; you're still the 12th wealthiest economy. One of the reasons we see the South making more progress with higher education is because they see themselves as distressed and the rest of us don't."

National comparisons based on federally collected data are also confounding: They show California ranking among the top dozen states in graduation rates at both two- and four-year institutions. But those figures do not account for two factors: First, a smaller proportion of students attend four-year universities, making the state highly dependent on the volume and success of community college transfer students to boost baccalaureate production. In California, 46 percent of postsecondary enrollments are at community colleges (when private institutions are included), almost double the national median of 25 percent. Only two other states enroll anywhere close to California's share (Wyoming and Washington, with 47 and 46 percent, respectively). Secondly, the statistics typically don't include part-time students, who complete college at much lower rates, and who account for a far greater proportion of students in California than in the rest of the country. This is particularly true at community colleges, where 70 percent of California students attend part-time, compared with 58 percent nationally.

Given California's larger community college enrollment, these factors mean that a significant proportion of California students are not accounted for in federally tracked graduation rates.

For example, for its four-year universities, federal statistics show California with a six-year graduation rate of 62.5 percent, well above the national average of 56.4 percent in 2006. According to numbers provided by the systems, UC's six-year graduation rate was 80.4 percent while Cal State's was just 47.8 percent. In addition, both state and federal data show that these rates have improved noticeably over the last decade. On national comparisons of three-year graduation rates for community colleges, California ranks third with a 46.3 percent graduation rate. But when part-time students are included, other analysts have found that roughly 25 percent of students seeking to transfer or complete a degree or certificate do so within six years of enrolling.

Actual transfer rates depend on the denominator that is chosen: In a 2007 study, MPR Associates found that for the

2000 entering class, among students who had completed any transferable classes, six percent transferred to UC and 11 percent to Cal State. Of those students who had reached "college pathway status," which means that they had completed 12 units, six percent transferred to UC and 16 percent to Cal State. Using a narrower denominator—those students who had completed transfer requirements—16 percent transferred to UC and 45 percent to Cal State. Another seven percent went to private or out-of-state institutions.

Another obstacle to advancing a higher education policy agenda is that when policy discussions do center around the failures of the state's education system, they invariably concentrate on the poor performance of the state's K–12 schools. But while California spends less than other states on K–12 schools and gets worse results, the trend is different with higher education, where California, by some measures, spends more than other states. For each bachelor's degree produced, California spends \$73,000, far more than the national average of \$63,000, according to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC).

The statistics do not seem to have confused the public, however. In a recent statewide survey, a perception of dwindling postsecondary opportunity was a strong theme: 65 percent of Californians (up from 48 percent in 2000) said that many who are qualified to go to college don't have the opportunity. That is particularly problematic when nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said a college education is necessary to succeed in today's economy. "This makes for a high-anxiety issue," noted Mark Baldassare, president of PPIC, in releasing the poll. "People are saying that the very thing they need to be successful, that their children need to be successful, and that the state needs to be successful, may not be attainable."

For the failure to tackle these trends, some analysts fault the very durability of the Master Plan, saying that devotion to it may explain why the state's leadership has not come to terms with serious threats to the performance of higher education in California. Because of the strength of the individual segments, it is harder for policymakers to see the forest (the needs of the state and its students) for the trees (three powerful public higher education segments). Despite rapidly changing demographics, there is no system of clear accountability for longitudinal outcomes.

"The structures put in place in 1960 are overwhelmed by today's issues," wrote Nancy Shulock, director of the Sacramento State University Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, in 2004. "In 1960 our public colleges and universities served a small and homogeneous portion of the young adult population. Today's public colleges and universities must serve a large and diverse population of students whose demographic characteristics and attendance patterns are profoundly different than in 1960. And they must do so within a more competitive environment—both with respect to other postsecondary institutions and other demands on public resources."

In a fairly damning 2004 assessment of the Master Plan, Jeff Lustig, a government professor at Sacramento State, wrote, "That a state with 20 million residents and nine public Ph.D.-granting

California's biggest challenges have not been the focus of concerted attention, let alone a state-level policy response.

institutions in 1970 should, in 2004, with 35 million residents and a “tidal wave” of new students (Kerr’s term), still have only the same nine public Ph.D.-granting universities, and growing obstacles to student access to its lower-track institutions is partly the result of that plan.”

Part of the problem may be that the least powerful of the three segments—the community college system—is actually the most important link in the chain. The idea of a strong system of public two-year colleges initiated in California and was codified in the Master Plan. In designating that only the top one-third of high school graduates could attend one of the state’s universities, the plan assigned the community colleges to serve any remaining student who could benefit from postsecondary education. As higher education has become increasingly necessary for anyone wishing to pursue career-path employment, the colleges have become more and more critical to ensuring that postsecondary attainment.

However, while higher education has historically embraced community colleges’ access mission, the state’s vision for them has only recently begun to include completion and transfer rates. “The Master Plan is access, access, access,” noted Charlie Reed of Cal State. “Today it’s access and completing the degree and getting out and going into this workforce that California has.” A state that routes a greater proportion of students to attend community colleges must ultimately have a more effective

transfer system in order to address the need for baccalaureate degrees.

And, as if that weren’t a great enough challenge, California’s colleges must do so with fewer dollars than community colleges in other states—and with less than the K–12 system. Though state subsidies in California approach the national average, extremely low fees and minimal investment in financial aid puts the community college system at a serious disadvantage compared to other states. California’s colleges receive roughly \$5,500 per student in fees and state funding per year, compared with nearly \$7,000 in other western states, according to WICHE.

Despite being chronically underfunded, the colleges are struggling to serve large numbers of students coming to them unprepared for college classes. More than 70 percent of students who take a placement exam are assessed as performing below college-level—the combined result of poor K–12 preparation and delays in college attendance. Of those who take remedial courses in English, only 41 percent attempt a transfer-level class within three years. Even fewer—just 14 percent—do so in math.

Addressing such dismal data is a challenge, given that by early 2008 the state had not developed any specific goals regarding the state’s education level or strategies for increasing it. An opportunity to do so came and went in the three-year period from 1999 to 2002, when the Master Plan was revisited. Despite an effort by state Senator Dede Alpert to rewrite the plan, the final document barely altered the original version, aside from the addition of sections on K–12 education. And even those modest changes were never enacted into law.

Since then, the only significant departure has been the 2005 vote of the legislature to allow Cal State to offer doctorates

in education, Ed.D. degrees, despite UC leaders’ fears about lowering academic quality and opening the door for Cal State to further encroach on their turf. Indeed, a new proposal surfaced in 2008 to extend the doctorate to nursing as well.

Today, even long-time devotees of the Master Plan have begun to question its utility in the 21st century. “California has basically a structural inadequacy in dealing with the educational needs of California and its long-term competitiveness,” said Douglass. “I came to this reluctantly, because I’ve always had a strong sense of the magic and power of California’s tripartite structure.

“For a long time, I kept thinking it just needs to be healthier, if you could just enhance the system and have better funding mechanisms for the community colleges. I think now that there’s just a structural flaw that goes beyond funding. California was an innovator that kept doing things to change the system at the margins. In the last 30 years, it’s basically not done anything innovative to its higher education system. The vision of 1960 is not one that meets the socioeconomic needs of a state like California and its long-term economic competitiveness.”

The closest thing to goal-setting has been a series of “compacts” between the state and its four-year universities, guaranteeing funding and fee levels over a four-year period in exchange for some additional reporting. Because of constraints on state funding sources, the agreements have not prevented an outcry over rising fees. Since the fall of 1997, tuition and fees have risen from \$4,212 to \$7,347 at UC, and from \$1,946 to \$3,451 at Cal State. Community college fees increased from \$13 per unit (\$390 for 30 units) to \$26 per unit (\$780) in 2006, and back down to \$20 per unit (\$600) in 2007—about one-quarter of the national average. Nevertheless, the four-year institutions favor the compacts because of the predictability they offer.

“The compacts have introduced stability because the institutions know that it’s a guarantee, and it seems to be non-partisan because it’s passed from Governor Wilson to Davis to Schwarzenegger,” noted Shulock. “But there’s no teeth in them. There are no state priorities. They just require that UC and Cal State report certain things. They don’t say we want you to improve transfer or help the state meet its shortage of computer scientists or engineers. They’ve been a good thing for the institutions, but I don’t think they’ve been tapped for their potential to be a good thing for the state.

“The governor just shakes hands with the president of UC and says here’s what you’re getting. Community colleges don’t fit in. They’re just micro-managed by the legislature and the Department of Finance. We’re falling behind other states in terms of having a public agenda for higher education, because we really don’t have one,” said Shulock.

Though some critics accused UC and Cal State of selling out to Schwarzenegger with the compacts, the universities’ leaders generally have felt that the deals helped insulate them against budget fluctuations. However, if UC and Cal State administrators have been satisfied with the arrangement, community college leaders decidedly have not. The universities’ compacts and the K–12 system’s budget guarantees make the colleges a de facto last priority. Even though Proposition 98 dedicates a portion of the state’s budget for K–14 education, the colleges’ share has been unpredictable and politically hard to defend.

Tired of being buffeted by the fortunes of the other systems, community college leaders mounted a ballot initiative in

Today, even long-time devotees of California’s Master Plan for Higher Education have begun to question its utility in the 21st century.

February 2008 (Proposition 92) seeking to bring more money to the system and insulate it from the K–12 budget decisions. Through the statewide referendum, they sought to ensure community colleges’ portion of the state budget while reducing fee levels from \$20 to \$15 per unit.

“It’s a response to an untenable situation,” said Dale Shimasaki, a veteran higher education political consultant, at the time. “They’re trying to figure out a way to get some stability and not have to fight with K–12 all the time. They don’t like that situation, and I don’t blame them for it. When you fight adults vs. kids, the kids generally win. It’s a loser issue to be boxed in on.”

Despite forging a rare alliance among college presidents, union leaders, faculty and students (for whom the fee decrease was predictably popular) in their plight to be freed of K–12 fetters, the initiative ultimately brought the colleges into direct political combat with K–12. Opposition by the California Teachers Association (the state branch of the National Education Association), along with both of the university systems, several business organizations, low-tax advocates and the governor doomed the effort. Announcement of a \$15 billion budget shortfall only solidified the opposition.

But while community college leaders understandably were looking for a way out of their funding dilemma, and the initiative could have buttressed their fortunes for a few years, it seemed unlikely to remedy the overarching problems facing the state any more than the compacts with the universities have.

Indeed, the ballot initiative gambit is a symptom of the state’s segmented approach to higher education. The state’s focus “has been too much on institutions and not enough on the state’s productivity,” said Longanecker. Indeed, the segmental structure itself has made it difficult to stimulate a focus on state-level measures of educational performance such as has occurred in other states. “While other states are mobilizing in response to the state-by-state report cards issued by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, no such activity has occurred in California, because these state-level measures of educational performance do not have any natural audience,” noted Shulock in an analysis of California’s governance structure.

Against that backdrop, even the most promising reforms that have occurred since the mid-1990s appear marginal at best, though some have promise for addressing the state’s need to educate a diverse population. Faced with a prohibition on affirmative action beginning in 1997, for example, the UC system embarked on various admissions reforms and outreach programs. From 1996 to 2006, the most dramatic demographic change in UC’s entering freshman classes was among white students, who constituted 32 percent of freshmen in 2006, as compared to 41 percent a decade earlier. At the same time, the number of Asian American students had increased from 29 to 34 percent. Latino students’ share of freshman classes also increased, from 13 percent to 16 percent, still far below their percentage of the state’s 18-year-olds. African American student enrollment remained constant, but low—at less than four percent.

But in a sign of continuing dissatisfaction with the status quo among many at the university, a statewide faculty council recommended revising UC’s longstanding policy of admitting the top 12.5 percent of students in the state. The policy would reduce the guarantee to only the top nine percent, allowing the admissions office to more thoroughly review the applications from students above and below the 12.5 percent cutoff.

While affirmative action is less relevant at Cal State, with its less selective admissions, the 23-campus university has embarked on extensive community outreach to minority communities. In February 2008, the system conducted its fourth annual Super Sunday, making appearances at more than 60 African American churches and contacting some 80,000 families. Over the past decade, Cal State has also sought to reduce the need for remediation, by requiring students to take remedial courses right away, and by adapting an 11th grade standards test to provide early information to students about their readiness for college-level work.

Though the assessment program has been considered a model K–16 policy by organizations such as Achieve, the results of the entire 12-year remediation effort have been modest to date, and they do not approach the 1996 goal of eliminating remediation, set by Chancellor Reed’s predecessor, Barry Munitz. “We have made progress in the math skills, but not in the English, reading, and reading for comprehension,” said Reed. “The single biggest challenge in California education is to get people to be able to read with comprehension.”

Nevertheless, the progress in math is encouraging: While 54 percent of entering freshmen needed math remediation in 1997, the percentage in 2007 was just 37 percent. Cal State’s requirement that students complete their remedial coursework early in their college careers may have contributed to a noticeable improvement in six-year graduation rates (from 38 percent to 48 percent). Transfer student completion rates have also improved, but the overall graduation rates remain low, partly because of a significant enrollment of part-time students.

Under Drummond’s leadership, the community college system adopted a strategic plan. Partly as a result, the system has begun to tackle one of the most critical problems facing the state: the large proportion of its students who require remediation, and the small proportion of them who ultimately succeed in higher education. Interim Chancellor Diane Woodruff made the system’s new Basic Skills Initiative, at more than \$30 million, her number-one priority. Because a majority of the system’s students enter unprepared for college-level work, the initiative is seen as critical to enabling more students to earn associate’s degrees, certificates, or to transfer to four-year institutions. It could be one of higher education’s most important initiatives.

But success is far from guaranteed, if Cal State’s experience provides any guidance. The community college effort seeks to address even lower levels of preparation, and unlike Cal State’s, has yet to set any clear targets for improved outcomes. Because of the colleges’ federated structure, with much authority resting within 72 independent boards of trustees, reforms have historically moved slowly and lacked statewide coherence. A bill to pilot Cal State’s early assessment program for community colleges, for example, has been stalled in the state legislature for the last two years, apparently because it was originally opposed by the colleges’ faculty senate, and because of differences about funding needed to support the program.

Another initiative intended to address issues of preparation and transition, the California Partnership for Achieving

Sixty-five percent of Californians (up from 48 percent in 2000) said that many who are qualified to go to college don’t have the opportunity.

Student Success (Cal-PASS), is a product of the community college system. Cal-PASS has pioneered a system for sharing data among K–12 schools, two-year colleges and four-year universities as the basis for professional learning councils where faculty can work together to improve curricular continuity between the segments. While it is viewed as a promising initiative to support improvements in instruction, it is also true that Cal-PASS has walked into a vacuum in state policymaking and finds itself taking on aspects of a K–16 agenda that analysts say would more appropriately be championed at the state policy level.

While many of these reforms are now considered national models, California's overall policy dilemmas remain unaddressed. Some outside the policy community are working hard to change that. Retired accrediting officials Steve Weiner and David Wolf started the Campaign for College Opportunity, which seeks to highlight the state's need for a plan to educate the next generation of Californians. The campaign has built a broad-based coalition. Another organization that came into being, the California EDGE

Campaign (Education, Diversity and Growth in the Economy), focuses on ensuring access to postsecondary education and training that prepares Californians for career-path employment. Though these groups have brought new attention to the educational needs of the state—and deserve some credit for the growing public awareness—it is far too early to know whether that awareness will be sufficient to translate into a coherent set of policies.

Conclusion

In early 2008, observers were closely watching two developments for insights into California higher education's future: the vacancies at UC and the California Community Colleges, and the state's projected (and growing) budget deficit of \$15 billion.

In March, the UC Regents named Mark Yudof the first outsider to run the university in more than a century. Yudof, who has headed the University of Texas system for the last six years, was brought in after UC had been pummeled by bad press and legislative scrutiny. Though issues of executive pay were the focus, the regents and the accrediting commission had concluded that the less seductive issue of bureaucratic bloat at UC's Oakland headquarters was threatening to undermine the system's overall effectiveness. Yudof's experience and mindset were considered right for the assignment of restructuring, even though his compensation package of more than \$800,000 (nearly double his predecessor's) was raising the very same eyebrows as the university's previous questionable executive pay practices.

As bureaucratic accretion troubled UC's leaders, bureaucratic starvation at the community college chancellor's office accentuated the difficulty of recruiting a strong leader there. The small staff and lack of authority—not to mention the low salary—were widely understood to have contributed to Drummond's decision to return to the Los Angeles district.

The weakness at the chancellor's office was at once a product of the system's historic belief in local autonomy as well as the state's placing a low priority on community colleges and their students.

Ultimately, the colleges were successful in recruiting Jack Scott, a former community college president and powerful chair of the state Senate Education Committee, to take on the job after becoming termed out at the end of 2008. Community college advocates expect the choice to help boost the profile of community colleges in California. But at the age of 74, Scott is not expected to have a long tenure, which has raised some doubts about his ability to tackle the system's series of challenges.

How higher education manages to simultaneously transition to new leaders and leaner budgets could be a strong indicator of whether California is poised to develop a serious policy agenda for higher education.

An initial sign may have come with the defeat of Proposition 92. Despite its failure, the ballot initiative nevertheless helped highlight the important role of community colleges in the education pipeline and the challenges they face. Within days of the initiative's defeat, Reed, a vocal opponent, extended an olive branch by coordinating a joint advocacy effort for the three higher education segments. With the acting heads of UC and the community colleges, he met with news organizations around the state to advocate for increasing resources for higher education. "America has to get away from this Reaganomics. My theory is that if you're sick, you've got to take a little bit of medicine to get better," he said in one of his standard lines. "It might not taste good, but if you want to get well, you've got to have a combination of budget reductions and revenue increases."

While Reed predicted that the legislature would ultimately adopt, with the governor's blessing, some type of tax increase, analysts were increasingly convinced that only a combination of revenues and reforms would help move California out of its higher education conundrum. As for reforms, indications were strong that 2008 could usher in some medicine for higher education via a new era of accountability: Both Reed at Cal State and Yudof in Texas had led their institutions to participate in a voluntary accountability system, and Scott had spent several years shepherding accountability legislation that he hoped to pass before becoming chancellor.

"People are just beginning to wake up," said Reed. "The general public, policymakers, legislators, everybody has realized in the last couple of years that if California is going to continue to have the sixth or seventh largest economy in the world, if California is going to continue to have per capita income that it has had in the past ten or 15 years, if Californians are going to have a quality of life, then they're going to have to depend on what I call a new workforce. California's economic future, its cultural and community future, is tied to how well-educated its citizens are going to be.

"Can California continue to reinvent itself every decade or so?" Reed asked. "Higher education has always played a role in every decade that that has happened." ♦

Independent consultant Pamela Burdman is a former higher education reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and former program officer in education at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

As higher education has become increasingly necessary for anyone wishing to pursue career-path employment, the community college system has become more and more important.

Performance-Based Budgeting

South Carolina's new plan mired in detail and confusion

Photos by Gordon Humphries for CrossTalk

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

THIS IS HOW Austin Gilbert tells the story of South Carolina's decision to launch an ambitious new performance-based budgeting plan for public higher education.

Gilbert runs a small construction company in Florence, S.C. He is also chairman of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. In that capacity, he was one of 12 people who met for several months in 1995 to ponder the future of South Carolina's 33 public colleges and universities.

The study group, appointed by the state legislature, included four state senators, four members of the House of Representatives and four people, including Gilbert, from business and industry. Their discussions were guided by a North Carolina management consultant named Terry Ainsworth, who asked the group to read two books: "Break Point and Beyond," by George Land and Beth Jarman, and "The Fifth Discipline," by Peter Senge.

The "Break Point" book made a deep impression on Austin Gilbert.

"They made the point that an organization is like an organism that is constantly evolving," he recalled during an interview. "In the early stages there's a lot of enthusiasm and it's okay to make mistakes. Then you get to the second phase—the 'break point'—and the organization starts to become more rigid, and mistakes are not tolerated as much. People begin to say, 'We don't do it that way around here.'"

"In the third phase, beyond the 'break point,' you have to reinvent the organization," Gilbert continued, "with supportive leadership that looks at things in a new and different way, encourages new thinking and says it's okay to

A 12-member study group of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education selected 37 "performance indicators," ranging from graduation rates to "use of best management practices."

make mistakes. We decided we were in that phase and we had to reinvent higher education in South Carolina."

The discussions were marked by "good will and camaraderie," Gilbert said. "This was a peak experience for me...everybody put the issues right out on the table,

and the openness of the discussions was wonderful."

None of the 12 members came from higher education, although the chair, state Senator Nikki G. Setzler, a Democrat, has been chairman of the Senate Education Committee for eight years, and Gilbert has been a member of the state higher education coordinating body for five years.

"There was kind of a gentlemen's agreement that we didn't want that kind of pressure," Gilbert explained.

Administrators and faculty leaders were in the audience when the group met but could not speak unless they were asked specific questions. Few outside experts were consulted and most of their advice was ignored.

The committee members were "largely unencumbered by knowledge of higher education," remarked Jack Parson, a political science professor at the College of Charleston and head of the statewide Council of Faculty Chairs.

"You had business people and others who thought they knew how things should be done in higher education," said Sally Horner, executive vice president at Coastal Carolina University, a 4,500-student campus near the popular resort community of Myrtle Beach. "This would be like me sitting on a committee to study the South Carolina banking industry."

But Terry Ainsworth, the group's "facilitator," said the absence of college administrators and faculty members "could be a positive—the people involved didn't have any particular biases."

Toward the end of their deliberations, study group members began to decide which were "critical success factors" for public higher education in the Palmetto State. Using keypads called "innovators," so no one could see how others were voting, they selected 37 "performance indicators," ranging from graduation rates to "use of best management practices."



The new performance-based budgeting plan for higher education "is costing the state a fortune," says University of South Carolina's Marcia G. Welsh.



Chairman Austin Gilbert, of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, is a strong supporter of the new plan.

Act 359, passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor David M. Beasley, mandated that future funding of public higher education should be based on these 37 indicators, not on the enrollment-driven formula of the past.

This year, 25 percent of the increased funding for public higher education, or about \$4.6 million, was awarded according to the indicators. Next year, 75 percent of the “new money”—perhaps \$30 million or more—will be distributed in this manner. Beginning with the 1999-2000 academic year, 100 percent of state

funding is to be allocated on the basis of the 37 “quality indicators.”

Or so the theory goes. As a practical matter, each public institution will receive a “minimum resource requirement” (MRR), and only 15 percent or less of its funding will depend on performance.

“The MRR is really a base budget for each institution,” said a member of the higher education commission who requested anonymity, “but we can’t call it that and we can’t refer to a ‘funding formula’ because the PR we’re putting out says we’re awarding 100 percent of the money according to performance.”

John E. Smalls, director of finance for the higher education commission, predicted the new budget approach will mean “no more than a one or two percent change for any given institution” because it will be “politically unacceptable” for the state to reduce financial support for any college or university significantly on the basis of poor performance.

The legislation also calls for the closing or merger of low-performing schools, but no one interviewed during ten days in the state thought local politicians would allow that to happen.

Performance-based budgeting has grown increasingly popular in recent years. A study by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute at the State University of New York, found that two thirds of the 50 states use performance measures in some way and that more than half report these measures in the budget process. However, in most states less than five percent of the higher education budget is tied to performance, and no other state has tried to use as many as 37 measurements of quality.

Austin Gilbert said he did not think 37 indicators were too many. “The construction industry has 40,” he said.

David Maxwell, a former Clemson provost and now a member of the Commission on Higher Education, keeps asking why there are 37 measures and not 36, 38 or 110. “The only answer I get is that the law says 37,” Maxwell said.

Supporters of the South Carolina plan say it will convince a dubious public that the state’s public colleges and universities are doing a good job and deserve more financial support.

Public support for higher education is said to have waned in South Carolina in recent years. There have been complaints about faculty members who do not teach enough, unprepared students and low graduation rates. Some businessmen believe good jobs are being lost to other states because South Carolina colleges and universities are not producing enough well-trained graduates.

Public confidence is thought to have been further weakened by the escapades of former University of South Carolina President James B. Holderman, who resigned in 1990 after an expense account scandal and later was imprisoned for lying to federal bankruptcy officials.

State Senator Setzler and others believe that requiring greater accountability from public campuses through performance-based budgeting will help to restore public confidence.

“I don’t think there’s any question that, with this movement to excellence, you will see legislative and public support for appropriate funding for higher education,” Setzler said in an interview. “And that clearly was one of the goals of the committee and the legislation.”

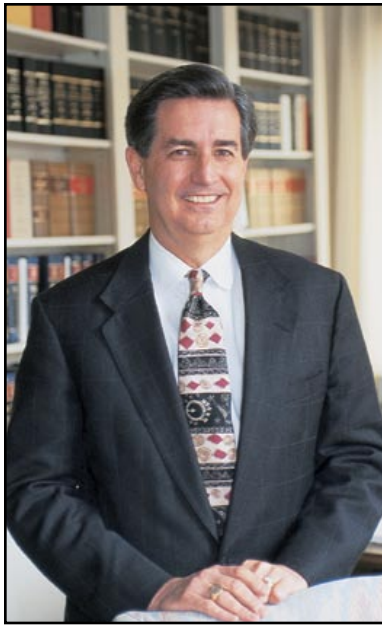
Others are not so sure.

“When all is said and done, I don’t think there will be more money for higher education,” said David Fleming, director of institutional research at Clemson University, one of three research institutions in the state (the others are the University of South Carolina and the Medical University of South Carolina). “Higher education doesn’t have a strong voice like other constituencies—senior citizens or public schools or crime. Politicians can’t get elected on higher education.”

In the 1995-96 academic year, South Carolina local and state expenditures per full-time equivalent student in four-year institutions were \$4,613—about \$250 less than the average for the 15 states belonging to the Southern Regional Education Board, according to an SREB report.

“The basic problem here is that higher education

Supporters of the South Carolina plan say it will convince a dubious public that the state’s public colleges and universities are doing a good job and deserve more financial support.



State Senator Nikki Setzler pushed the performance plan through the South Carolina Legislature.

is drastically underfunded,” said a college president who asked not to be identified. “No amount of ‘performance indicators’ or any of that other stuff is going to change that.”

Or, as Mary Thornly, president of Trident Technical College in Charleston, put it, “there’s a strong interest in South Carolina in rolling back taxes of every sort.” In that kind of climate, she said, more “accountability” is

unlikely to earn large increases in spending for public higher education.

Nevertheless, because “this is the law”—as one college administrator after another referred to it in interviews—a massive data collection and reporting process is under way throughout the state.

For the 1997-98 academic year, the plan’s first year, 14 of the 37 indicators were used to judge the performance of each public college and university. Next year, eight more will be added, and in the third and final year of the phase-in period, all 37 will be in play.

Some indicators have several parts. If all of the parts of all of the indicators are used to judge all of the campuses, measurements could total in the thousands.

Each campus establishes a “benchmark” for each indicator. This year, the benchmarks have little meaning because they are based on past performance. To some extent, that will be true for the second year as well. Beginning in the 1999-2000 academic year, however, each school must demonstrate that its benchmarks have been met or exceeded in order to earn a high rating from the Commission on Higher Education, which administers the entire unwieldy process.

Once a year, the commission assigns ratings of one to six for each indicator at each institution and then issues a single-sheet “report card.”

This year, for example, Clemson received a 6 for holding down “overhead costs per FTE student” but only a 4 for “average class size.” The university’s total score was 92 percent, tenth highest in the state.

The highest score—101 percent—was recorded, surprisingly, by the University of South Carolina’s branch campus in Lancaster, a lower-division (freshman-sophomore) school with about 1,200 students and a modest academic reputation.

South Carolina’s 37 Steps

THE NEW SOUTH CAROLINA budgeting plan appropriates money to public colleges and universities according to 37 “performance indicators”:

- Expenditure of funds to achieve institutional mission
- Curricula offered to achieve mission
- Approval of a mission statement
- Adoption of a strategic plan to support the mission statement
- Attainment of goals of the strategic plan
- Academic and other credentials of professors and instructors
- Performance review system for faculty, to include student and peer evaluations
- Post-tenure review for tenured faculty
- Compensation of faculty
- Availability of faculty to students outside the classroom
- Community or public service activities of faculty for which no extra compensation is paid
- Class sizes and student-teacher ratios
- Number of credit hours taught by faculty
- Ratio of full-time faculty compared to other full-time employees
- Accreditation of degree-granting programs
- Institutional emphasis on quality teacher education and reform
- Sharing and use of technology, programs, equipment, supplies and source matter experts within the institution, with other institutions and with the business community
- Percentage of administrative costs compared with academic costs
- Use of best management practices
- Elimination of unjustified duplication and waste in administrative and academic programs
- Amount of general overhead costs
- SAT and ACT scores of student body
- High school standing, grade-point averages and activities of student body
- Postsecondary non-academic achievement of student body
- Priority on enrolling in-state students
- Graduation rate
- Employment rate for graduates
- Employer feedback on graduates who were employed or not employed
- Scores of graduates on post-graduate professional, graduate or employment-related examinations and certification tests
- Number of graduates who continue their education
- Credit hours earned by graduates
- Transferability of credits to and from the institution
- Continuing education programs for graduates and others
- Accessibility to the institution for all citizens of the state
- Financial support for reform in teacher education
- Amount of public and private sector grants
- Number of “distance education” credit hours

After studying these scores, Fred R. Sheheen, the state’s former commissioner of higher education, wrote, “No other method of which I am aware would render such results, including the ancient practice of spilling the entrails of goats on the ground and reading messages from the patterns formed thereby.”

South Carolina Statistics

(Fall 1996)

- Number of public campuses: 33 (three research universities, nine four-year comprehensive universities, five two-year regional colleges, 16 technical colleges)
- Enrollment: 157, 363 (headcount)
- Students: 73 percent white, 27 percent minority (mostly African American)
- Operating budget: \$642,407 (1996–97 academic year—14.7 percent of total state revenue)
- Tuition and fees: average for four-year universities \$3,133, for two-year regional colleges \$1,850, for technical colleges \$975

(Source: South Carolina Commission on Higher Education)

“I was just as surprised as anyone else,” said Deborah Cureton, dean of academic and student affairs at Lancaster. “I guess we just looked particularly good on some of those first 14 indicators.”

Michael Smith, who is coordinating the new plan for the higher education commission, warned that the first-year scores don't mean much because only a limited number of indicators were used, the benchmarks were based on past performance instead of future goals, and there was insufficient planning time.

“We're feeling our way,” Smith said. “We're looking for answers. We won't know what works and what doesn't until we have all 37 indicators in place and we've been using the whole system for a couple of years.”

But critics wonder if the scheme will ever make sense. They believe large amounts of meaningless information are being compiled that, in the end, will make little difference in state financial support.

Some indicators, or “critical success factors,” are puzzling.

For instance, one tries to measure “institutional emphasis on quality teacher education and reform” when the state's 21 two-year colleges do not train teachers.

Act 359 calls for the Commission on Higher Education to apply “objective, measurable criteria” in judging a school's performance, but for some indicators no such criteria exist. For instance, one indicator is: “Curricula offered to achieve mission.” For a given school, any judgment about that would be, as Fred Sheheen has written, “subjective” and “largely in the eyes of the beholder.”

Most campus officials who were interviewed agreed that some of the indicators are valid measures that can be quantified, at least to some degree: Does the institution have a strategic plan? How do faculty salaries compare with those of rival institutions, both inside and outside South Carolina? How much of the total budget is spent on administration? Is there a post-tenure review policy for tenured faculty members? How many degree-granting programs have been accredited?

But other measurements appear to be trivial or meaningless—for example, one requiring institutions to report on the “non-academic achievements” of their students when they were in high school.

Still others are contradictory. One indicator rewards an institution whose students enter with high SAT or ACT scores, while another gives high marks for enrolling in-state students, many of whom have low test scores.

South Carolina State University, the only historically black school in the state, made the mistake of taking the test

score indicator seriously, increasing the SAT score required for entrance last fall. The result was a 25 percent drop in freshman enrollment, causing a revenue loss of more than \$500,000 that the state will not reimburse.

“We have always done a very good job of retaining the students who enroll here, including those with low test scores,” said Leroy Davis, South Carolina State's president. “I should think that would be a more significant indicator of quality than entering test scores.”

Another indicator calls on campuses to gather “employer feedback on graduates who were employed or not employed,” a measure that Susan Pauly, director of planning at the University of South Carolina at Lancaster, called “ludicrous—employers aren't going to take the time to do that, and, if they answer honestly, they might be opening themselves to law suits.”

Class size seemed at first to be an appropriate quality measure but problems developed immediately. How can an introductory course in political science or psychology, almost always a large lecture, be compared with the one-on-one instruction required in some programs at the Medical University of South Carolina?

Commission staffers first decided not to apply this indicator to the medical campus. Then they limited the evaluation to freshman and sophomore classes. Campus officials doubt that the eviscerated indicator has much meaning.

In order to generate more money for faculty salaries and other high priorities, Coastal Carolina University had increased its student-faculty ratio gradually from 19-to-one to 25-to-one. “This was cost-effective and we were convinced quality did not suffer,” said Sally Horner, the campus executive vice president. “But we got a low rating (3.5) on that indicator.”

Some of the people who are working on implementation

Critics believe large amounts of meaningless information are being compiled that, in the end, will make little difference in state financial support.

of Act 359 understand that some indicators need to be modified and others should be tossed out altogether.

Changes have been made already, such as limiting the class size measure to the lower division. Other modifications are coming.

Work is being concentrated on indicators that seem practical, while others are being silently ignored.

“We've found, as we work through this, we tend to find problems that were not apparent until our work began,” Dalton Floyd, who chairs the higher education commission's planning and assessment committee, said diplomatically.

Floyd, a 59-year-old attorney from Surfside Beach who specializes in golf law, is given credit for bringing calm and

reason to the implementation process since taking over the planning committee a few months ago.

However, every formal attempt to reduce the number of indicators or make other substantive changes has been given short shrift by Senator Setzler and other supporters of the plan.

When a committee from the three research institutions suggested that 15 of the indicators should be dropped as largely irrelevant, they were rebuffed.

“Some people want to drop some measures,” Austin Gilbert said. “But I tell them, ‘No, it’s like the knob on your radio—if it’s not right, you adjust it but you don’t remove it altogether.’”

Setzler believes the implementation problems have been exaggerated.

When questions arose last year, “we sat everybody around the table (and) we learned that there really wasn’t the disagreement they thought there was, and everybody was on

the same song sheet,” Setzler said in an interview. “Certainly, I think any postponement of implementation would be an effort to either dilute or kill the legislation, and I certainly would not support that.”

“I think we need to work with this awhile before we make any significant changes,” Dalton Floyd said. “I don’t think the legislature would look in a friendly way at any major changes at this stage.”

Now that Setzler, Floyd and others are being invited to talk about the South Carolina budget plan at national higher education meetings, it will be even harder to make needed changes, some campus officials fear.

Said one, “Senator Setzler is getting praise for this, and now his ego is so big, he doesn’t want to hear about any

Gathering the massive amount of data required for the performance review process has been especially burdensome for smaller campuses.

UPDATE

Interest in Performance-Based Budgeting Has Faded

March 2008

TEN YEARS AFTER adopting a detailed performance-based budgeting plan for higher education, South Carolina essentially has abandoned the effort.

“We still collect performance-based data but we do not use it for budgeting,” said Julie Carullo, director of government affairs for the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education.

“The state has backed off from performance-based funding, in the face of prodigious budget cuts,” said Debra Jackson, vice provost and assistant to the president at Clemson, one of the state’s three research universities.

“The state has backed off from performance-based funding, in the face of prodigious budget cuts.”

—Debra Jackson, vice provost at Clemson University

The plan established performance indicators for South Carolina’s 33 public campuses. (The original 37 indicators swelled to more than 70.) Those that met or exceeded the criteria were to receive additional state funding; those that failed to meet the standards were to be punished financially.

“Those institutions receiving the highest scores were to receive extra money,”

Jackson said, “but that never happened, there was no extra money.” Instead, state appropriations for public higher education were reduced by more than 25 percent from 2002 to 2005.

There were other problems with the performance-based funding approach.

“You have to take money away from one school and give it to another, something that is politically very difficult,” said one education official. “How do you improve a low-performing school by cutting the

budget? How is that supposed to work? You wind up with a school that is worse off than before.”

Thomas Higerd, associate provost at the Medical University of South Carolina, said the state higher education commission, which was charged with implementing the plan, took a “one size fits all” approach.

“They treated all institutions the same, from a rural two-year school to the medical university,” Higerd said. “But we all had different missions. They didn’t take into account local situations. Lumping us together didn’t make any sense.”

There were conflicts between the state higher education commission, which implemented the plan, and administrators at many of the state’s 33 public campuses.

“There was a considerable gap between the institutional culture of academe and the values of government bureaucrats,” top officials of Clemson, the University of South Carolina and the Medical University of South Carolina wrote in a 2004 paper published by the National Association of College and University Business Officers.

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education still collects performance data but no longer uses it to determine campus budget recommendations. Although the commission’s publications and website continue to say that performance funding is state policy, there is little evidence that this is so.

A decade ago there was a flurry of interest in performance-based budgeting around the country, but it has faded, experts say, because the programs were underfunded, they were the first thing dropped when budgets became tight, and they were poorly administered.

—William Trombley

There were conflicts between the state higher education commission, which implemented the performance-based funding plan, and administrators at many of the state’s 33 public campuses.

defects” in the plan.

So the expensive, time-consuming process continues.

“This is costing the state a fortune,” said Marcia G. Welsh, associate provost and dean of the graduate school at the University of South Carolina’s main campus in Columbia. “We have a number of people who are dedicating a significant part of each day to this, and when all the numbers fall out, what are they going to mean?”

“It’s really frustrating,” she continued. “Higher education is in such tough shape in this state, the situation is growing more and more desperate, and we’re spending all this time and effort on this exercise.”

The legislature did not appropriate any additional money for performance-based budgeting, so the institutions are absorbing the costs. University of South Carolina officials estimate they have spent at least \$150,000 on start-up costs alone.

Clemson’s David Fleming said he has put 62,000 miles on his Mercedes in the last two years, most of it traveling from the Clemson campus, in the western part of the state, to meetings at the state capital in Columbia.

Gathering the massive amount of data required for the performance review process has been especially burdensome for smaller campuses.

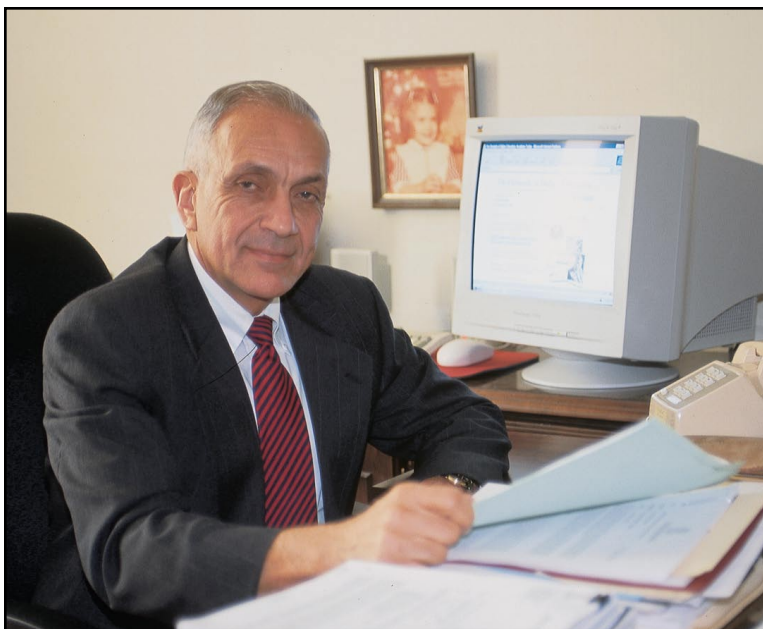
Thomas Hallman, associate chancellor at the University of South Carolina’s 3,000-student branch campus in Aiken, said a successful student assessment program has been “significantly reduced” because campus administrators are spending so much time on the new budget plan.

But Joseph C. Burke, who has been studying performance budgeting at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, is not sympathetic to these complaints.

“Shouldn’t they have been gathering much of this information already?” Burke asked. “If some people in higher education had their way, nothing new would ever get started because you can always think of more criticisms than reasons to do it.”

Several administrators agreed that the plan has forced them to analyze their campuses more carefully and to do better planning.

At Coastal Carolina University, for instance, seven task forces, including about 50 faculty members, have been involved in fashioning campus responses to the higher education commission’s requests. “I think we all know a lot more about the institution than when we started on this,” Executive Vice President Sally Horner said.



Former Higher Education Commissioner Fred R. Sheheen doubts South Carolina’s performance plan will work.

“We feel, with hard work and good sense, it will become a useful exercise,” said Conrad Festa, provost at the College of Charleston, a handsome liberal arts campus in the heart of Charleston’s historic district. “It forces us to hook together planning, budget and assessment in ways we haven’t done before.”

But Jack Parson, who has taught political science and international relations at the college since 1980, is less optimistic.

“The best we can hope for,” Parson said, “is to be able to go back to the public and the legislature and say, ‘Here are the indicators, we seem to be doing pretty well and, now that you have the evidence, it’s time to appropriate more money for higher education.’”

“This may enable higher education to regain some of the credibility it has lost, not only in South Carolina but nationwide,” Sally Horner said. “But do I think it will affect, in the near future, what goes on in the learning experience of a single student in this state? No, I don’t think so.” ♦

“This is costing the state a fortune. We have a number of people who are dedicating a significant part of each day to this, and when all the numbers fall out, what are they going to mean?”

**—Marcia G. Welsh,
University of South Carolina**

“Outcome Funding”

Tennessee experiments with a performance-based approach to college appropriations

By Robert A. Jones

NASHVILLE

WHEN THE NASHVILLE songwriter Kris Kristofferson famously penned the words “freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose,” he was not likely contemplating Tennessee’s higher education system. But the lines are more apt than he might have imagined.

Tennessee, long at the bottom of the higher education heap, is throwing out the rule books that have governed its state colleges and universities. With little to lose, the state leadership is gambling that a sweeping reform, anchored by a new approach to funding, will pull the state system out of its long trough and lift it, at least, to the national average.

Beginning this year, Tennessee is promising to boost the production of college graduates by 3.5 percent annually, yielding a cumulative 210,000 more bachelor’s and associate’s degrees by 2025. At the same time, Tennessee officials say they will reduce college dropouts dramatically, and achieve those results at a lower per-student cost than today.

The reform has attracted national attention because of its scope, which includes every level of public institution from community colleges to the University of Tennessee, and because it incorporates many of the strategies currently favored by education foundations and think tanks. As such, Tennessee is seen as the laboratory where those strategies will be tested.

“We are doing these things aggressively. It seems a little strange to say it, but Tennessee has become the leading edge of change in higher education,” said John Morgan, chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents. “Other states are now looking at us to see what’s going to happen.”

Reform, and promises of reform, constitutes a way of life in higher education, of course. Many such attempts fail to produce long-lasting change and, collectively, the makeovers have not stemmed the decline that has seen the United States fall from first place to tenth among nations in the percentage of young people earning a college degree.

Education experts are hoping the Tennessee plan will turn out differently, and they see a couple of reasons for optimism. First, according to Dewayne Matthews of the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Tennessee approach is comprehensive rather than piecemeal, and derives its authority not from agency directives but from legislation passed with overwhelming support from both Democrats and Republicans.

That legislation, the Complete College Tennessee Act, was passed in 2010 and spells out specific goals such as increases in graduation rates and the retention of students in the first years of college. It then ties future funding for each institution to the achievement of those goals.

Stan Jones, president of Complete College America (a national nonprofit organization that advised the state at various times in the process), sees a second hopeful sign. “The most

elegant reform plan will do no good if it’s not supported by high officials in the state,” he said. “In Tennessee the leadership has consistently provided support, and they have built a consensus that continues to the present.”

Jones noted, for example, that the Tennessee legislation was sponsored by former Governor Philip Bredeson, a Democrat, and now has been endorsed by the new Republican governor, Bill Haslam.

Ironically, Tennessee is also seen as fertile ground for an education experiment because of its lamentable past. Today, 31 percent of Tennessee adults ages 25–34 have a college degree, a figure that ranks the state just below Mississippi. An analysis by Complete College America shows that only 12 percent of Tennessee’s ninth graders will eventually earn a four-year or two-year degree.

The state’s flagship institution, the University of Tennessee, is widely seen as a ho-hum research university subject to rapid turnover of presidents. At the state’s community colleges, two-thirds of the students fail to transfer to four-year institutions or to graduate. And the state’s parsimony in funding has pushed tuition so high that the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (which publishes *National CrossTalk*) gave Tennessee an F in college affordability in 2008. The situation has only worsened since then.

“Large states like California and New York, especially if they see themselves having a proud history, can be very difficult places to get consensus on reform,” said Jones. “A place like Tennessee is an easier environment to work in because it’s smaller, and no one is kidding themselves about the need to get the job done.”

The high concept behind the Tennessee plan is disarmingly simple: The state will reward each campus according to its “outcomes”—the production of degrees, retention of students, and other measurable factors—rather than its enrollment. Each institution will be given its own set of goals and will be measured according to its success in



Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Jamie Woodson, a Republican state senator, says that “rewarding higher education with larger budgets is not part of the conversation. The conversation is about outcomes.”

Tennessee, long at the bottom of the higher education heap, is throwing out the rule books that have governed its state colleges and universities.



“We will see some institutions with improved performance who receive fewer dollars because others improved even more,” says Joseph DiPietro, president of the University of Tennessee. “That’s when the in-fighting will start.”

meeting those goals.

This strategy, known as performance funding, has been used for decades in other guises. Typically it was employed as a reward, or cherry, on top of an enrollment-based funding formula. If college administrators achieved certain goals they would be favored with a few extra percentage points of funding.

The Tennessee plan tosses out the enrollment formula altogether and puts performance funding on steroids. Henceforth, in Tennessee, 100 percent of funding will be based on outcomes and none on enrollment.

It comes as no surprise that this idea did not come bubbling up from the campuses. The architects, rather, were a handful

of officials at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), working with the legislature and the office of then-Governor Bredeson.

“A lot of things came together at once,” said Richard Rhoda, executive director of the commission. “We had a governor who would ask questions like, ‘Why aren’t students graduating from our colleges?’ At the same time the state was reforming its K–12 system, and the issue became, how are we going to provide for the larger number of kids successfully graduating from high school?”

Bredeson was a Democrat, and a plan to alter the higher education system typically would set the stage for a political battle in the legislature. But that did not happen, largely because the proposals emanating from THEC and its consultants emphasized accountability, cost savings, and the production of educated workers—themes beloved to Republicans.

Gordon Fee, a retired Lockheed Martin executive at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, said state businessmen were ready to support a change in direction because they were increasingly frustrated by the lack of skilled and educated workers in the state.

“I would hear stories that managers were going further and further outside the state to attract people who could fill the jobs they had,” said Fee. “You got the sense that the state was producing graduates with the wrong skills or in the wrong field,

and that we needed to make a change.”

By early 2010, the Complete College Tennessee Act was passed with hardly a dissent in the legislature. The first provision of the act directed THEC to link higher education to “the state’s economic and workforce development.”

College leaders initially were a harder sell. Dennis Jones, president of the National Center for Higher Education

Management Systems and a Tennessee consultant, said many campus presidents saw danger signals in the legislation but were eventually persuaded that a major change was necessary to pull the state out of its trough.

“Tennessee is so far below the national average that small tweaks weren’t going to work,” said Jones. “And a big selling point was the economic impact of success. If higher education met the new graduation goals, Tennessee’s per capita income could rise 20 percent. That’s huge.”

The THEC plan that grew out of the legislation developed several strategies to ease students’ path toward a degree, such as uniform core courses and uniform course numbering in community colleges and universities.

In addition, all remedial or developmental education was handed over to community colleges, whether students are enrolled in a community college or a university. Cleveland State Community College in southeastern Tennessee has become a national leader in designing computer-assisted developmental courses, and it is hoped that the Cleveland successes will be adopted on a larger scale.

But, in general, Tennessee laid out few such programs. According to David Wright, director of policy at THEC, the planners in Nashville decided they would determine “the what and not the how” of the reform.

“We did not want to pretend that we had all the answers here in Nashville,” Wright said. “It seemed a better idea to let each institution handle the issue of how to achieve the goals. And if a particular institution comes up with a great approach, it’s our hope that we can seize on those good ideas and scale them up across the system.”

And so Tennessee’s fate in higher education rests almost exclusively on the success of its incentive funding. And in that area, the state planners have broken new ground.

To begin, each campus was assigned a mission statement, an otherwise innocuous-looking document that has the effect of defining—and limiting—that institution’s academic pursuits. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville’s mission statement, for example, heavily emphasizes research, professional education such as nuclear engineering, and, curiously, printmaking.

In effect, the mission statement gives UT Knoxville a license to pursue and expand those programs. And because other institutions’ mission statements will not include some of UT’s programs, UT Knoxville will be protected from incursions into its turf. For the time being, printmaking appears to be safe at the home of the Vols.

But what the mission statement gives, it also takes away. Nowhere does UT Knoxville’s mission statement mention a medical school. The campus does not have a medical school—the main UT medical school is located in Memphis—and the mission statement makes it more certain that the situation will remain so.

Those limitations were intentional. “Under the old funding formula using enrollment, the way (for a campus) to get more money was to start new programs, and sometimes we saw a duplication of programs,” said Rhoda. “Under the new plan, which rewards the production of graduates, a lot more thought will be given to where programs are likely to be high producers.”

The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 spells out specific goals for each institution, then ties future funding to the achievement of those goals.

Not surprisingly, the development of the mission statements set off a lively round of lobbying by campus presidents to make sure their institutions were defined in the most satisfactory and rewarding fashion.

At the University of Memphis, President Shirley Raines said she tried, and ultimately failed, to have her campus described as a research institution more or less equivalent to UT Knoxville. The difference between what she wanted and what she got might appear subtle to a casual observer, but Raines said the distinction looms large because a broader research role would ultimately bring more dollars into her university.

“We produce something like 150 doctorals a year,” she said. “I think we compare very favorably to UT Knoxville on that score, and we haven’t given up on this issue. There’s going to be an opportunity to tweak these things over the next year, and I expect we will take advantage of that.”

The mission statements have another, more nervous-making purpose. By defining each campus, they serve as the basis for that campus’ funding formula, the metric that will be used to judge its performance.

The metric, in fact, is the beating heart of the Tennessee system. It employs ten criteria, ranging from freshman retention to research dollars gained. Each year an institution will receive a score for each criterion. The higher the total score, the more funding that campus will receive.

But the criteria are weighted differently for each institution according to its mission statement. Thus the University of Memphis, whose research component is not described as loftily as UT Knoxville’s, will be rewarded less vigorously for an increase in research activity than will the UT campus.

According to Raines, that difference could amount to millions of dollars per year. Raines says she very much supports the concept of an outcome-based approach to university funding but is wary of what she sees as the devils in the details. “I firmly believe that the people (at THEC) are working in good conscience, and these issues will get resolved,” she said.

The new funding system begins this year but will incorporate what one education official termed a “soft roll-out.” In effect, that means the impact of campus performance on funding will grow slowly over the next three years until it reaches the 100 percent level.

Because of the soft roll-out, no campus will experience a sharp uptick or downtick in funding. And even after three years, when the new system is fully operational, the formulas will limit the annual loss or gain for an individual campus to approximately two percent a year, according to Russ Deaton, director of fiscal affairs at THEC. “It is designed to produce incremental impacts,” he said. “Of course, over time those impacts could compound for an institution with consistent low scores.”

The reality that campuses will be competing with each other for available dollars has not been lost on college presidents in the state. All presidents and other campus officials interviewed for this article expressed at least guarded support for the new system, but the uncertainties have lent a breathless quality to the experience.

A two percent swing at the University of Memphis, for example, could amount to more than \$5 million a year. With a metric containing ten criteria, and a different weight assigned

to each criterion, predicting the result in advance at any campus becomes virtually impossible.

“I applaud Tennessee for being bold with this plan,” said Carl Hite, president of Cleveland State Community College in southeastern Tennessee. “No other state has come close to going from 100 percent seat-count funding to 100 percent outcome funding. At this point, though, I don’t think anyone knows how the system will play out for their campus.”

To add some clarity—and perhaps to get the juices flowing—THEC has posted a “dynamic model” of the new funding mechanism on its website that allows administrators to play with different outcomes. A college president, for example, can plug in an improvement in freshmen retention and see the extra dollars flowing to the campus. Since the dynamic model assumes a zero-sum environment, he can also see equivalent dollars being subtracted from other campuses.

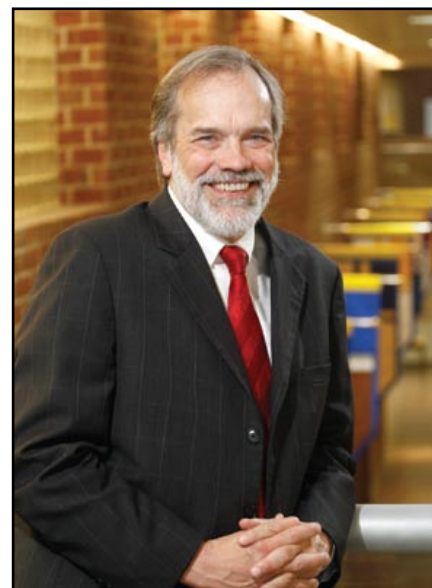
Hite said he suspects every campus president has spent some time with the dynamic model, spinning out scenarios, and he laughs about his own experiences. “If I have a target of 100 in a certain area and I type in a result of 110, I can see how much we get, and then I can see who’s going to be mad at me because I took their money. When someone wins, someone else loses.”

The complexity of the system also raises the question of whether it could be gamed by clever campus officials. For example, if retention and graduation rates reign supreme in the new system, could some institutions raise their scores by judiciously reducing the number of risky freshmen they admit? Could graduation awards, or other criteria results, be shifted from one year to the next?

Rhoda, the executive director of THEC, concedes that any funding system is vulnerable to manipulation, but he believes the new model will prove to be more honest than its predecessor. “In the past, with enrollment funding, the game was to bulk up in the fall when students were counted,” he said. “The new approach has been pored over by campus presidents and chief academic officers, and we’ve tried to keep it as straightforward as possible. If soft spots show up with the new system, we can fix them.”

John Morgan, the Board of Regents chancellor, says another wrinkle lies in the system’s subtle but perverse incentive for administrators to withhold strategies that prove successful. “If you are a campus president and you find the secret of success, you might want to keep it to yourself because your discovery

An analysis by Complete College America shows that only 12 percent of Tennessee’s ninth graders will eventually earn a four-year or two-year degree.



Wade Payne, Black Star, for CrossTalk

“Tennessee has become the leading edge of change in higher education,” says John Morgan, chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents. “Other states are now looking at us to see what’s going to happen.”

gives you a competitive advantage," he said.

The answer might be a device that rewards collaboration, allowing the originator of a new strategy to share in the success of others who adopt it.

The largest uncertainty surrounding the new funding system, however, is not the response on the campuses where, as one administrator said, "we've all drunk the Kool-Aid." Rather, it's the response in Nashville where a new Republican governor and a legislature with 20 newly elected conservative Republicans will hold sway over the higher education system and its budget.

Haslam, the new governor, took office in January and thus far has voiced support for the outcome-based program. Haslam comes from a wealthy family in Knoxville that has a long history of involvement with the University of Tennessee, and he made higher education reform a central part of his gubernatorial campaign.

The legislature is more of a wild card. It turned decidedly more conservative after last November's election, and many of the new members campaigned on a small-government platform.

Higher education officials say they have little fear that the legislature would attempt to dismantle or seriously tinker with the program. After all, the system reflects many Republican ideas in regard to government.

The anxiety, the officials say, stems from the fear that the legislature and Haslam may not accept what the higher education community sees as the implicit political deal of the

new system. In a nutshell, that perceived deal says that if higher education succeeds in its gamble and operates at higher efficiencies, then the state will reward it financially. It amounts to pay-for-performance, another Republican ideal.

Education officials argue that this deal is not merely a matter of fairness. Rather, it is crucial for the new system to survive and thrive.

Joseph DiPietro, president of the University of Tennessee, described the problem this way: "If everyone performs well and the funding stays flat, we will see some institutions with improved performance who receive fewer dollars because others improved even more. That's when the in-fighting will start."

Right now, said DiPietro, "We are all locked arm in arm, and we

are convinced this is going to be a major step forward. With flat funding, that attitude could erode."

Morgan reiterated that rewarding better performance is "the key to the program's success. Without it, you're going to get cynicism and resentment. College administrators are not going to bust themselves trying to increase productivity if they believe they will be punished for it. Nobody wants that."

Hite, the president of Cleveland Community College, noted

that the old route of increasing budgets by increasing enrollments has been taken away, and college presidents now need the assurance of another route toward expansion other than snatching funds from their brother institutions.

"The legislature told us that the new standard would be the outcomes at our institutions. OK, that's fine, but if we measure up to the new standard, don't

come back and say we have to cut you more," Hite said.

The crucial year, the educators say, will be 2012, when the financial results of the outcome funding are first felt on the campuses. If the state provides enough money so that every campus with improved performance sees an uptick in funding, the new system may be over the hump.

But the idea of an implicit deal is greeted with some skepticism in the state capital. Mark Cate, a senior advisor to Governor Haslam, said the question of whether improved performance would be rewarded with more funding is "impossible to answer today. Appropriations are always a matter of what's possible and what's not. Everyone is also curious how the new (Republican) players in the legislature will affect things going forward?"

Jamie Woodson, a Republican state senator and a co-author of the Complete College Tennessee legislation, agrees that reform in a zero-sum game is "a real challenge for the leadership in higher education."

"At the end of the day, though, that's their job. It's not about getting more money," Woodson said. "What I'd want every institutional leader to do in the morning when they get in the shower is think what they can do to align their institution with the needs of the state, which means making Tennessee a more competitive place for growth and jobs."

Right now, Woodson added, "rewarding higher education with larger budgets is not part of the conversation. The conversation is about outcomes."

Ultimately, the fate of the funding issue will depend on economic recovery in Tennessee over the next year, which is unpredictable. As of yet, a resurgence in the economy and tax revenues has not occurred in any dramatic fashion. Several weeks after Woodson made her comments, Haslam unveiled his budget for the upcoming year. It proposed a two percent cut in higher education. ♦

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



Dennis Brack, Black Star for CrossTalk

"The most elegant reform plan will do no good if it's not supported by high officials in the state," says Stan Jones, president of Complete College America. "In Tennessee the leadership has consistently provided support."

Weade Payne, Black Star for CrossTalk



Richard Rhoda, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, believes the new funding system will prove to be more honest than its predecessor. "We've tried to keep it as straightforward as possible," he says.

Colorado's "Grand Experiment"

Voucher program could give the state's colleges a new lease on life

Photos by Eric Lars Bakke, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Pamela Burdman

DENVER, COLORADO

AS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES around the country find themselves facing the budget noose, policymakers in Colorado have devised a voucher-like proposal that they hope will give the state's institutions of higher education a new lease on life.

The first of its kind in the country, the plan would turn the traditional form of state appropriations on its head, routing state subsidies for education directly to students, instead of institutions. As envisioned by the panel that hatched the idea, the higher education commission that refined it, and the legislators who are seeking to enact it into law, the new funding mechanism would have a dual effect: enticing more low-income students to attend college while allowing four-year universities the tuition increases they say they badly need.

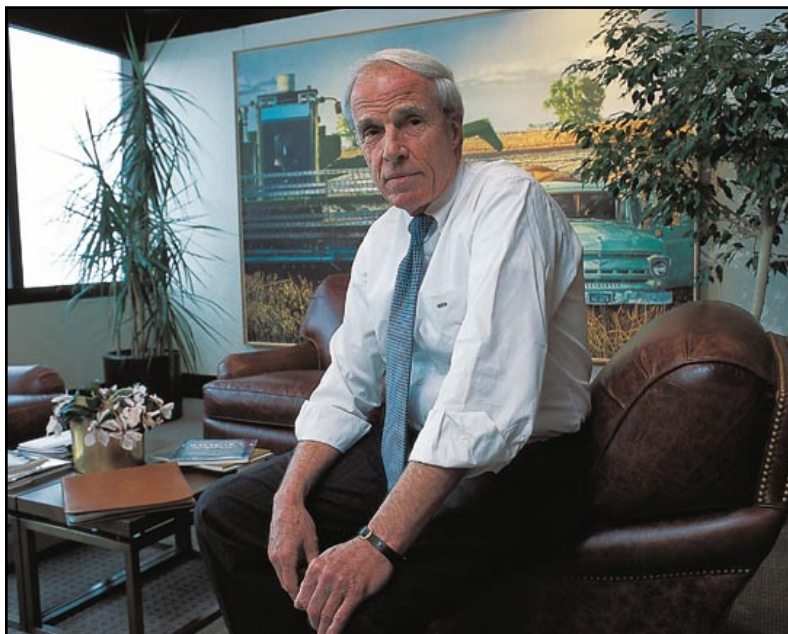
The plan is designed to address the peculiarities of Colorado's fiscal landscape—namely by liberating schools from constitutional limits on revenue increases. Since 1993, state government has operated under the Colorado Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, or TABOR amendment, which strictly limits increases in state revenue, including tuition. By placing a large chunk of institutions' traditional revenue in students' hands, the plan would reduce schools' revenue below the ceiling required for exemption from TABOR—a key reason the state's two research universities favor the proposal. But since distributing dollars to students could help keep higher education funding on the public's agenda, the notion is drawing interest from policymakers in other states as well.

"This is the boldest plan I've seen," said David Longanecker, executive director of the Boulder-based Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. "This could be the way to secure the long-term future for higher education in Colorado. I think a lot of states will pay attention."

Longanecker, a former U.S. assistant secretary of education and former director of Colorado's Commission on Higher Education, believes that in addition to its fiscal environment, Colorado's conservative political climate and traditionally low public support for higher education make it an ideal candidate for this sort of experiment.

But the legislation's destiny remained yoked to higher education's budget fortunes, which were in considerable doubt. After slashing higher education spending from \$686 to \$602 million in the current year, legislators were seeking to trim another \$100 million for 2003-04 as budget talks got serious in late March. Against that grim fiscal backdrop, the plan seemed as risky as it seemed urgent.

"The state of higher education is going to be extremely difficult if we pass this legislation," said Peggy Lamm, a former Democratic legislator who chairs the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. "But if we don't pass it, it will be much



Businessman Bruce Benson chaired the blue ribbon panel that has proposed Colorado's higher education voucher plan.

worse. We are way past the fat. We're into the sinew and getting to the muscles and bones."

Though the concept of college vouchers sounds brand new, it actually has a history in Colorado. In the late 1970s, conservative legislators kicked around the idea as a way of making a case for a K-12 plan. And back in 1996, when several states were looking at the voucher idea, the Colorado House of Representatives considered a higher education voucher bill, which would have made the grants available to students at both public and private colleges. Partly because it could have drained funding away from state institutions, that proposal did not attract broad support.

But the current bill has more momentum—and muscle—behind it. It was the brainchild of a panel convened in 2001 by Republican Governor Bill Owens. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Higher Education for the 21st Century was charged to look at the funding mechanism for higher education and consider ways of increasing college participation. The 17-member panel was headed by former CCHE chairman Bruce Benson, an influential oil and gas executive whose current

As the legislation was drafted, the term "vouchers" morphed to "student educational savings accounts," then "college opportunity grants" and, finally, "college opportunity savings accounts."



University of Colorado President Elizabeth Hoffman supports the voucher plan, which should increase the university's tuition revenue substantially.

chairmanships include the state Republican Party, the Denver Public Schools Foundation, the Metropolitan State College of Denver, and the University of Colorado's capital campaign. Benson was recruited by CCHE Executive Director Tim Foster, a former Republican legislator and another key player in the voucher drive. Governor Owens is said to support the proposal, but he had not made his support public as of early April.

Meeting in tandem with CCHE and the state's higher education CEOs, the panel confronted some vexing statistics, which are catalogued in their report: On the one hand, Colorado is one of the nation's wealthiest states, and it ranks number one in terms of the percentage of citizens with a college degree, according to U.S. census figures. On the other hand, the state falls below the median in terms of college attendance by its own citizens (according to the *Measuring Up 2002* report published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, which also publishes *National CrossTalk*) and ties for third in the percentage of 16-to-19-year-olds who are high school dropouts, according to an Annie E. Casey Foundation report.

While the state's population mushroomed by more than 30 percent in the 1990s, college enrollment grew by just under ten percent, the panel said in its report. And, in terms of probability of low-income families attending college, Colorado placed dead last in 1999 and 41st in 2000, according to higher education policy analyst Tom Mortenson.

"It was embarrassing to have the most educated population and be doing such a poor job sending our kids to school. We need to do a much better job," said Lamm, noting that low college attendance by the state's growing Hispanic population was a particular concern. During the 1990s, Hispanics grew from 13 percent to 17 percent of the state's population.

After considering six funding alternatives, the 17-member panel almost immediately locked onto the voucher idea, participants said. "Most of us felt pretty strongly about a consumer-oriented program," said Benson. "It really doesn't

change the money that much. It changes how people think about that money."

The panel's recommendation became legislation even as a controversial K-12 voucher measure seemed destined to become law. That bill would make Colorado the first state to begin funding students attending private schools since last summer's U.S. Supreme Court ruling lifted a constitutional cloud from voucher programs. The Colorado K-12 proposal was limited to low-income children with poor grades in designated school districts. But opponents were vowing to challenge it all the way back to the high court.

Against that backdrop, the higher education panel made a point of avoiding the most contentious aspect of K-12 voucher plans—the funding of private institutions. Though sympathetic to that idea, Benson and his Republican allies knew that Colorado had neither the dollars nor the will to include independent institutions. "Philosophically I would like the privates in it," said Benson. "But the down and dirty is that if you put the privates in this deal, it is dead. Down the road, maybe things will get better and you can put the privates in."

In its final report, released in January, the panel eschewed the term "voucher" altogether, instead talking about "student educational savings accounts." As the legislation was drafted by Representative Keith King (R-Colorado Springs), who had sat on the blue ribbon panel, the name morphed to "college opportunity grants" and, finally, "college opportunity savings accounts."

Here are the particulars:

- **Student Grants.** According to the blue ribbon panel, these would be \$4,000 a year for undergraduates and \$8,000 for master's degree students. In the legislation, the actual amounts were left blank, pending the outcome of ongoing budget discussions. As the joint budget committee took a knife to the higher education budget, reducing next year's appropriation to \$506 million, the grants seemed unlikely to pass at the \$4,000 a year level. If they fell to the \$3,200 figure that some officials were predicting, support could quickly erode.

"Like a coupon with a variable face amount, it can go up and it can go down," said CCHE spokeswoman Joan Ringel, acknowledging, "We would have to say that very carefully." Undergraduate credit hours would be capped at 140 and graduates at 60, with some waivers available and some stipends for "lifelong learners" six years after completing an undergraduate degree.

- **Community College Tuition Reductions.** Tuition at two-year public institutions would be decreased by 25 percent and then increased by the amount of the grant. At Colorado Northwestern Community College in Rangely, for example, tuition would drop from \$1,981 for full-time in-state students (an estimate for next year, assuming a five-percent increase

Some higher education finance experts say the voucher plan can not work without a boost in financial aid dollars.

over this year's \$1,887) to \$1,486, plus the face value of the voucher, bringing total tuition to \$5,486 if the voucher is worth \$4,000.

- **Role and Mission Grants.** These grants would supplement the tuition money received by the institutions to make up for any loss in state funding as a result of the new funding mechanism. The amounts were not specified in the legislation, but models circulated with the blue ribbon panel report showed that the three state colleges (Adams State College in Alamosa, Mesa State College in Grand Junction, and Western State College in Gunnison) would receive \$2.8 million to help keep those rural campuses afloat. The state's two research institutions, CU and Colorado State University, would secure \$85 million and \$57 million, and the community colleges would get no grant, receiving all of their funding in tuition.

- **Universities get Tuition Flexibility.** In another feature of the plan that is not spelled out in the bill itself, existing state law would allow campuses to become "enterprises" if the portion of their budgets coming from the state's general fund falls below ten percent. CU and CSU predict they will be able to go this route almost immediately, thereby liberating them from TABOR restrictions. But Colorado State University President Al Yates worried about a lawsuit or other impediment. And state Senator Ron Tupa (D-Boulder) was introducing another bill that would grant enterprise status without vouchers.

That last feature, TABOR exemption, explains why the state's two research universities back the proposal. "Why would the flagship research institution in the state be in favor of this program? My feeling is that when we're raising most of the money to run this institution, we need the flexibility to price our tuition at the market rate," said University of Colorado President Elizabeth Hoffman. Plus, she said, "If this becomes something that families across the state care about like K-12 funding, it will be harder to cut."

By the time it was introduced on March 20, the proposal had garnered significant attention, with positive editorials from the state's two largest newspapers and support from the higher education CEOs as well as the Colorado Student Association. Though its introduction was repeatedly delayed as the bill underwent a series of revisions, it hit the House floor with 39 sponsors—five more than needed to clear the House.

Still, the bill's future was far from certain. With only six weeks remaining in the session, it needed to clear several committees whose members had not signed on as sponsors. And its key benefits for higher education—guaranteed funding floors and tuition flexibility—left austerity-minded legislators wary of creating an entitlement and writing higher education a blank check.

"If [King] pleases us and the Democrats on this, he's going to make the fiscal conservatives angry," said Ryan McMaken, executive director of the student association. "If he pleases the fiscal conservatives, we're going to bail. Everywhere you look, there's a coalition waiting to kill the bill. It's a pretty wild situation at this point." CU's Hoffman wasn't much more optimistic: "It's not even worth doing if they don't fully fund the vouchers."

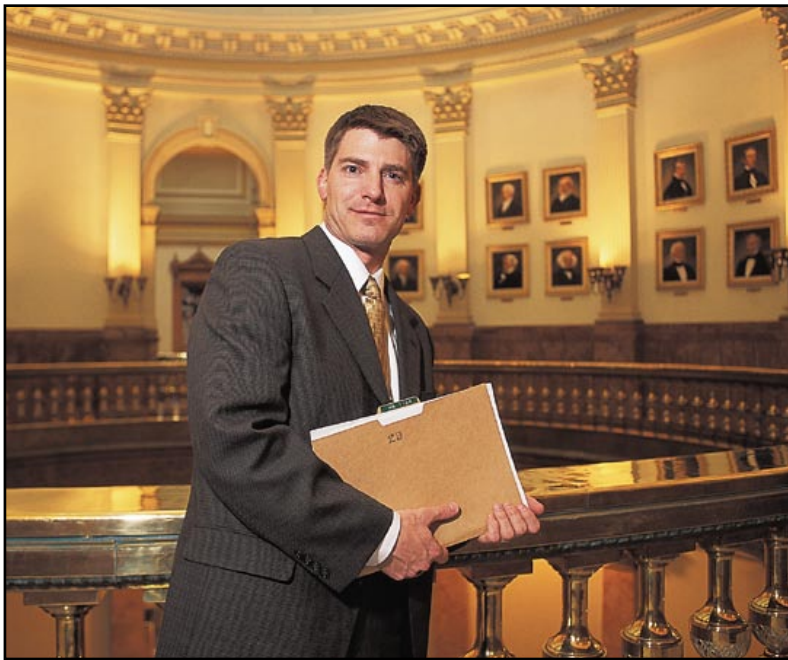
If it does pass, the proposal's success in increasing college participation among low-income and minority students will depend largely on whether the blue ribbon panel was correct in its prediction that the savings accounts will entice more students to attend college. While community college tuition will decrease, the scheme allows for increases at the four-year institutions—especially if they achieve enterprise status. Students could be looking at very high numbers. If CU-Boulder's undergraduate tuition next year reaches \$3,910, as expected, that figure could increase another five percent plus the \$4,000 amount of the voucher for a total tuition of \$8,105 in 2004-05, the first year of the program.

Some researchers, including one who presented his findings to the panel, say that students are turned off by such high sticker prices. "The piece that they're ignoring is that, particularly for low-income students, these students tend to be more influenced by changes in price than by changes in financial aid," said Donald Heller, associate professor at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University. "I would expect that \$4,000 increase in price to have more of a negative impact on the probability that a low-income student would enroll than would the offsetting

While Colorado's population mushroomed by more than 30 percent in the 1990s, college enrollment grew by just under ten percent.



The voucher plan's success depends on getting accurate information to every high school freshman, says Tim Foster, executive director of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.



State Senator Ron Tupa believes the voucher plan will work only if adequate financial aid is made available to Colorado students.

\$4,000 voucher.”

CU-Boulder student leader Michael Donnelly, a senior finance major, opposes the plan for that reason. “I think a lot of students already know they’re receiving a state subsidy, and they’ll be turned off at a higher tuition,” he said. “This is kind of like a shell game.”

Tim Foster, Executive Director of CCHE, said the panel’s conclusions were influenced by focus groups showing clearly that such a plan would appeal to low-income students and perhaps even reduce the high school dropout rate. “The interesting dynamic is that you convert the state subsidy to their money,” said Foster. “It increases their stake. It’s a psychological sea change.”

Foster acknowledged that success will be contingent on how well the program is marketed: “You have to explain to every freshman in every high school that they have this opportunity.” Foster’s best-case scenario: Within four years, Colorado will rise to the top quintile of states in college participation.

But even the best-case scenario poses dilemmas: The more successful the plan is at expanding enrollment, the

greater the burden it would place on state resources. Unless more funds become available for higher education, the face value of the vouchers could become depressed. The safety valve for higher education is designed to be TABOR liberation, but without TABOR, tuition at some of the four-year institutions could become prohibitively expensive—leading Longanecker and other higher education finance experts to say the plan can not work

“I don’t want to see this proposal mask the fact that the state of Colorado provides a pitiful amount of assistance for needy kids.

**—Colorado state Senator
Ron Tupa**

without a boost in financial aid dollars.

“The Achilles heel of this whole proposal is if you allow the universities to raise tuition, but there’s not a corresponding increase in financial aid, the whole proposal will fail,” said Tupa. “I don’t want to see this proposal mask the fact that the state of Colorado provides a pitiful amount of assistance for needy kids. For me to support legislation like this, there needs to be a corresponding increase in financial aid from the state of Colorado.”

In response, CU’s Hoffman says she is committed to plowing a significant proportion of any tuition increases into financial aid—about one-third on the Boulder campus and 25 percent at CU’s other campuses in Colorado Springs and Denver. Colorado State University President Al Yates predicts a number closer to 15 percent at CSU.

Yates lobbied hard to ensure that any state financial aid dollars freed up because of the decreased community college tuition would be available to the four-year sector, and that was reflected in an amendment to the bill. CCHE had no projections, however, as to whether it will cover tuition increases. Nor did Joe May, chancellor of the 13-campus community college system. “We’ve not been able to run any models to look at the savings,” he said.

While most public universities offer institutional aid, research has shown that it is less effective than statewide programs. “The biggest disadvantage is that it’s not as visible or predictable. You never know what you’ll have when you jump through the admissions hoop,” said Paul Lingenfelter, executive director of the Denver-based group, State Higher Education Executive Officers. “The second disadvantage is that, at the institutional level, the typical practice is for merit and need to get blended. Schools look at students’ academic ability, their athletic ability, and tuition discounting comes into play. If your primary consideration for a certain pot of money is to meet the need of students with limited resources, it will be more visible and have a greater impact and be used more effectively if it’s at the state level.”

CCHE’s Foster, a believer in need-based aid, said he was hard-pressed to increase funding in the current budget climate. One proposal emerging from the legislature’s joint budget committee in late March would have increased the state’s \$51 million expenditure for need-based financial aid by ten percent, while eliminating the \$10.5 million in aid (need- and merit-based) currently available for the state’s private and proprietary institutions.

The latter proposal would have placed Colorado among a handful of states supplying no financial aid to private university students, and University of Denver President Dan Ritchie and others were fighting it vigorously. On top of public university stipends, the loss of need-based aid would mean a “double whammy” for DU and other privates, said Toni Larson, a lobbyist for independent institutions.

Even some public institution leaders were expressing reservations about the voucher plan, chief among them Al Yates, who will step down as Colorado State president this summer. His main concern was whether the plan would end up tracking minority students into the community colleges.

“I wonder about the message we send to the people of our state when we institute a policy that seems on the face of it

to say that we will provide access but only to a portion of the system of higher education,” said Yates. “The message could come out that if I’m a low-income student my only entry point to the system of higher education is the community college. There are many students for whom the appropriate route is the four-year institutions.”

Ed Romero, a Denver marketing and advertising executive who served on the blue ribbon panel, thinks that students with the background for four-year schools will not be deterred under the plan. “This is about a lot of kids who don’t go to college at all,” he said. “I pressed this very hard to use the community colleges as a point of access. The big schools resent that.”

Joe May shares that perspective. “Right now we have a large part of the population simply not going anywhere,” he said. “To provide an opportunity that increases the likelihood that they will attend college somewhere is better in the long

run, for them, their families and the state.”

May’s counterpart at CU, Betsy Hoffman, seemed not to be waiting for the bill to sail through. Alarmed by predictions of drastic budget cuts, Hoffman held a press briefing in mid-February highlighting the already dismal funding her university receives—and noting that the Boulder campus had already reached the ten percent threshold, and that she could apply for enterprise status even without vouchers.

“I think a lot of students already know they’re receiving a state subsidy, and they’ll be turned off at a higher tuition. This is kind of like a shell game.”

**—CU-Boulder student leader
Michael Donnelly**

UPDATE **Colorado’s Voucher Program** **July 2008**

COLORADO’S HIGHER EDUCATION voucher plan—the only one in the nation—has been less than a resounding success so far.

Many of the goals of the program, described in *National CrossTalk’s* spring 2003 issue, have not been met:

- One aim was to increase participation by low-income students; instead, enrollment of these students has declined eight percent, the Colorado Department of Higher Education has reported.
- Another goal was to increase enrollment in public higher education, but total enrollment has remained about the same since the program began in fall 2005. Two years later, the numbers were up slightly in four-year institutions but had declined in the two-year community colleges.
- Student financial aid has remained at about the national average.
- Implementation at Colorado’s 15 two-year community colleges has been especially difficult. Many students don’t enroll until just before classes begin, so there has not been enough time to inform them about the availability of vouchers.
- State reimbursement for vouchers has been slow, officials report.

“The philosophy of ‘the money should follow the student’ has not held true,” Nancy McCallin, president of the Colorado Community College System, told the *Rocky Mountain News* in the spring of 2008.

Although legislation to implement what is officially known as the College Opportunity Fund removed public colleges and universities from the spending restrictions of the state’s Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR), this has not resulted in the increased

revenue that many college officials had expected.

Escaping from TABOR limits “did not provide the tuition flexibility that institutions were seeking,” said David Longanecker, executive director of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

“It became very clear that the governor and the legislature were not going to take their hands off tuition (policy),” said Paul Lingenfelter, president of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. Despite these restraints, however, the University of Colorado’s flagship campus in Boulder was able to raise tuition 23.9 percent in two years.

Bruce Benson, president of the University of Colorado system, said “a drop in the voucher amount also hurt.” Initially expected to be between \$4,000 and \$4,500 per student, the voucher was worth only \$2,760 in 2007.

Voucher supporters say the state has done a poor job of informing prospective students about the availability of the stipends. They also charge that the program has been poorly managed.

“A lot of our institutions don’t believe it was implemented in the way that was intended,” said David Skaggs, executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education. “The question is whether that’s the fault of the theory or the fault of implementation.”

To answer that and other voucher questions, Skaggs’ department has commissioned a WICHE study, to be completed by spring 2009. That means significant changes in the voucher program are not likely to be made until 2010, if then.

—William Trombley

One goal of the program was to increase participation by low-income students, but enrollment of these students has declined eight percent, while financial aid has remained at about the national average.

Voucher supporters say the state has done a poor job of informing prospective students about the availability of the stipends, and that the program has been poorly managed.

While research institutions in California and Illinois spend \$16,086 and \$10,895 per full-time equivalent student respectively, Hoffman said, Colorado contributes just \$6,156 per FTE student to the University of Colorado's four campuses. And at \$3,566, Boulder's tuition and fees for this year are among the lowest of Association of American Universities members. "We're underfunded and overregulated," she sighed.

CU has partly made up for Colorado's frugality by aggressively—and successfully—pursuing federal research dollars. Because of the high ratio of research and development funds, and because it takes in a high proportion of tuition dollars from out-of-state undergraduates paying \$16,000 a year, Boulder hit the ten percent TABOR cut-off after the latest round of budget cuts, Hoffman said.

In the last two years, the CU system has seen its enrollment increase by 3,779 despite a \$37 million drop in general fund support. To sustain cuts of \$28.9 million in the current year, the university eliminated 178 positions, cut four programs, and shuttered ten academic centers on its four campuses. Other belt-tightening measures have included unpaid furloughs for administrative officers.

But CU's finances are not nearly as vulnerable as the state's regional colleges—Adams, Western and Mesa—which are undergoing a transition from a single governing board to separate boards. The small rural institutions may be integral to efforts to enroll more minority and low-income students, but they will remain reliant on role and mission grants for the foreseeable future. "If that gets pulled, we probably will have difficulty adjusting to any fluctuations in the economy," said system President Lee Halgren. "Our three institutions are the institutions of opportunity for their regions of the

state. To raise tuition significantly for the population we're serving is not realistic... unless we have a subsequent increase in financial aid."

Halgren also worries about enrollment pressure if the universities use the colleges as a cushion by dipping below their admissions standards. Currently they are allowed to make such exceptions for up to 20 percent of their classes, but Halgren insists that that needs to change. Despite

those risks, Halgren, like other administrators, was intrigued by the possibility of increasing public ownership of higher education—the chief reason other states were taking an interest.

"It makes you have the right set of conversations," said Richard Jarvis, chancellor of the Oregon University System. "It forces you to bring together financial aid, appropriations, tuition... This is the only way you're ever going to see anything that looks like an entitlement."

Jarvis said the idea of putting money in students' hands would resonate with Oregon's business community. "I'm trying to seed discussions around here," he said. "But if it crashes and burns in Colorado? End of conversation."



President Al Yates of Colorado State University worries that the voucher plan will direct most low-income and minority students into community colleges.

And in Washington, state Senator Don Carlson, a Republican who chairs the state's higher education committee and serves on the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, has already taken an interest. But he would not want any limitations concerning the use of vouchers at private schools. "If you let the student go where they're going to be best served, you have to include private facilities in your state," said Carlson.

He did not say how Washington would come up with the money to fund vouchers at private schools, which now receive little in the way of state support. But he said the plan would force publics to compete for students or "go out of business." He was considering introducing legislation next year to start with a pilot voucher project at an institution such as Eastern Washington University, whose president, Stephen Jordan, has written articles favoring the voucher idea. But, Carlson said, Washington officials, like those in Oregon, will be keeping their eyes on Colorado.

"This is going to be one of the grand experiments," said Longanecker. "It's the ultimate test of what the economists have been saying all along. This wouldn't be an ideal policy in an ideal world, but I think it's pretty good policy for Colorado." ♦

Independent consultant Pamela Burdman is a former higher education reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and former program officer in education at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Colorado's blue ribbon panel on higher education made a point of avoiding the most contentious aspect of K-12 voucher plans—the funding of private institutions.

Is it a Shell Game?

Colorado's controversial new way of handing out its higher education money

By Susan C. Thomson

DENVER, COLORADO

ASK YOUR TYPICAL Colorado public college or university students about the vouchers that are supposedly helping them pay for their education, and their brows furrow in puzzlement. Ask them about their stipends, and some of them show glimmers of awareness. But mention College Opportunity Fund, and most of their faces brighten in recognition.

COF (pronounced "cough"), Colorado's roundabout way of funding higher education, now in its second year, has caught students' attention, seeped into their vernacular and become part of their routine.

Vouchers, stipends and COF are three different terms used to describe this payment system, the first—and so far only—one of its kind in the nation. All three terms are imprecise, the first two erroneously suggesting something valuable, portable and negotiable, like checks, the latter open to the mistaken interpretation that students are receiving cash they did not get before. Truth is, rather than getting anything extra, students have merely become conduits for some of the money the state used to send straight to its community college system and its public four-year colleges and universities.

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education, however, persists in implying some sort of state benevolence, referring on one of its websites to "taxpayer-funded" instruments that students "bring with them" to college. Another Commission website goes so far as to proclaim prominently: "In-state undergraduates: The State of Colorado is investing in your education. Money has been put aside for your tuition. Apply now to receive this new benefit."

Online and in presentations at the state's secondary schools, the Commission is marketing the College Opportunity Fund, encouraging students as young as eighth graders to sign up. As of late last year, 350,000 had done so, according to Jenna Langer, the commission's interim executive at the time.

Nicole Ebsen got the message and put her name on the line two years ago when she was a junior at Greeley West High School. Now a freshman at the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley, she is among those who perceive that the COF is saving her money. "I can see it online when I pay my bill," she said. "It shows a total, and it shows a credit for the COF stipend."

Given the complexities and the confusion about its name, it is little wonder that most students profess not to understand the COF entirely. Most can at least tell you, though, that it adds up to maybe \$1,000 or so, and that—at the click of a computer mouse—they can electronically deduct from their bills when they register for a semester of classes. Hey, it's "free money," some say gleefully.

Hee Yeon Day, a sophomore at Colorado State University, is among the minority of pooh-poothers. "Some people think

they're getting extra money from the state but they're not," she said.

Few students can elaborate the point better than Aaron "Jack" Wiley. As a political science major and president of the Student Government Assembly at Metropolitan State College of Denver, he has studied the political process that brought this new funding wrinkle about. It's "a gimmick," he said, just a way to get around Colorado's budget limits and keep the state's higher education system afloat.

In other words, it's just so much budgetary sleight of hand. And this is not merely students' chronic, sometimes uninformed, skepticism talking. Others with more detached perspectives describe this whole thing in even more negative terms:

- "A money laundry." That's what John Straayer, a professor of political science at Colorado State University calls it.
- "A different way of packaging and distributing the money...an elaborate process to do things the same way by calling it something different." That summation comes from Frank Waterous, senior policy analyst for education at the Bell Policy Center, a Denver foundation.
- "A huge shell game." That's the considered opinion of Spiros Protosaltis, Waterous' predecessor at the Bell Center and now a doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado's School of Public Affairs in Denver, who is writing his dissertation on how Colorado came to this new way of handing out its higher education money.

The story begins in 1992, when state voters passed the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR), an amendment to the state constitution that limited the annual growth of state spending to the increase in the Consumer Price Index, adjusted for state population change. By 2001-02, considering its population and per-capita income, Colorado had dropped into the bottom ten states in its financing effort for public colleges and universities in the annual rankings of the Center



Eric Lars Bakke, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Frank Waterous, of the Bell Policy Center, in Denver, thinks the new higher education funding plan is simply budgetary sleight-of-hand.

Colorado's "College Opportunity Fund," according to Colorado State University political science professor John Straayer, is "a money laundry."



Aaron Wiley, student body president at the Metropolitan State College of Denver, called the new plan “a gimmick.”

for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University.

By then, voters had delivered yet another punch in the form of Amendment 23, passed in 2000, which required a basic level of state funding for public elementary and secondary education, plus annual increases. No sooner did public schooling become another mandate, like Medicaid, than the recession took hold, driving available state revenue down. And so, said Hank Brown, president of the three-campus University of Colorado system, “The state was left with no option but to take all of the cuts out of higher education,” its largest pot of discretionary cash.

Come 2003-04, after back-to-back annual cuts of nine percent and 14 percent, the state was supporting its public colleges and universities with roughly the same amount of money as it had eight years earlier—for an enrollment that meanwhile had increased 19 percent. A year later, higher education’s share of the state’s budget had shrunk to ten percent from 20 percent in 1990.

Colorado higher education officials describe this as a period of severe retrenchment. They coped only by increasing class sizes, cutting academic offerings, curtailing faculty and staff hiring and raises, covering more classes with part-time teachers, and deferring maintenance. “Our physical plant was left to rot in the gorgeous Colorado sun,” lamented professor Straayer of Colorado State.

Then-Governor Bill Owens responded to the crisis in mid-2001 by appointing a “blue ribbon” panel of legislators, citizens and representatives of higher education to rethink the state’s approach to higher education funding.

A year and a half later the panel came forth with a proposal to fund students instead of institutions. Doing that, the group contended, would “help to encourage increased access for students from the lowest income levels and would increase higher education participation for all students.” This market-like approach “would lead to greater responsiveness by all institutions to students’ needs, and would increase flexibility to allow

for world-class institutions in this state.”

Specifically, the panel proposed a student “stipend” that would be worth \$133 per credit hour for an in-state undergraduate and \$267 per credit hour for certain graduate students.

Budgeters bought the student-funding concept in principle, if not those particulars. They tossed out the old TABOR-limited system of a single lump-sum appropriation for each of the public institutions and replaced it, for starters, with a

new TABOR-free approach built around a fixed amount of compensation for every student credit hour. The planners were, however, considerably less generous than the panel envisioned, leaving graduate students out of the plan and pegging the credit-hour amount at \$80, not \$133, for undergraduates, no matter where they enrolled.

This was the first of several catches. At \$80 per undergraduate hour, Metropolitan State College of Denver would receive roughly the same amount of state money it was getting already. All of the other campuses would come up with less than their existing funding, the gaps ranging anywhere from 16 percent for the Colorado Community College System to 74 percent for Adams State College. The University of Colorado system, the big gorilla in state funding, would wind up with \$84 million less than the \$150 million it was getting already from the state.

Obviously, that wouldn’t fly. So the solution became a supplementary stream of income called “fee-for-service” that technically made the institutions contractors and supposedly paid them according to their various contributions to the state. Except, said Stephen M. Jordan, Metropolitan State’s president, “The fee-for-service was not set up to accomplish any public political goal. It simply became a filler to make everybody whole.”

When the filing was done, between fee-for-service and stipends, Colorado’s higher education outlay for 2005-06, the new plan’s first year, was calculated to come out to exactly what it had been under the old revenue scheme of the preceding year. And each institution was reckoned to get exactly the same share—no less but no more either, with no provision for inflation.

To ease their continuing financial bind, the schools seized the one financial bone the new deal had thrown them: Unlike the old, it allowed them to raise tuition without having to count it against the TABOR limits.

When students first signed up for classes in the fall of 2005 under the new system, they were in for a shock or two. If they thought the stipend money was going to be theirs to spend, they found themselves clicking it away, merely authorizing the state to pay their schools money it used to pay them directly. What’s more, students found themselves, between higher fees and tuition, out of pocket anywhere from six percent at Metro State to 24 percent at the University of Colorado at Boulder, over and above what they had paid the year before.

So, instead of lowering the cost to students, as had been promised or at least implied, the new scheme ended up costing them more that first year. Nor have the “stipends” spared them or provided any relief from smaller tuition increases this year. “I’ve seen both systems,” said Andrew Aitchison, a student leader at CU-Boulder. “I don’t see that [the COF] made any difference.” College just keeps costing more money, students say with shrugs of resignation.

The colleges and universities took pains to inform students about the change a semester or more ahead of time, holding meetings, sending electronic and other mailings, developing brochures about the COF and hiring additional staff to explain it to them in person. The information effort continues with campus websites that detail the COF and avoid overselling it. As Colorado State frankly tells students, one of its purposes was

In 2001 Governor Bill Owens appointed a “blue ribbon” panel to rethink the state’s approach to higher education funding.

By 2002, Colorado had dropped into the bottom ten states in its financing effort for public colleges and universities.

“to heighten awareness that state tax dollars are used to offset the costs of undergraduate education.”

Hector Hernandez, a senior at CU-Boulder, said the COF has done that for him. He is impressed—unfavorably. “There are a lot of other states that pay a lot more,” he said. He mentioned Georgia, which pays full tuition at any state college or university for any state resident who graduates from a state high school with a B or better average.

As for its advocates’ claim that the COF would increase student access, Protopsaltis asks how. In fact, according to his calculations, college participation by low-income students has decreased in Colorado since this went into effect. As for its proper name, Protopsaltis insists on calling this a “voucher system.” “That’s what it is,” he said, because it is also available to the state’s private nonprofit colleges that are not, according to the law, “pervasively sectarian.” By signing up, they can claim for their Pell grant-eligible students half the credit-hour amount that goes to the public campuses.

So far Regis University and Denver University are taking part, and Colorado College has been approved to do so. The inclusion of the private schools is “a foot in the door... that signals a major change in higher education in the state,” Protopsaltis said.

Colorado makes the COF payments up to a total of 145 undergraduate credit hours per student. Beyond that, students must pay the COF amount themselves. Jordan said that students have become aware of that limit and are now being “a lot more careful about the choice of the credits they take.” Newly this year, basic-skills, or college-prep, courses taught at community colleges are exempt from the cap. And undergraduate students in fields like nursing and dental hygiene at the University of Colorado’s Health Sciences Center in Denver are eligible for the COF for the first time this year.

Last year, an unknown number of eligible students statewide either didn’t get the word or said, in effect, “no thanks” to the COF. Jordan says the holdouts included some students whose employers were paying for their education. Others spurned what they perceived as needless government handouts, said Nancy McCallin, president of the Colorado Community College system. Still, given all the administrative work that went into informing students about the new system and installing new computer software to accommodate it, she said it would take “a significant amount of work” to return to the old pre-COF days.

No college administrators are publicly advocating doing anything of the kind, though none seem entirely satisfied with what they and the state budget refer to as “stipends.” The prevailing attitude is that this new way of collecting state money is here to stay, something they must learn to live with but that, as a work in progress, is subject to fixing more to their liking over time. Tying some state support to students has introduced an element of fiscal uncertainty that was not there before, McCallin said. “You live and die now by your enrollment numbers.” Still, she said she’s holding off on making any suggestions for improvement until this second year of the experiment has ended.

Officials of research universities, meanwhile, are not at all reticent about expressing their special beef—that the state is failing now to adequately reward them for their higher-cost

programs. As Boulder campus president Hank Brown pointed out, “Theoretically the stipend is for undergraduate programs, and an equal amount no matter where the student goes.” Theoretically, then, a fee-for-service funding stream would cover the cost of graduate and other high-cost programs, such as the University of Colorado’s medical school in Denver, the only one in the state. But Brown said it doesn’t begin to do so.

Nor, said Colorado State President Larry Penley, does fee-for-service take adequate measure of his school’s relatively costly extension service, veterinary school, and undergraduate and graduate programs in science and technology. He worries that the result is an incentive for all of the state’s colleges and universities “to offer more low-cost programs because there’s no variation in the amount of revenue you get.”

As solutions, Penley suggests extending stipends to graduate students and replacing the one-size-fits-all undergraduate payments with variable amounts tied to the cost of students’ academic programs. Some have suggested tying the stipends to students’ financial need. More common are calls to increase the dollar amount. Frank Waterous of the Bell Policy Center said he’d like to see the stipend rise to at least \$100 per credit hour next year.

Jordan proposes raising it as much as it takes to make it a true entitlement and force his and all of the other state schools to compete more vigorously for students. As things stand now, he said, “We’re caught between two funding systems... I don’t think it serves the state to be in this mixed model.”

In the first year, when the model had only been in effect for 11 months, the state divided its higher-education funding almost exactly down the middle—51 percent to stipends and 49 percent to fee-for-service. Estimates for the current 12-month year show stipends rising to 55 percent of the state’s higher education spending (the result of that extra month), growth in the number of eligible students, and a \$6 increase in the stipend, or COF, rate—to \$86 per credit hour.

The schools have Colorado voters to thank for that extra \$6. In their fondness for government by ballot box, voters went to the polls once again in November 2005, and produced an outcome that belied their tight-fisted image. They passed Referendum C, which lifted for five years the state spending limits they had approved in the TABOR amendment 13 years earlier.



Spiros Protopsaltis, of the Bell Policy Center, thinks the plan represents “a foot in the door” for Colorado private colleges and universities to claim state and federal money.

Eric Lars Bakke, Black Star, for CrossTalk

As a result, the state has been legally free since early 2006 to spend some of the surplus revenue—now running ahead of estimates—that otherwise it would have had to return to taxpayers. As a result of the passage of Referendum C, the state's

Colorado's higher education outlay for 2005-06, the new plan's first year, turned out to be exactly what it had been under the old revenue scheme of the preceding year.

public colleges and universities have been spared yet another debilitating budget cut, and they stand to realize, together, an extra \$80 million or so in state funding this fiscal and academic year, about 13.9 percent more than last year, according to the Center for the Study of Education Policy.

All of the institutions are collecting more stipend money as well as more state money altogether this year, but nobody is claiming it is enough. For the University of Colorado system, the extra cash has provided little more than cost-of-living adjustments, according to Brown. "It has stopped the bleeding, but it hasn't restored the limb that has been cut off," he said.

The issue of how best to divvy up this financial pie does not deal with the problem that Brown and other college officials see as the biggest higher education funding issue of all—the small size of the pie.

Support for that view comes from the Boulder-based National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, which in a recent study for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education found every one of the state's public colleges and universities deficient in state support when compared with its peer schools nationwide.

Based on NCHEMS' work, the Commission has estimated that Colorado would need to pump \$832 million more a year—more than double its current level of support—into higher education just to bring all of its campuses up to the national average. For starters, the Commission has put in a 2007-08 budget request for an extra \$106 million, with \$10 million of that to go to stipends. Before leaving office, Governor Owens asked for a more realistic boost of \$50 million, including the \$10 million for stipends. Either way, funding would tilt toward fee-for-service in the third year of the new system.

Jordan, while preferring stipends, is hopeful, believing that Colorado has "turned the corner in people's understanding of the importance of higher education."

Colorado State's Straayer takes heart from what he senses is a new and warmer climate for higher education, partly reflected in Colorado's recent dramatic turn from red state to blue.

Democrats captured both houses of the state legislature in 2004, and Democrat Bill Ritter, the state's new governor, finished what Straayer calls a "hat trick" for his party by winning the state's top office by a solid margin in November. Circumstances add up to what Straayer foresees as "an effort to



Eric Lars Bakke, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Stephen M. Jordan, president of Metropolitan State College of Denver, thinks the new funding approach has "turned the corner in people's understanding of the importance of higher education."

rebuild the fiscal foundation for higher education."

Governor Ritter has talked that talk. On his campaign website, he called for "doubling the current production of technical certificates and college degrees over the next ten years," and he pledged to restore higher education funding, increase state support, and "salvage" the community college system, which he described as so financially devastated that ten of its 13 campuses had been at risk of closing. However, other than briefly proposing that the College Opportunity Fund be extended to college courses taken by high school students, Ritter's website has nothing to say about the funding system.

Ritter also spoke in the same generally positive vein about higher education in a pre-election interview with *ColoradoBiz* magazine. "We need to figure out how to stabilize it going forward," he said. "Higher education for us will be a priority, and our goal is going to be to try to get it to the national average in (per-student) spending."

From Hank Brown's perspective, Colorado's colleges and universities share with the politicians the onus of reaching that goal. "We haven't done as good a job as we should have in making people understand the importance of higher education," he said. "We have to reach out to the community and involve them in what we're doing... We've done a decent job with the legislature; where we've fallen short is with the people who elect the legislators."

Ultimately, in a state with a history of voters taking legislative matters into their own hands, the people will decide. They're the ones who approved Referendum C, loosening the state purse strings, but for only five years, making for what Waterous said is just "a temporary timeout," good only until 2011. What happens then "is a discussion we need to start soon to know what the options are," he added. Clearly, without a statewide vote to extend Referendum C or enact some other measure to keep TABOR at bay, the old spending limits will come back in full force and shut off the money flow. ♦

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



"Some people think they're getting extra money from the state, but they're not," said Colorado State sophomore Hee Yeon Day.

“Truth in Tuition”

Illinois’ novel answer to skyrocketing rates

By Susan C. Thomson

URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

COLLEEN AND MARK Schloemann marveled at how much more stuff it took to send their first-born, Greta, off to college this fall than they had required a generation ago. The computer! The refrigerator!

The money! Greta is a freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where the going tuition for her class is \$7,042. “It makes my stomach hurt to think how we’re going to afford it,” her mother said, noting that as social workers she and her husband “don’t have a big income.”

The Schloemanns, of downstate Herrin, have one reason to take heart: If Greta graduates in four years, her tuition bills will never rise. For her and the university’s other in-state freshmen, the first-year rate is nailed down for the next three years as well. The same goes at Illinois’ 11 other public university campuses, all now in their second year of guaranteeing incoming Illinois undergraduates the same tuition for four straight years, or more for bachelors degrees that take full-time students longer to complete.

It’s the law, passed by the General Assembly two years ago, one state’s novel reaction to eye-popping tuition hikes seen in many recession-battered states as they slashed spending for public higher education in recent years.

In Illinois, between 2002 and 2004, lawmakers cut the appropriation for university operations by 13.3 percent. Suddenly tuition increases that had been bumping along at about the inflation rate breached the ten-percent barrier and, in a couple of extreme cases, exceeded 30 percent.

Doubling the whammy on the neediest students, the state simultaneously clipped the budget of its Student Assistance Commission. This is the agency that, among other things, administers the state’s Monetary Assistance Program (MAP), one of the nation’s most generous programs of need-based grants, available to state residents attending any Illinois college or university, two- or four-year, public or private.

The agency’s maximum grants, for the lowest-income students, had long been enough to pay the state’s average public university tuition. But by 2002 tuition had pulled ahead. And then, over the next two years, the state cut MAP money by 7.7 percent, and the average yearly grant fell by 11 percent to \$2,355 from \$2,646.

In Illinois neither the governor nor the legislature has any say over how much tuition the universities charge or how they and the student aid commission spend the state money parceled out to them. But politicians had plenty to say about the tuition run-up. Campaigning for governor in 2002, U.S. Representative Rod Blagojevich vowed, if elected, to do something about the situation. At the same time, Kevin Joyce, then an assistant football coach at Chicago’s St. Xavier University, was making his first run for the state House of

Photos by Larry Evans, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Mark and Colleen Schloemann are pleased that daughter Greta, a freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will pay the same tuition for four years. Others dislike the policy.

Representatives. Joyce says he made the same promise to college students working in his campaign.

Both men, Chicago-area Democrats, won.

The next legislative session produced a variety of proposals—to cap annual tuition increases at, for instance, five percent or the rate of inflation, or to give legislators veto power over proposed increases.

Joyce advanced the competing notion of a four-year lock on tuition, room, board and fees. Although he didn’t realize it at the time, a plan along those broad lines had been in place at Western Illinois University since 2000. The universities were initially put off by his idea, Joyce said, but a turning point came when the University of Illinois—with roughly half the state’s public university students and half its appropriation for university operations—bought in. Chester S. Gardner, the university’s vice president for academic affairs, said he was persuaded by students’ enthusiasm for the plan and by Joyce’s willingness to be talked out of including room, board and fees in the fix.

When the plan went into effect a year ago, Illinois became the first state to embrace a type of pricing system then in effect at only a handful of U.S. colleges, most of them small and private. The law bore a politically appealing and grandiose name—“Truth in Tuition.”

Illinois’ public universities are in their second year of guaranteeing incoming Illinois undergraduates the same tuition for four straight years.



“We’re trying to build a research university,” and “Truth in Tuition” is not helpful, says Walter V. Wendler, chancellor of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

“As if we were lying before!” scoffed Walter V. Wendler, chancellor of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. His assessment of the law is brief and blunt: “I do not like it.” He described the plan as, to some extent, an overreaction to tuition increases that, at SIU-Carbondale anyway, were made all the more necessary by years of keeping the lid on. “We’re trying to build a research university,” he said. “The costs are rising. We have lost ground, and one of the reasons is we’ve been so conscious of keeping the costs low.”

David Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, says the Illinois plan has the effect of transferring the tuition risk from students and their families to the universities. W. Randall Kangas, the University of Illinois’ assistant vice president for administration and budget, conceded it’s “a big risk” for the university. Wendler cited the recent blind-siding spike in gasoline prices to illustrate just how risky the new, longer-range forecasts can be. “Anybody that provides a good or service wants to set costs as close as possible to the time the good or service is delivered,” he explained.

Wendler is also concerned that, because the universities’ wiggle room on tuition increasingly comes down to freshmen, they will have to pay “a disproportionate share” of unforeseen budget shortfalls. Nobody disputes that assertion or denies that guaranteed tuition is, almost of necessity, front-loaded, with underclassmen paying more than their fair share of costs.

Any such plan “generally means there’s going to be a bigger increase up-front,” said Paul Lingenfelter, executive director of the State Higher Education Executive Officers association. But, he added, “Just like with an insurance policy, you pay for risk protection.”

The University of Illinois’ Gardner also used the insurance analogy, saying students are paying a premium for their

educations in their first couple of years so that they’ll never have to pay more, and the university “can be certain we have the money to pay for their education in the last two years.” Gardner admitted that students who drop out of school after just two years or less will have overpaid. And they won’t get refunds.

Sylvia Manning, chancellor of the University of Illinois at Chicago, likens guaranteed tuition to a fixed-rate mortgage, costlier than the variable-rate kind at the outset but with the attractive advantage of predictability. “I think the primary benefit of it is peace of mind,” she said. For President Al Goldfarb of Western Illinois University, now in its seventh year of guaranteeing student costs, the beauty of the plan is the certainty it provides parents. “They would like to know what they have to pay,” he said. “They don’t want to be surprised later.”

That is exactly the point, according to parent Colleen Schloemann, who said the guarantee is “really nice for parents,” making it easier for them to budget for college expenses.

With its four-year time horizon, the tuition plan is tailor-made for students like Greta Schloemann at places like Urbana-Champaign, where most students live on campus, study full-time and have a shot at graduating in four years. But for those who stretch out their college careers, sticker shock awaits. “Once the guarantee expires, you pay the non-guaranteed rate, which increases year to year,” said Gardner. “That could discourage students from continuing. On the other hand it could also encourage some students to finish in four years.”

Therein lies an eventual dilemma for the 45 percent of the 12,000 students at Northeastern Illinois University, in Chicago, who take classes part-time. They, too, get the four-year tuition pledge, as do transfer students. Katrina Berry, 46, falls into both categories. An administrative assistant in an architect’s office, she enrolled at Northeastern part-time last year after a 25-year break from college.

Because she entered with an associate’s degree that gave her a leg up in credits, Berry expects to be able to finish her bachelor’s degree before her guarantee expires in 2008. As for students who can’t beat their tuition-guarantee time clocks, “We hope they see that education is a great enough benefit that they will keep coming,” said Mark Wilcockson, vice president for administration and finance at the non-residential campus in Chicago.

Residential campuses, meanwhile, continue to have a free hand to raise room and board, which already costs as much as, or more than, tuition in many cases. Fees—those miscellaneous add-ons for items like healthcare, on-campus

“We’re coming through (financial hard times) with minimal impact on students, except for tuition.”

—James L. Kaplan, chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education

Trends in Tuition at Illinois Public Universities*

(1) 2001-02 single tuition; (2) 2005-06 continuing rate; (3) 2005-06 four-year fixed rate

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Chicago State University	\$2,364	\$4,560	\$5,220
Eastern Illinois University	\$2,906	\$4,118	\$4,629
Governors State University	\$2,280	\$4,080	\$4,470
Illinois State University	\$3,219	\$4,123	\$5,400
Northeastern Illinois University	\$2,340	\$3,780	\$4,800
Northern Illinois University	\$3,150	\$4,813	\$5,261
Western Illinois University	**	**	\$4,968
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	\$3,011	\$4,920	\$5,310
Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville	\$2,388	\$3,900	\$4,350
University of Illinois-Chicago	\$3,232	\$5,660	\$6,194
University of Illinois-Springfield	\$2,873	\$3,953	\$4,575
University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign	\$3,724	\$6,436	\$7,042

* for an in-state undergraduate taking 30 credit hours a year

**All students at Western Illinois University have been on a guaranteed rate without a time limit since 2000.

Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education

transportation and recreation—are also beyond the law's reach, automatically adding anywhere from a few hundred to a couple of thousand dollars to students' bills.

Special fees for any number of special-case programs and courses further serve to up students' ante. These extra charges peeve Pam Duffield, a 21-year-old senior art student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. She offers the example of a silk screening class, which, besides an \$85 signup fee, cost her \$140 for supplies.

As for tuition, what used to be singular is becoming more and more confusingly plural at Illinois' state universities. In complying with the law, all have moved, airline-like, to differential pricing—different rates for different students, depending on when they first enrolled. This year all of the campuses are posting at least two fixed rates for in-state undergraduates—one for brand new students and one for last year's entrants.

As Colleen Schloemann noted somewhat wistfully, her family's sophomore goddaughter at Urbana-Champaign is locked into an annual rate hundreds of dollars lower than daughter Greta's—\$6,460 to be exact.

Lastly, all of the universities now post a separate rate for those generally referred to as "continuing" students, the ones who enrolled before the tuition law went into effect. In time, students who have outstayed their guarantees will be lumped into this catch-all tuition category.

For two years now, continuing students have been paying the least, the newest students the most, their premiums this year ranging from eight to 31 percent. But being subject to annual increases, continuing students are projected to eventually lose their advantage to upperclassmen on flat rates.

Time—specifically another two years—will tell. By then, the law will be fully phased in and today's freshmen and sophomores will be juniors and seniors. All of the universities' schedules will look something like Western

Illinois, with different prices for each of the last four years for new students. Western even goes so far as to maintain all of its fixed rates for continuously enrolled students all the way back to the 2000 rate—\$2,730, compared with \$4,968 for this year's freshmen.

Whether the other universities will keep their fixed rates in effect beyond the requisite four years remains to be seen.

The politicians who settled for Truth in Tuition never claimed it satisfied their original goal of reining in tuition. Even Blagojevich, signing the law as governor in 2003, hailed it as a boon for parents, "a binding contract that locks in the cost of tuition." That same year he

signed a state budget that cut higher education spending by \$147 million, or 5.5 percent.

Truth to tell, while insulating successive classes of new students against tuition-bill trauma, the law has done nothing to brake the long-term tuition trend, which continues upward without letup.

Even with the new four-year rates clouding what used to be a transparent tuition picture, it is still possible to track the trend in something like the old-fashioned way. Just look at what has been happening to the universities' prices for those continuing students, the equivalent of the one-size-fits-all tuitions of old.

Data from the Illinois Board of Higher Education show



James L. Kaplan, chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, thinks prospects for more funding are "semi-favorable."

Illinois' guaranteed tuition plan is, almost of necessity, front-loaded, with underclassmen paying more than their fair share of costs.

that, typically, the universities have raised those charges for full-time students by seven or eight percent both this year and last. By far the largest jump was last year's 29 percent at Chicago State University, the result of an increase in its per-hour rate and a decision to start charging students for credit hours up to 15 instead of 12.

For those same reasons, while the other state universities pegged their first guaranteed tuition at a median of 16 percent over their previous single-year rates, Chicago State's jumped 45 percent.

This year all of the universities raised guaranteed rates over last year's, generally between eight and ten percent. Northeastern Illinois University set the pace with a jump of 29 percent.

Vice President Wilcockson describes this as an anomaly, reflecting the university's needs to make up for underpricing itself last year and to replenish a "resource base" eroded by years of striving to charge the lowest public university tuition in the state. Now eighth out of 12 statewide, Northeastern remains the lowest-tuition public university in the Chicago area.

The University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign and Chicago campuses remain the price leaders, first and second,

respectively, among the state's 12 university campuses. While tuition percentage increases on both campuses have been middling these last couple of years, they have come on top of bases swollen by a \$1,000-a-year tuition surcharge the university imposed on each undergraduate on the two campuses in 2002 and then made permanent. The university earmarked a portion of the proceeds for redistribution to low-income students whose MAP grants were coming up ever shorter of tuition costs.

The university's budget for need-based aid has continued to grow— to \$24 million this year from \$2 million in 2000— as the university deliberately has shifted to what Kangas described as a high-tuition/high-aid policy. Just as at private universities, he said, "Increasingly, the tuition you're paying out of pocket (at the University of Illinois) is based on your ability to pay." Despite a sheaf of national studies in recent years suggesting that skyrocketing tuitions are pricing lower-income students out of college, Kangas said he's always on the lookout for evidence of that happening at the University of Illinois but has yet to find it.

The proof, Kangas believes, is in Pell grants. "If you look at the number of Pell recipients versus the total number of undergraduates, it hasn't changed in 20 years," he said. Though those numbers bounce around from year to year, they stay within a "pretty predictable range" of, for instance, 17 percent at the Urbana-Champaign campus.

Clearly, the tuition hasn't discouraged applicants overall. This fall the flagship campus overshot its 7,000 target by

UPDATE **Tuitions and Fees Rising in Illinois** **February 2008**

SINCE THE GUARANTEED four-year tuition, or "Truth in Tuition," plan was adopted four years ago, undergraduate costs at Illinois' 12 public universities have been increasing steadily.

"The only 'truth' is that tuition keeps rising," a former state education official said.

Charges (tuition plus mandatory fees) for entering freshmen at the University of Illinois flagship campus in Urbana-Champaign jumped from \$7,010 in the 2004-05 academic year to \$11,130 in 2007-08, the Illinois Board of Higher Education reported. At Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, the price increased from \$5,521 to \$8,893.

Resident undergraduate tuition at Urbana-Champaign is fifth highest among the 50 state flagship campuses, according to the annual survey by the Washington (state) Higher Education Coordinating Board. Charges at Illinois comprehensive colleges and universities are fourth highest in the nation.

Community college tuition and mandatory fee charges remain modest, averaging slightly more than \$2,300 per year.

A student who enrolled at the Urbana-Champaign campus in fall 2004, when the "truth" plan began, paid \$6,460 per year, a rate that would remain the same for eight semesters. But the same student, entering in fall 2007, paid \$8,440, or \$7,290 more over four years.

The plan guarantees that tuition is fixed for eight consecutive semesters. But many entering freshmen at Illinois public institutions do not graduate in four years or even in five or six. The four-year

graduation rate at Urbana-Champaign is 62.5 percent, according to campus officials. The five-year graduation rate is 79.2 percent; the six-year rate is 81.9 percent. The six-year graduation rate at Illinois State University is 63.3 percent. At Chicago State University it is only 15.8 percent.

Each campus decides how much to charge students for an extra year or two. Many have chosen to charge students at the same rate they would have paid had they entered in 2005-06, the second year of the new policy.

In addition, there have been sharp increases in mandatory fees, which are not covered by Truth in Tuition, which now run as high as \$1,987 at Carbondale and \$2,962 at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Charges for entering freshmen at the University of Illinois flagship campus in Urbana-Champaign jumped from \$7,010 in the 2004-05 academic year to \$11,130 in 2007-08.

At Urbana-Champaign there are seven mandatory fees for all undergraduates, even more for those majoring in agriculture, business, engineering and some other fields. These include not only the usual charges for health services and the student union but also an "academic facilities maintenance fund assessment," to repair and maintain academic buildings. Campus officials say this is needed because the state has provided no capital budget for several years.

The tuition and fee increases

enrolling a record 7,600 freshmen.

This fall also has brought a little relief for all of the state's college students, especially the needier among them: a MAP grant pot that the state has sweetened by two percent, or \$8 million. The move has had the serendipitous side effect of making the program eligible again for \$3.7 million in federal funds that it lost as a result of previous MAP cutbacks.

With a grand total of \$349.7 million in MAP money this year, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission expects to help 145,000 students with grants averaging about \$2,400, roughly the same amount as five years ago. Even with this infusion of funds, however, the commission will continue the rationing that hard times have forced. Besides striking some students from the eligibility rolls, last year the agency trimmed all grants by ten or 11 percent of what they would otherwise have been. This year's reduction will be an across-the-board nine percent.

However diminished, the MAP program is still big. Illinois, long second or third among the states in total need-based student aid, slipped to fifth place—behind California, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas—in the most recent survey of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs.

The public universities, meanwhile, remain under the state's budget gun, most of them with an appropriation identical to last year's. The best that officials can say about the situation is that at least they didn't take another hit. Northeastern's Wilcockson spoke wearily of "a commitment

at the state level not to increase income taxes or sales taxes... a climate where they're not enhancing revenue."

Appropriations are not the whole problem, he added. The state now requires public universities to pay a greater share of their employees' retirement and health insurance costs. And Wilcockson said he has heard talk of dumping some workers compensation costs on the universities next year.

This stepchild treatment has taken some getting used to by the universities. From the mid-1990s to 2002, they had been the state's fair-haired, basking in annual state funding increases that always beat inflation by a few points. When a legislature that had been so predictably giving began abruptly to take away, it was a particularly stinging slap in the face.

An embarrassment, too. This was the state that sat at the head of the class in *Measuring Up 2000*, a state-by-state report card for higher education produced by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (which also publishes *National CrossTalk*). It didn't get much better than Illinois' A's in three of five categories, including one of only three nationwide for affordability. But come *Measuring Up 2004*, Illinois had slipped back a few rows, with a still-

All of Illinois' state universities have moved, airline-like, to differential pricing—different rates for different students, depending on when they first enrolled.

have caused grumbling among parents and others who pay college bills. When Greta Schloemann of Herrin, in downstate Illinois, entered Urbana-Champaign as a freshman in fall 2005, her parents paid tuition of \$6,460—a rate that has remained the same. Had she entered in fall 2007, the charge would have been \$7,708. However, required fees have increased from \$1,442 to \$2,174 in the same time period.

Colleen Schloemann, Greta's mother, said, "I still think it (Truth in Tuition) is a good idea because it helps families with their budgeting, but the fees are quite high and they keep going up."

After one semester at Urbana-Champaign, Greta's younger brother Max transferred to Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, where fees increased from \$1,276 in 2004-05 to \$2,551 in 2007-08. "Max's total cost is higher now than if he had stayed at Urbana," Colleen Schloemann said.

But Campus administrators say they have received few complaints about the rising costs. "I don't hear lots of noise about tuition," said W. Randall Kangas, assistant vice president for budgeting and planning for the three-campus University of Illinois system. "What I hear is complaining that 'I can't get my kid in.'"

At Urbana-Champaign there are seven mandatory fees for all undergraduates, even more for those majoring in agriculture, business, engineering and some other fields.

Kangas and other campus officials argue that sharp tuition and fee increases are needed because of the decline in state support. Since the 2004 fiscal year, state appropriations for public higher education have increased only one or two percent a year, well below the rate of inflation.

So far, the steep tuition and fee increases have encountered little opposition from Illinois legislators. "They know they haven't been funding the institutions adequately, and they hope by letting the campuses raise tuition as much as they want, that will keep them happy," said a veteran observer of the state's educational politics.

Truth in Tuition is proving to be a headache for campus budget officers, who must decide how much to charge students, depending on the year they enrolled, their academic program, whether they are covered by "truth" or not, and other factors.

"This has been something of a nightmare for our student accounts office," said Barbara Blake, budget officer at Illinois State University. "What is the retention rate going to be? How many students are taking five or six years to finish? Projecting what student rates should be, and what our revenues are going to be, is proving to be very difficult."

Said a budget officer at Northern Illinois University, "It's very difficult, but it's the law and we're trying to follow it."

Despite the problems, Truth in Tuition is not likely to disappear, not unless the state's fiscal condition improves markedly.

"I do think they (those who pay college bills) wind up paying more than they would have under the old tuition approach," said Sue Kleeman, director of research, planning and policy analysis at the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. "But people are willing to pay for certainty."

—William Trombley

respectable B average but a lowly D for affordability. In a report that awarded no A's in that department and two-thirds of the states a flat-out F, it could have been far worse.

Nobody is predicting that Illinois will regain its gold star for affordability any time soon. Certainly not Thomas Lamont. A lawyer by profession now filling in as executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, he takes a dim view of the situation. It is also a relatively long and inside view, the result of his having served five years on the higher education board and 13 as a trustee of the University of Illinois, some of those years simultaneously, before agreeing a year ago to take this job on a temporary basis.

To Lamont's thinking, this year's level state funding is just another take-away in sheep's clothing. "It's not level funding for the institutions," he said. "In reality their fixed costs certainly haven't remained level. Be it energy, be it salary, be it administrative costs, they creep up. To suggest this can continue much longer, and you won't eventually affect the quality (of education) doesn't stand to reason." Illinois public higher education is "on a precipice," he added. "We've got to be careful we don't fall off."

James L. Kaplan, a Chicago lawyer and chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, said Lamont overstates the case, that the state's seeming fall from public higher education grace is "not that dramatic." He said the state board and the universities have significantly reduced overhead and improved productivity, and that the prospects for funding are "semi-favorable." "We're coming through (financial hard times) with minimal impact on students, except for tuition," he said.

Lamont's contract is due to run out in November. His successor will be the fourth person to sit in the board's executive director's chair in less than four years.

Representative Joyce said he and all members, both Democrats and Republicans, of the House higher education committee add up to a determined pro-higher education coalition. "You're not going to get the cuts you got before," he said. Senator Ed Maloney—another Chicago-area Democrat, who shares home office space with Joyce and is the new chairman of the Senate higher education committee—can also be counted on, Joyce added.

Two years after passing the tuition law, Illinois still is the only state to legislate against escalating tuition bills in this way. Joyce is not rushing to judgment. "Five years from when this became law, that's when we have to look at it to see if it's successful,"

he said. "If nothing else, we've created an awareness that universities can't just throw their costs onto the student. [The law] has also created an awareness in the legislature that if the schools aren't funded properly, they have to raise tuition."

In time, universities and students alike will be able to gauge the law's success by whether they made or lost money on it, with one side's gain likely to be the other's loss. Sandy Baum, professor of economics at Skidmore College in



Northwestern Illinois University's tuition jumped 29 percent this year to make up for several years of underfinancing, says Vice President Mark Wilcockson.

Saratoga, New York, and an expert on college costs, sees the universities as having the upper hand. "It's hard to imagine that students would be paying less than they ordinarily would," she said. For a rough idea, she said, students could compare their four years of identical tuition payments with what students on the continuing rate paid during that same time.

For now, the Schloemanns are grateful that daughter Greta's rate is safely locked in, along with loans to ease some of the immediate fiscal pain. But there's more to come—son Max, a high school senior, also is eyeing the University of Illinois. This much the family can count on: His tuition will be higher than his sister's. ♦

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

Illinois public higher education is "on a precipice," said Thomas Lamont, executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. "We've got to be careful we don't fall off."

HOPE Springs Eternal

Georgia's scholarship program, a model for the nation, experiences financial pains

Photos by Robin Nelson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Don Campbell

MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

ADRIENNE PAQUIN, a 20-year-old junior at Georgia College & State University here, hadn't even heard of this institution until about three years ago. Paquin, a physical education major, was attending high school in the Atlanta suburb of Douglasville, 100 miles away, and had her eye on Lee University in Tennessee, where her sister had spent her freshman year.

Then financial reality set in. Adrienne could borrow money to attend Lee, or she could take advantage of Georgia's HOPE scholarship, which would pay her tuition, mandatory fees and a book allowance if she went to college in Georgia.

It was a no-brainer. "I decided to stay in the state; otherwise I'd have had to take out loans of about \$40,000," she said during a recent interview while sitting in a rocking chair between the stately white columns of GC&SU's administration building.

The decision was even easier because Adrienne, who describes herself as "paranoid about grades," has never let her grade point average fall below 3.5. And because of the HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) scholarship, she has not had to work, though she has taken out a loan to pay for her apartment.

Adrienne also had the experience of seeing her older sister, Michelle, take on college loans of \$10,000 during one year at Lee University before she transferred to the State University of West Georgia.

"She matured," is the way Brenda Paquin, mother of the two sisters, describes Michelle's decision to come back to Georgia after a year in Tennessee. The maturation process, Mrs. Paquin adds, was helped along by the sight of mounting college loans. Now both of her daughters have HOPE scholarships.

"We told them, as long as they kept their grades up, they wouldn't have to work," said Mrs. Paquin. "Without HOPE, they'd have had to work, and their grades would have suffered. So it's made our life easier."

Ten years after Georgia launched the HOPE scholarships, the Paquin sisters are billboards for the success of the nation's most ambitious merit-based state college-aid program. But HOPE is becoming a victim of its own success. It is now facing its own version of financial reality as college tuition in Georgia spirals upward, and state support for higher education shrinks.

The brainchild of former Governor and now U.S. Senator Zell Miller, HOPE was designed to keep Georgia's brightest college-bound students in the state and give them an incentive to keep their grades up. It is a simple carrot-and-stick approach.

With funding from a state lottery approved in 1992, HOPE



Sisters Adrienne (left) and Michelle Paquin, shown with their mother Brenda, are attending Georgia public universities on HOPE scholarships.

scholarships were phased in to cover tuition, mandatory fees and a book allowance at all public colleges and technical schools and to provide scholarships and grants to Georgia residents attending private colleges in the state. To qualify, entering students must have earned a B average in core curriculum courses in high school, and they must maintain a B average in college to keep the scholarship.

The program quickly made Georgia the nation's most generous provider of merit-based aid, and became the model for 14 other states which have adopted some variation. From September 1993 until May of 2003, HOPE awarded more than \$1.9 billion in scholarships to more than 693,000 students. More than 70 percent of Georgia's high school graduates now qualify for HOPE, up from about 50 percent when the program began.

Although the overall increase in college enrollment in Georgia was small during HOPE's first five years, individual colleges more recently have reported remarkable growth both in enrollment and in the number of students benefiting from HOPE.

At Kennesaw State University, for example, freshman enrollment shot up 66 percent between the fall of 1998 and the fall of 2002, and the number of freshmen qualifying

The HOPE scholarship was designed to keep Georgia's brightest college-bound students in the state and give them an incentive to keep their grades up.



Stephen Portch, former chancellor of the University System of Georgia, says HOPE works because it was designed by a politician, not by educators.

for HOPE increased by 97 percent. The average SAT score for incoming freshmen during that period increased from 1021 to 1032.

“Our academic reputation has really improved over the last five to ten years,” said Terry L. Faust, Kennesaw’s director of student financial aid. “All that has happened during an incredible growth in the HOPE program. I think the type of student we’re reaching and enrolling is different from the students we were enrolling when I came here twelve years ago. I have seen great change in the makeup of our student body, and I don’t think HOPE is the only factor, but I think it’s a significant factor.”

HOPE also gets credit—or blame—for making the University of Georgia, the state’s most prestigious public university, harder to enter. As the requirement of a B average has worked up through the system, more and more students have become competitive as applicants to begin at, or transfer to, UGA (which now ranks in the top 20 public universities in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings).

By any measure, HOPE has become one of the most popular and politically untouchable state-aid programs in history. When the program began, families with annual incomes of more than \$66,000 were ineligible for HOPE. That income cap was raised to \$100,000 after a year, and in 1995 the income cap was removed altogether.

Georgians are so protective of HOPE that in 1998 they voted for a state constitutional amendment barring any legislative or political tampering with the program. “HOPE is an entitlement now,” said University of Georgia economics professor Christopher Cornwell, who has studied the program extensively and has raised questions about its economic efficiency.

But this rather slapdash growth has come at a cost. The program is now facing long-term funding issues, and no one wants to shoot Santa Claus. In the wake of cuts totaling more than \$200 million in aid to higher education by the state legislature, the Georgia Board of Regents in May was forced to raise tuition as much as 15 percent for 2003-04. Because the HOPE scholarship is tied directly to tuition, the hike puts further pressure on the program’s bottom line.

Revenues from the state lottery, while still rising, are expected to flatten in the next two or three years, largely because of competition from lotteries in neighboring states. The lottery also finances an ambitious and popular pre-kindergarten program, as well as capital outlays for

technology in education. Meanwhile, HOPE has been expanded to cover an ever-wider range of student activity fees, and to reward education majors at both the undergraduate and graduate levels who promise to teach in Georgia public schools.

“It is time to begin serious dialogue about bringing some sanity to this process,” Georgia Lt. Governor Mark Taylor told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* earlier this year. The first step came this spring when the state legislature created a study commission to recommend adjustments to the program.

“There is always talk about making changes, but to this point it’s always been changes to expand the program,” said Shelley Nickel, executive director of the Georgia Student Finance Commission, which administers the HOPE scholarships. “Now we’re at the point where it’s been so successful it’s putting pressure on the revenue side.”

She added, “Nobody wants to be the one who takes HOPE away...but we may be tightening things up.”

Any attempt to restrict the program will have to overcome a consensus that HOPE—despite the occasional sniping from researchers in academia who have turned the study of HOPE into a cottage industry—is a product of uncanny political imagination.

“Nothing has changed my view that it was a moment of genius by (then-Governor) Miller, it really was,” said former University System of Georgia Chancellor Stephen R. Portch. “And had he asked anyone at the time how to design it—rather than just announce it—I think it would have been a lousy program. Because its beauty is its simplicity.

“If you look at any federal financial aid program, they’re crazy,” said Portch, now a higher education consultant. “You need a Ph.D. to understand them, and they’re aimed at kids who didn’t have any parents who went to college. You can’t explain federal financial aid—I don’t understand it and I’ve been in the field all these years. But I understand HOPE: You get a B in high school, you get a scholarship. Keep it in college, you keep your scholarship. It’s so simple.”

Had Miller asked anyone in higher education for advice, added Portch, “we would have complicated it. That’s why it’s politically so attractive, because you’ve got to be able to describe something in a sound bite that works in a coffee shop. And this one you can.”

The simplicity that Portch alludes to is reflected in the steps Georgia has taken to make applying for HOPE an easy process. The one-page application can be completed in less than five minutes and can even be filed online. When the program began, applicants had to first apply for a federal Pell grant, and the HOPE money would then make up the difference to cover tuition and fees. This “offset” requirement was eliminated—at great cost—after complaints from college

HOPE scholarships made Georgia the nation’s most generous provider of merit-based aid, and became the model for 14 other states.

financial aid officials and politicians. Needy students now can apply for both the Pell and the HOPE.

The simplicity is also apparent to students who are receiving HOPE, or who are trying to qualify or re-qualify for it. They call it pressure.

Tim Gramling, a junior economics major here at Georgia College & State University, attended summer school this year in an effort to get his grade point average back to a 3.0 when he is re-evaluated for HOPE in the fall. He received HOPE for two years, then lost it for reasons he attributes mainly to a medical condition. His GPA going into summer school is a tantalizingly close 2.98.

“The problem is that the pressures of learning how to study in college come at the same time (in your freshman year) that you’re worrying about keeping your grades up for HOPE,” said Gramling.

Chris Koch, of Roswell, a student last spring at Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year college in the Atlanta suburb of Dunwoody, had a 3.75 high school GPA, and didn’t worry about the academic requirement for HOPE. But a lot of his classmates did. “It was a big topic in the last six months of high school,” said Koch, who will be a bio-medical engineering major and a junior at Georgia Tech this fall. “There definitely were a large number of my classmates under pressure to maintain their GPA. A lot of kids I went to school with came from large families. You’re talking about a lot of money if there are three or four kids in college. I probably have 25 or 30 friends where it was dictated: If you can maintain HOPE, you can go to college. Otherwise, you’re on your own.”

In Koch’s case, his parents saw HOPE as a chance to save money after having paid to send their son to a private high school. He had considered the University of Pennsylvania, but found that it was going to cost \$37,500 a year. “When I looked at the dollars and cents,” he said, “it didn’t warrant the additional outlay, when I was already from here. All other things being equal, HOPE certainly had an influence on me staying in state.”

While students and their parents tend to see HOPE in black and white terms, academic researchers are more likely to see shades of gray. They have crunched a lot of data and have come up with somewhat different conclusions: One is that HOPE has had only marginal success in improving access to college and improving academic achievement; the other is that HOPE has succeeded broadly in curbing the brain-drain of students to out-of-state colleges and has demonstrably improved academic performance within the state.

A team of researchers led by Cornwell and colleague David Mustard at the University of Georgia, for example, found that HOPE may have produced some “unintended consequences”: students taking fewer classes per term in order to delay their time to graduation; withdrawing from difficult classes at a higher rate; taking less difficult classes and majors, and taking more classes during summer school, when grades are typically higher.

Cornwell’s team also documented what it calls the “distributional inequity” of the “implicit” lottery tax, finding that counties in Georgia with relatively large shares of African Americans, low-income and/or poorly educated people spend relatively more on lottery tickets, thus bearing the largest share

of the lottery burden.

On the other hand, researchers at Georgia State University found in a study of HOPE scholarship “borderline” recipients that they take more courses, make better grades and are more likely to graduate in four years than their peers who didn’t get the HOPE. “That’s my definition of academic performance,” said GSU Professor Gary Henry, who headed the study.

Thomas Pavlak, associate director UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, does not agree with the notion that HOPE is a model of economic inefficiency. From his surveys of UGA students, he said, he is convinced that some of them wouldn’t have been able to attend college without HOPE, or would have gone out of state if they had been able.

“There’s a lot of these kids that, had they gone out of state, might have been lost to the state,” said Pavlak. “We had been importing educated talent for a decade (before HOPE). We had to develop our own native talent. So it’s been a good economic investment.”

While researchers may disagree on the economic or academic nuances of HOPE, the underlying debate is about merit versus need, and it is that issue that is most likely to create a furor if any major restrictions on the program are proposed.

Stripped to its essentials, the issue is whether it is good policy for lottery players to finance a college education for families who can afford to pay for it themselves, and who would do so anyway if the HOPE scholarship did not exist.

Georgia will spend more than \$441 million on HOPE in the next fiscal year, but has only one small need-based financial aid program, a federal-state matching effort called LEAP (Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership).

“This is one of the great deals of all time for a middle- to upper-income, non-lottery-playing voter,” said Cornwell of the political appeal.

The argument for addressing need before merit is summed up by Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, who wrote earlier this year in *Trusteeship*, the magazine of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and

Ten years after Georgia launched the HOPE scholarships, the nation’s most ambitious merit-based state college-aid program is becoming a victim of its own success.



U.S. Senator Zell Miller introduced HOPE scholarships when he was governor of Georgia.

**“It’s a political hot potato—
but something has to be done
pretty soon or we’re going
to see some real serious
budgetary problems.”**

**—Terry L. Faust,
Kennesaw State University**

that the federal government should be responsible for need-based aid and the states should be free to tailor their financial aid programs as they wish.

“It’s a scholarship, and if it’s a scholarship, students should not be punished because of their parents’ earnings,” said

Colleges, “Higher education’s paramount value must be equal opportunity. We must not allow our excellent system of higher education to become an instrument for perpetuating and reinforcing privilege.”

Those who favor a scholarship without regard to family income offer several rebuttals. Former Chancellor Portch, for example, believes

Portch, adding, “I’ve become rather tired of the needs-versus-merit debate, because I don’t think it’s an either-or debate. I think you have to have both.”

Henry, the Georgia State University professor, acknowledges that the HOPE program is “clearly inefficient from an economics standpoint,” because money is being paid to students who would otherwise pay for college themselves. But he contends that flaw is potentially offset by the greater levels of effort that students put out to get the grade point average they need.

“Economists say it’s inefficient, but public policies don’t always have to be efficient to be good public policies,” said Henry.

Efficient or inefficient, good public policies have to be paid for. That is the challenge facing Georgia officials as they assess HOPE, and there is no shortage of opinions on what needs to be done.

“Nationally, the state of Georgia gets beat up about not

UPDATE **Georgia’s HOPE Scholarships**

April 2009

SINCE *NATIONAL CROSSTALK*’S last article about Georgia’s popular HOPE Scholarships (summer 2003), a number of changes have been made to keep HOPE spending within the bounds of the program’s funding source, which is the Georgia State Lottery.

In fall 2003, Governor Sonny Purdue appointed a commission to study the problem.

**In spring 2004, a
commission appointed by
Governor Sonny Purdue
reported that the funding
required for HOPE
scholarship winners
would exceed the
Georgia State Lottery’s
projected revenues.**

The following spring the commission reported that the funding required for the HOPE scholarship winners would indeed exceed the lottery’s projected revenues.

The commission recommended tightening eligibility rules. Georgia lawmakers agreed and enacted a series of changes. The changes were adopted on the last day of the 2004 legislative session, after what one education official politely

called a “contentious” debate.

The most important change was to take the compiling of high school grade point averages out of the hands of individual high schools and give it to the Georgia Student Finance Commission, which administers the HOPE scholarships, as well as other state scholarship and grant programs.

Some local high schools, wanting to help their graduates attain the 3.0 GPAs needed to be eligible for HOPE, did not count courses the students failed or dropped. And they were including such “soft” courses as physical education and driver training.

The rules set by the Student Finance Commission give credit only for “academic core” courses—English, mathematics, science, social science and foreign language. All “attempted” courses are counted, including those that students have failed or dropped.

As a result of these and other changes, the number of HOPE-eligible high school students has been reduced by about one-third. “The most significant change was the change in the GPA method,” said David V. Lee, vice president for strategic research and analysis for the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

HOPE is popular with campus officials.

“It enables a large percentage of our students to have their tuition paid,” said Ron Day, financial aid director at Kennesaw State University. About 7,000 of Kennesaw State’s 25,000 students hold HOPE scholarships.

Critics of merit-based financial aid programs remain skeptical about HOPE. “Nothing in the changes they made has altered the basic problems,” said Donald E. Heller, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education, at Pennsylvania State University. “If anything, they push HOPE even more in the direction of a sop to the middle class.”

David Lee disagrees. In 2003-04, he noted, \$117 million in federal Pell grants went to students who held HOPE scholarships. “If we had a need-based system, I’m not sure we would see a larger pool of students,” Lee said.

Lee worries more about the program’s financial future. Although tightening the eligibility standards has reduced the number of students who qualify for HOPE, it is not a permanent solution.

“At some point, expenditures will again exceed revenues,” he warned, “and we’ll have to re-evaluate the program again.”

—William Trombley

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HOPE has “been so successful it’s putting pressure on the revenue side,” said Shelley Nickel, executive director of the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

having need-based scholarship and grant programs,” said Nickel, who administers HOPE. She said Sonny Perdue, the current governor, wants to preserve HOPE, “but is also mindful of the costs, and recognizes we will have to do something to tighten up loopholes or whatever the issue may be, to make sure it stays there for the students who deserve it.”

Nickel says the issue of restoring some kind of income cap is likely to be studied, along with a variation on the theme. One possibility, she speculated, would be to give all B students an award—not tied to tuition—that they could use at any public or private college, with an additional amount going to students who have financial need.

One outsider who has studied HOPE, Donald Heller of Pennsylvania State University’s Center for the Study of Higher Education, said he would point Georgia officials toward Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars Program, which he called “a good program that gets it right in terms of need and merit.”

“If the concerns are reining in costs, if they really want to improve both the equity and efficiency of the program,” said Heller, “I think the best thing the state of Georgia could do is implement some form of means testing.” But, he acknowledged, “It’s not going to be politically popular.”

Heller also questions whether the 3.0 grade requirement for HOPE might be too high. “Is that GPA excluding people who could otherwise be successful in college and could really use the financial assistance in order to afford college?”

University of Georgia economist Cornwell said one thing the state could do is cut the HOPE award loose from tuition values. That link “automatically raises the claim on the funding source,” he said. “And it means the Georgia plan is going to eventually absorb all the lottery money.” Currently, about 36 percent of Lottery revenue goes to HOPE. Cornwell also suggests that the state put an expiration date on HOPE awards, as many other states have done. Currently HOPE eligibility covers up to 127 credit hours, but there is no limit on how long a student can take to amass those credits.

Suzanne Buttram, director of student financial aid at Georgia College & State University, said the easiest solution is to “get back to basics where HOPE began—tuition and fees for Georgia residents.”

Buttram, who questions the wholesale fashion in which other targeted scholarships have been added to the HOPE program, said she would look first at cutting the book allowance, which now totals \$150 per semester.

Portch said there is a quick and simple fix for HOPE. “It’s a no-brainer: You take the fees out of it. A scholarship that covers tuition is perfectly adequate. Adding fees to it is not necessary, long term, and that would have a very significant savings. There doesn’t seem to me to be an overriding rationale for it supporting anything but tuition.”

Faust, the director of financial aid at Kennesaw State, said the “word on the street is that somebody’s going to have to go out there and restrict expenditures. The only way you can do that is tighten up on eligibility or restrict some benefits. I don’t know who’s got the guts to stand up and say we’ve got to do it. It’s a political hot potato—but something has to be done pretty soon or we’re going to see some real serious budgetary problems.”

U.S. Senator Miller, the man who conceived HOPE, said he is reluctant to give advice on how to stabilize the program, but speculated nonetheless. He said the original intent behind having a state lottery was to give priority to funding a pre-kindergarten program and the HOPE scholarship, and that funding a technology program was something that could be done later, or not at all. “I always thought you’d have to come back and do away with it (the technology program),” he said.

“It might be educational to look at how it was built incrementally as you begin to think about changes,” Miller added. “We built it step by step as we could afford it. As more students are covered, and therefore you can’t cover them as well, perhaps you could look at going back in increments, just like we raised it in increments.

“It was not born full-grown.” ♦

Don Campbell is a freelance writer and a lecturer in journalism at Emory University.

Georgians are so protective of HOPE that in 1998 they voted for a state constitutional amendment barring any tampering with the program.



Financial Challenges

Oregon's Opportunity Grant program must overcome new hurdles due to the recession

By Kathy Witkowski

SALEM, OREGON

LAST FALL, an unprecedented infusion of state financial aid gave Oregon college students and higher education advocates reason to rejoice. Spurred on by Governor Ted Kulongoski, who has consistently cited education as his top priority, state legislators had more than doubled the amount of need-based assistance available this academic year for state residents, from roughly \$34.5 million to \$72 million, while broadening the program's eligibility requirements to include middle-class students.

Those changes came on the heels of others that, for the first time, allowed part-time students to receive state aid. The intent was to increase the state's dismal college participation and achievement rates by removing financial barriers to higher education.

"I'm really proud to be in a state where they have decided to take a stand for education," said Kathy Campbell, associate dean of enrollment and financial aid at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, and chair of the steering committee that helped implement the new "Shared Responsibility Model" for the need-based program known officially as the Oregon Opportunity Grants. "That was a huge turnaround."

Even before its first year of full implementation was over, the program exceeded expectations, as students applied for and received aid in record numbers last fall, and schools experienced a simultaneous increase in enrollment. The challenge, said James Sager, the governor's education policy advisor, is, "How do we maintain [the program] in good and bad economic times?"

And the bad times have arrived. The program now faces unforeseen hurdles due to the economic downturn, which is expected to leave Oregon with a budget shortfall of between \$855 million for the current biennium that ends in July, and a \$3 billion budget shortfall for the 2009-11 biennium.

The governor's advisors said that he remains intent on protecting the state's investment in education. But as the legislature began its 2009 session in January, education advocates said that, while they were confident that the program had enough political backing to guarantee its long-term survival, they were nonetheless concerned about its immediate future.

"It's like 'A Tale of Two Cities': the best of times and the worst of times," said Oregon University System Chancellor George Pernsteiner, who oversees the state's seven four-year public institutions. He lauded the program as a success, but said he was "very stressed" about whether the current fiscal situation would allow it to continue as is.

This year, according to the terms of the Shared Responsibility Model, the state no longer awarded equal

amounts of aid—11 percent of the cost of attendance—to all eligible students. Instead, the program eliminates the income "cliff" of \$33,000 for a family of four, expanding the eligibility to include incomes up to \$70,000, and calculating the aid on a sliding scale.

As originally conceived, the formula started with the cost of attendance, then subtracted expected sources of funding: federal grants and tax credits and family contributions. It also assumed that students would contribute their fair share toward their education: that students would work 15 hours a week for 48 weeks, or full-time in summer and ten hours a week during the academic year, earning minimum wage. Students at four-year institutions were expected to provide an additional \$3,000 a year through loans, scholarships, savings or other means. The state would then pick up the rest of the cost.

However, because of the lack of available state monies, that formula had to be scaled back. So this year, the state applied a multiplier of .19 to expected family contributions; in general, that resulted in an increase in the amount of the contribution, though for the neediest students it resulted in no change, since their families weren't expected to contribute anything. This year, grants also maxed out at \$3,200 per year for four-year public and private institutions, and \$2,600 per year for community colleges. By comparison, last year the award amount was \$1,752 for a full-time student at a four-year public school, and \$1,470 for a full-time student at a community college. (Awards to students at the state's 19 independent schools varied; the highest was nearly \$5,000.)

By factoring in a reasonable amount that students could be expected to contribute, education advocates overcame common objections to increasing financial aid, objections that were voiced during focus groups convened by the State Board of Higher Education early in Governor Kulongoski's tenure. "The attitude was, 'I paid my way through college, why

Photos by Brett Patterson, Black Star, for CrossTalk



"This infusion of cash in our students' pockets is a very empowering moment for them," said David McDonald, associate provost at Western Oregon University, in Monmouth.

This year, according to the terms of its new "Shared Responsibility Model," Oregon no longer awarded equal amounts of aid to all eligible students.



Kathy Campbell, associate dean of enrollment and financial aid at Chemeketa Community College, in Salem, Oregon, chaired the steering committee that helped to implement the plan.

can't they?" said James Sager, the governor's education policy advisor. "The general public didn't understand the true cost of attending college today—that students can't pay their way through."

A working group comprised of educators, students and policymakers, with help from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, repackaged the issue, basing it on a model that has long been in place in Minnesota.

"The pitch in the past has been, 'We don't have enough, and we need more,'" said Brian Prescott, WICHE's director of policy research. "That's not really tied to anything real. And this is." What's more, it's palatable to those on the conservative as well as the liberal end of the political spectrum, he said.

"What this approach does is let policymakers and everybody else tell the public that students are earning their way through college to the extent possible," said Dennis Jones, president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

To promote the beefed-up program, the state undertook a \$300,000 statewide bilingual marketing campaign. The state's overall educational participation rates are below the national average, and Hispanics, the state's largest minority population, lag even further behind: In 2007, 14 percent of Hispanic young adults were enrolled in college, compared with 33 percent of whites; only ten percent of the state's Hispanic population have a bachelor's degree, whereas 31 percent of whites do.

"Don't Just Dream About College... GO!" urged brochures, posters, radio and television advertisements marketing the Opportunity Grants. The response was overwhelming: In 2008, a record number of students filled out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid; 38,500 of those students received Opportunity Grants last fall, about 11,000 more than had received them in previous years, and 4,000 more than the state had predicted.

Enrollment at the state's four-year public institutions was up this past fall by an average of 5.2 percent; at Oregon's 17

community colleges, enrollment jumped by an average of 10.3 percent. (The program appears to have had the opposite effect on the state's independent colleges, where the number of students who received awards increased from 1,400 to 2,500, but where awards for the neediest students were less this year than last year.) And while much of that change in

enrollment might well be due to the downturn in the economy, administrators said they believe the expanded Opportunity Grants also played a significant role.

"This was exactly the right response for exactly the right reason," said OUS Chancellor George Pernsteiner. The new Opportunity Grant, he said, sent an important message: "Your state believes in you, it will invest in you, and here's proof of it. And people took us up on that."

For students like Mayra Gomez, 20, of Hermiston, Oregon, a first-generation college student who is pursuing a double major in community health studies and health sciences at Portland State University, the additional money meant that she could reduce her work hours by half—from 20 hours a week to ten—and that she didn't have to add to the \$6,000 in loans that she has already accrued. The additional aid also meant she could afford to live on campus this year, instead of commuting 40 minutes each way from an apartment in a different section of Portland, as she did last year. As a result, she said, her grades have improved.

"Because I received more money, I was able to work less and study more," said Gomez, who is determined to finish college so she won't have to work in the agricultural factories and fields in eastern Oregon, as her parents do.

"This infusion of cash in our students' pockets is a very empowering moment for them—allowing them to pursue the college dream," said David McDonald, associate provost at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, who was in charge of the efforts to promote the program.

At WOU, a small undergraduate-focused institution near Salem, where more than half the students are first-generation college-goers, and 70 percent receive financial aid, the results have been felt already. Some 1,200 students—more than a third of the school's Oregon resident undergraduate students—are receiving Opportunity Grants worth a total of \$2.8 million, compared to 799 recipients last year who shared a total of \$1.1 million. "That's huge," said McDonald.

Administrators at other Oregon institutions expressed similar enthusiasm. "It's been wonderful for our students," said Campbell, of Chemeketa Community College, where enrollment increased by a whopping 18 percent last fall. Not only has the maximum award for full-time students increased by more than \$1,100, but 650 part-time students are now also receiving Opportunity Grants they would not have been eligible for under the prior rules. The result, she said, is that fewer students have had to take out loans.

If the story ended there, in the middle of the fall quarter, it would have had a happy ending.

But as the economy worsened, and revenues fell, the governor was legally obligated to make across-the-board cuts to state agencies that receive money from the state general fund. That 1.2 percent reduction, combined with a drop in lottery interest earnings, another source of Opportunity Grant funding, essentially wiped out a \$4 million emergency fund allocation that the Opportunity Grant program had received to deal with the unexpected crush of students who had qualified for the awards. The program ran out of money, and the Oregon Student Assistance Commission announced that students who hadn't applied for financial aid prior to December 1, 2008 would not receive any awards during the 2008-09 academic year.

As the economy worsened, the governor was legally obligated to make across-the-board cuts to state agencies that receive money from the state general fund.

By the end of February, OSAC reported that nearly 5,000 students who had filled out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms after the December 1 cutoff date had qualified for aid, but that there wouldn't be any money for them. That number is expected to continue to increase through the spring. In addition, as a cost-saving measure, OSAC decided it would not award Opportunity Grants this academic year to any students who had not received an award in the fall—even if they had filled out their paperwork prior to December 1, and had been told they were going to get aid for winter and spring. And all students receiving awards this winter and spring will see their amount reduced, by \$80 for full-time students, and \$40 for part-time students.

"It's been kind of a roller coaster," said OSAC Executive Director Dennis Johnson. "What it does is rattle confidence in terms of the resources that will be available in the future." Still, Johnson said he didn't expect any more changes in this biennium. "It's going to be very, very tight, but I don't expect any additional cuts," he said. But depending on what the legislature does with the 2009-11 budget, OSAC may have to revise the program, by reducing the award amounts, or by changing its eligibility requirements to serve fewer students, Johnson said. The good news, he added, is that federal Pell grants and tax credits will be increasing substantially over the next couple of years; those measures should help to make up for at least some of the state shortfalls.

Still, administrators said they are concerned about the signals such cutbacks could send. "The worry is that with not even a year under our belt, we have had to back away from our promise," said Camille Preus, commissioner of community colleges and workforce development.

No one knows how many students will choose not to enroll or will drop out because of this year's reduction in aid. But, said Mary Spilde, president of Lane Community College in Eugene, "The lives of many of our students are a house of cards. When you're living on the edge, it just takes one little piece and the whole house of cards comes down."

The vast majority of those who qualified too late to receive the Opportunity Grants this year—4,300 of 5,000—are community college students. That's to be expected, since community college students typically make decisions about schooling later than students at four-year schools. But even those who had planned in advance not to attend fall term, and to return to school for winter term, have lost out.

"It means less for rent. I'll probably have to work more," said a disappointed Nicole Padron, 26, a student at Lane Community College, when she heard news of the cutbacks from a reporter. Padron had taken off the fall term to deal with her recently deceased mother's estate, but was counting on the \$600 Opportunity Grant she had been awarded to help her through the winter and spring terms. Padron, a straight-A student, is studying to be a veterinary technician, and said her textbooks for winter term alone had cost her \$465. Despite the loss of aid, she said she planned to remain in school so she can eventually earn more than the \$10.60 an hour she is currently paid in her part-time job working with disabled adults. "I don't want to be uneducated forever," she said.

Oregon has no state sales tax, and a ballot measure passed in 1990 significantly lowered property taxes, leaving the state

heavily dependent on income tax for its revenue. Higher education budgets took huge hits in the years that followed, forcing program cuts. For 15 years, the four-year public institutions failed to meet enrollment goals, said George Pernsteiner. "That's one of the reasons that Oregon's educational attainment level is so low," he said.

Governor Kulongoski has articulated a set of ambitious long-term educational goals for the state that would raise those levels. According to those goals, by 2025, 40 percent of Oregon adults should have a bachelor's degree or higher; another 40 percent should have at least an associate's degree or other technical credential; and the remaining 20 percent should have at least a high school diploma. Kulongoski's belief that higher education should be made accessible isn't a surprise to those who know his background: He was raised in an orphanage, and attended college on the GI Bill.

During his January 12th State of the State address, delivered at the beginning of Oregon's 2009-11 legislative session, Kulongoski repeated his support for education, which he said is the state's way out of the recession and toward prosperity. "If we're going to turn unemployment checks into paychecks, the state must invest in our human infrastructure," said Kulongoski, who talked about building a "protective wall" around funding for education.

Kulongoski's proposed budget for 2009-11 included \$163 million for the Opportunity Grant program. That would represent a substantial increase from the current level, though still far shy of the \$250 million it would cost to fully fund it. State officials said they were hopeful that a federal stimulus package might help keep the program, as well as higher education, whole, even as the state economy worsens.

In early January, as they prepared for their session,

By factoring in a reasonable amount that students could be expected to contribute, education advocates overcame common objections to increasing financial aid.



Mayra Gomez, a first-generation college student from Hermiston, Oregon, says the new student aid measure enables her to work fewer hours at a part-time job.



Oregon's "shared responsibility" student financial aid plan has gotten off to a good start, but James Sager, education policy advisor to Governor Ted Kulongoski, wonders, "How do we maintain the program in good and bad financial times?"

legislators on both sides of the aisle said they, too, believe it is imperative to continue funding the Opportunity Grant program, though they would not commit to a specific amount, given the tough budget climate. "Putting people into higher education has a great return," said House Republican Leader Bruce Hanna, adding that education will be a high priority both for him and his caucus. "Our goal has to be to create an environment

of creating jobs, because when people are working they're generating money, and they're less of a drain on social services," Hanna said.

Now that the groundwork has been laid, lawmakers believe they should build on it. "It would not be in any sense a good decision to have opened the doors to thousands of Oregon students... then close the doors," said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin, a Democrat. Still, Devlin would not defend the governor's education budget as proposed, in part because it assumes the use of reserve funds that the legislature would have to release during a supplemental session next year. In addition, Devlin, Hanna and others are concerned that the governor's budget shortchanges the community colleges, which have seen the largest enrollment increases and which, given the state's economic troubles, are likely to see even more, as workers who have lost their jobs return to school.

Legislators also will have to weigh education and training needs against pressing demands for human services and public safety. "It is my goal to support education," said Senator Margaret Carter, a Democrat and co-chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

But, she said, "I do know I won't balance this budget on the back of human services."

Among those who will be lobbying the legislature to support the Opportunity Grant program will be the Oregon Business Council, an association of more than 40 top business executives focused on public policy issues. The OBC helped fund the initial research on the Shared Responsibility Model and endorses it in its current business plan. "It's a very logical

formula that has wide support," said OBC president Duncan Wyse.

Even so, OSAC's Dennis Johnson was pragmatic. "This is going to be one tough session," he said.

One thing is virtually certain: With increased enrollment and tight budgets, institutions will have to do more with less.

That will not be easy, said Mary Spilde, president of Lane Community College. Like the rest of Oregon's community colleges, Lane is still trying to regain the budget ground it lost in the early part of the decade, when the state last faced a fiscal crisis. At Lane, \$8 million in cuts over two budget cycles forced the school to close programs, lay off staff and raise tuition from \$38 to \$63 per credit. With a 14 percent enrollment increase this past fall, there's no more fat to trim, Spilde said. If she shuts down programs, the school will lose students. And if the school loses students, it will lose tuition dollars and public funding tied to enrollment. "So it's a downward spiral," she said.

"As a state, how we approach funding of education in this downturn is going to be very important to the public's optimism and decisions about college," said OUS Chancellor Pernsteiner. "When institutions are well-funded, there are corresponding enrollment increases," he added. "If we sound doom and gloom, people don't come."

Soon after the cuts to the Opportunity Grants were announced, six of the state's seven four-year institutions promised to absorb the costs of those cuts (Pacific University, a private institution, also made a similar pledge.); the seventh, Portland State University, said it would cover about 75 percent of the unmet need for its students who filled out their applications too late to receive a grant for the winter and spring terms.

But by the end of February, with the economy continuing to tank and the legislature threatening to slash an additional \$37 million from the OUS budget, at least one institution was exploring the possibility of raising tuition. In late February, University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer told lawmakers that enrollment increases and the cost of covering financial aid cuts have put the school's budget under severe strain, and that he and campus officials have been talking about adding a surcharge onto spring term tuition bills, as one potential option to deal with deeper budget cuts.

Meanwhile, institutions, as well as the state, are looking to private donors to fill in the gaps. Linfield College has announced a fundraising effort of more than \$32,000 for its students; Chemeketa Community College is engaged in a \$150,000 effort to qualify for a matching grant for scholarships from the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, which in August extended similar offers of varying amounts to all the state's community colleges, for a total of \$1.5 million.

In fact, there has been increased interest from private donors in funding scholarships, said OSAC's Dennis Johnson. In addition to administering the Opportunity Grants, OSAC also administers some 400 privately funded scholarships, up from 280 just three years ago. And Johnson said he expects that more private donors will come forward as the economy worsens. "It isn't the solution, but it's one of many solutions," he said.

"These are precarious economic times," Johnson said. But, like other higher education advocates, Johnson still thinks the Opportunity Grant is a good news story. "Without seeming like a Pollyanna, I am optimistic about the program," he said. This is the message he said he'd like to send to students: "Don't panic. There is help available." ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

Only ten percent of Oregon's Hispanic population have a bachelor's degree, whereas 31 percent of whites do.

Indiana's 21st Century Scholars

A new community college system and college prep curriculum are improving the state's position

By Susan C. Thomson

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

IN ITS MIDDLE-AGE, Ivy Tech has been reborn—again. At the beginning of the current academic year, what began as a vocational-technical school 43 years ago and grew into Ivy Tech State College, with 23 locations around the state, became Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana.

New signs on the campuses, and a crisp new green and white logo, proclaim the new name. A \$500,000 statewide advertising campaign—featuring smiling young people and accompanied, in its radio and television versions, by a soft rock beat—drives home a new message: The “new Ivy Tech” is affordable, close to home, the starting point of choice for students who want to prepare for good jobs or transfer to four-year colleges.

For the college, the name change comes as just desserts, a belated recognition of the kind of school it pretty much already was.

For the state, community college is a whole new concept, something it never had before.

And for Stan Jones, Indiana's higher education commissioner, it's about time. “I think Indiana has always had a good higher education system,” he said. “One of the things we didn't have was a community college (system).”

Ivy Tech is the latest and most visible of a synergistic mix of initiatives that for 15 years or so have been reinventing Indiana public schooling from grade school through college. Chief among the others:

- An inventive program that allows all of the state's low-income students to qualify for college scholarships.
- Stiff statewide requirements for college preparation in high school.

Ivy Tech State College has been transformed into Indiana's first system of two-year community colleges.

With less than 15 percent of residents 25 or older holding a bachelor's degree or higher, Indiana consistently ranked among the two or three lowest states in the educational level of its adults. Only 13 percent of its high school graduates had studied a college-prep curriculum. Only half were going straight on to postsecondary education—a college-going rate that put the state in 34th place nationally.

- An organization that, by state law, brings a wide range of interest groups together to hash out educational policy.

As recently as the early 1990s, the state's higher education system was behind the national curve in attracting and graduating students.

Such were the outward signs of what Jones and others describe as a perception, pervasive in Indiana, that high school graduates didn't need to go to college as long as they could get good jobs in manufacturing. But as that long-dominant sector of the state's economy began to rust away, it dawned on the state's business, education and political leaders that things had to be done to change that perception.

“What you had in this changing economy was a tremendous demand for skill improvement,” said Steve Ferguson, former state legislator, former member of the Indiana

Commission for Higher Education, and now president of Indiana University's Board of Trustees and chairman of Cook Group Inc., a worldwide medical products company based in Bloomington.

By 2002, the state's statistics were improving dramatically. Two-thirds of high school graduates were earning a college-prep diploma, and 62.4 percent, the tenth best rate in the nation, were going immediately to college. Even though Indiana's population was growing more slowly than the nation as a whole, enrollment in the state's public colleges and universities was increasing at a faster rate than the national average.

These new claims to fame came in addition to one important asset that Indiana already had: one of the nation's most generous financial aid programs for college students. It was then—and continues to be—rated among the nation's ten largest by the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs. Unlike states that pour much of their financial aid into merit scholarships, Indiana spends about 90 percent of its resources on need-based help.

In 1990 Indiana took a major new step in that direction with the launch of 21st Century Scholars, a program that

Photos by John Starkey, Black Star, for CrossTalk



In the biotechnology lab at Ivy Tech Community College, in Indianapolis, instructor Todd Murphy works with students Lori Bancroft and Kim McKinney.



Stan Jones, Indiana higher education commissioner, and Suellen Reed, the state's superintendent of public instruction, have worked together on reforms in Indiana postsecondary education, including creation of the state's first community college system.

promises middle school students who qualify for the federal school lunch program eight semesters of full tuition at an Indiana public college or university, or a like amount at one of the state's private schools. All the students must do is sign up, maintain a C average in high school, and stay out of trouble. Indiana was the first state to create such a program.

According to the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana, about half of the students who have signed up in middle school have stayed the program's course through high school. Of those, roughly nine out of ten have gone on to college, where their numbers have grown from 1,442 in 1995-96, the year the first of them were freshmen, to 8,228 in the 2004-05 school year. The commission has just begun to collect data on how many have graduated.

One of the successes is Ron Adams, 22, of Hammond, Indiana, who expects to get his bachelor's degree in organizational leadership and supervision in May from the combined campus of Indiana and Purdue universities in Indianapolis (IUPUI). The oldest of four children whose single mother works as a teaching assistant in a Head Start program, Adams credits her for always being "big on going to college." All four of her children got the message. Adams' younger siblings include a sister at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, a brother getting ready to graduate from high school and attend IUPUI, and a sister who is a high school sophomore. All are in the 21st Century Scholars pipeline.

As much as possible, Adams says, he has tried to be a role model for the younger ones, talking up his positive college experiences and never sharing his difficulties, like his struggle as a freshman to get up to speed on a perplexing new computer system. Adams laments that none of his high school friends

took advantage of the Scholars program, or went to college at all. Many of his college friends who might have been eligible didn't sign up, either.

As the Scholars have grown in numbers, so have the state's grants to them. Last year these totaled \$17.1 million out of a total grants budget of \$161 million, an amount that itself had nearly doubled in seven years.

Those have included some rough budget years for a state that is anything but flush with money, yet year after year it has sweetened the grants pot. So how does the assistance commission get so lucky? Interim Executive Director Dennis Obergfell smiles when he hears again a question he says he gets a lot from his peers in other, less bountiful states. "We've been fortunate," he said, in having a succession of supportive legislators and governors, of both political parties, who believe in the commission's mission.

Nick Vesper, the commission's policy and research director, makes the process sound easy: "We figure what we need in order to meet student need and then go to the legislature and ask for the money, and they've been giving it to us." This year's maximum awards are up ten percent from last year's—to \$5,172 for state colleges and \$10,014 for in-state private ones.

Those grants that give Indiana students the means to go to college are indexed now to a college-prep high school diploma that came about in 1994 and was designed to ensure that students arrive on campus at least somewhat prepared to do college work. This program is called Core 40, for the minimum number of semester

credits it requires, among them eight of English, six of mathematics, six of science and six of social studies. By taking specific additional credits and meeting certain academic standards students can earn the diploma with "academic honors."

With that they qualify for 20 percent more need-based aid than students without Core 40 diplomas.

Last year the legislature upped the academic ante on all of the state's students by making Core 40 the standard not only for admission to Indiana's public universities but also—beginning with the class of 2011, this year's seventh graders—for graduation from the state's public high schools. High school students will be able to opt out of the curriculum only with parental permission. Indianapolis Public Schools, the state's largest district, with 39,000 students, has set a goal of graduating all students with some kind of Core 40 diploma by 2011.

John DeBoe, principal of the city's Crispus Attucks Middle School, says he has detected "resistance and anxiety" about that high aim, especially on the part of parents, who fear their children will drop out of school rather than risk failure on the Core 40 track.

As recently as the early 1990s, the state's higher education system was behind the national curve in attracting and graduating students.

For Indiana, community college is a whole new concept, something the state never had before.

Indiana has one of the nation's most generous financial aid programs for college students.

State Senator Luke Kenley, a member of the senate education and workforce development committee, is more skeptical still. With two-thirds of Indiana's high school graduates already earning one of the new diplomas, and with special education students

accounting for about 17 percent of the state school population, Kenley wonders how many more students Core 40 can gain. "I think we're into overkill here," he said.

Like much education policy in Indiana in recent years, Core 40 came about as a consensus of people from perspectives not always easily reconciled. In this case, they included representatives of higher education, elementary and secondary education and business, the latter faction led by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, which has consistently backed higher educational standards at all levels.

An even broader group got together in 1998 and formed the Indiana Education Roundtable, which consists of a revolving roster of about 30 representatives of K-12 and postsecondary education, business, labor, government and others who make recommendations on the gamut of state education issues. Jones said the group was "born out of frustration that we were having these battles between Republicans and Democrats in the legislature and between the business and the education communities, and a sense that we weren't making progress and we needed to do it differently."

In 1999 the legislature wrote the Roundtable into a state law designating the governor and state superintendent of public instruction as its co-chairs. Since then the group has gathered clout, to the point that it now drives the state's education agenda. In its current push for a seamless state system from pre-kindergarten through college, the Roundtable is calling for greater attention to kindergarten and pre-school, adult education, and high school and college dropouts. One-quarter of Indiana college freshmen don't make it to the sophomore year, the group reports.

By the Commission for Higher Education's own reckoning, fewer than half of students who start bachelor's degree programs, and fewer than a third who start associate's degrees, finish them. Although the percentage of residents 25 and older holding at least a four-year college degree has risen to slightly more than 21 percent, Indiana remains stuck among the bottom five states by that measure. "We're still a blue collar state," said Jones by way of explanation.

At all levels, Indiana education remains a work in progress, with Jones very much in the thick of it all. Besides constantly advocating for higher education, he is vocal in his support of proposed legislation that would require the state's public high schools to better track dropouts, potential as well as actual. Such across-the-board involvement is typical of a man Kenley described as "the thinker and driver" behind

Indiana's education initiatives.

Jones is a career politician whose resume begins with 16 years as a state representative. Given a district that included Purdue University, his alma mater, and a mother who had been a teacher, Jones says he naturally gravitated toward education issues. As a legislator, working closely with then-Governor Evan Bayh, he wrote the House bill that created 21st Century Scholars. Later, as Bayh's senior education adviser, Jones was instrumental in bringing various interest groups together in support of the Core 40 curriculum.

As higher education commissioner, Jones pushed for creation of the Education Roundtable. Though he never has been a member of the group, "Stan was a part of the work," said Suellen Reed, a former public school teacher and administrator, now the state's superintendent of public instruction. "He came to all of the meetings. He helped us pull things together."

She calls him Stan; he calls her Suellen. That they are on a first-name basis and say they are friends and collaborators speaks to the ability of Indiana's disparate education interests to join forces these past few years out of mutual concerns. In 1992 Jones and Reed ran against each other for state superintendent of public instruction, she as a Republican and he as a Democrat. Kenley, a Republican, says bi-partisanship has become the rule on state education issues because in Indiana the two parties are "not so far apart that if there's an issue of importance to us we can't get together."

In 1995 the higher education board picked Jones as commissioner. Steve Ferguson, the Indiana University governing board president, said Jones' "passion for what we were doing, his love for the state" made him the standout in a field of candidates for the job, most of them professional educators.

One of Jones' main accomplishments as commissioner is the transformation of Ivy Tech State College into Indiana's first system of two-year community colleges.



Carol Bodie (right) instructs Melissa Lambright in Practical Nursing, one of the most popular vocational programs at the 23 Ivy Tech Community College campuses.

“Some legislators didn’t know what a community college was,” Jones said. Purdue and Indiana universities also took some convincing, because, he explained, they feared community colleges would cost them students. Kevin Brinegar, executive director of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, believes the state’s two largest universities effectively “headed community colleges off at the pass” about 40 years ago by establishing regional campuses around the state and allowing them to offer two-year associate’s degrees.

“Unfortunately the regional campuses have evolved in the direction of trying to be main campuses,” Brinegar said. “They wanted to offer bachelor’s degrees, graduate programs.”

Meanwhile, he added, their associate’s degrees were failing to focus on the workplace skills Chamber of Commerce members wanted in their employees. Besides, added Jones, “Their tuition was twice as much as it would be for a community college, so they weren’t affordable for typical community college students.”

Kenley says he and other legislators simply had no idea how many students community colleges would attract. In 2000 the legislature took a tentative first step toward the semblance of a statewide community college system when it forced a cooperative arrangement between Ivy Tech and Vincennes University, a public, two-year liberal arts school with a single campus in a remote corner of the state. Vincennes was to provide the liberal arts, Ivy Tech the technical side of a typical community college curriculum.

Jones promoted the idea, with support from then-Governor Frank O’Bannon and leaders of both legislative houses. But the plan was ill-conceived. At Vincennes, enrollment was falling and faculty members were being laid off. There was no chance that the small school could provide liberal arts instruction all over the state.

But the arranged marriage went ahead, leading to what one Ivy Tech faculty member called five “dark years,” marked by spats over funding, faculty assignments and logistics.

Finally, last year the legislature granted the reluctant spouses a divorce and gave Ivy Tech the community college name and the green light to go it alone.

Jones is philosophical about that failed first try. From his perspective it was better to forge ahead, even against the odds, than to wait until all the wrinkles were ironed out. “We

could have spent 25 years of planning and not gotten where we wanted to go,” he said.

The “new Ivy Tech” has been on such an enrollment roll that it has paced the state’s gains in college students. In 2000, the Commission for Higher Education decided to aim for a total of 30,000 more students in Indiana’s public colleges and universities by 2009. After only four years the state was



Students Amanda Nester, Michelle Engel and Jessica Reed (left to right) work in the laboratory kitchen that is part of the Culinary Arts program at Ivy Tech Community College’s Indianapolis campus.

almost 90 percent of the way toward that goal, with Ivy Tech accounting for the bulk of the increase.

The growth has come from students across the age spectrum. Toward the upper end are those like Steve Ballard, 50, and a career changer. Mindful of the physical toll his work as a builder and remodeler can take, he said, he just couldn’t see himself doing it for the rest of his work life. Anxious to “find something else before it’s too late,” he enrolled in the college’s popular hospitality administration program and is learning to be a baker and pastry chef.

Over the last decade, however, the average age of Ivy Tech students has declined to 25 from 31, as more people like Caitlin Ward, now 21 and expecting her associate’s degree in May, have enrolled. Like her two older brothers, she went straight to Ivy Tech from high school. “It was the only affordable way for all of us to be in college at the same time,” she said.

Jones reads Ivy Tech’s changing demographics as a gain in “kids who wouldn’t have gone to college until they were older. We’re getting them younger, which is much more effective.”

But he is still not satisfied that the state is getting enough of them. “We still believe there are huge numbers of adults and young people who could go to college that are not,” he said, putting the number at 20,000 to 30,000 more who could be enrolled in the next ten years. ♦

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

Unlike states that pour much of their financial aid into merit scholarships, Indiana spends about 90 percent of its resources on need-based help.

Ohio's Brain Drain

Reform of public higher education is intended to change perceptions and retain graduates

By Jon Marcus

BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

THREE HANDS RISE tentatively into the air from among nine students in a lecture hall at Bowling Green State University in rural northwest Ohio.

That's the number of them—these three out of nine—who say that they expect to stay in Ohio when they graduate.

"Too cold," says one of the students who didn't raise his hand, as the others chuckle.

"Too boring," pipes in another, provoking more giggles.

"No jobs," says a third, much more seriously, eliciting a somber murmur of agreement.

Changing these students' perception of Ohio, and Ohio's about them, is at the heart of one of the most high-stakes and far-reaching reforms of public higher education in America—more dramatic still for coming in a part of the country where the economic recession is particularly severe, and at a time when even healthier states are shrugging off huge budget cuts to public universities and colleges.

Ohio's governor, Democrat Ted Strickland, has bucked the trend by making public higher education a financial and political priority, on the grounds that educated graduates and laboratory research with commercial potential are the lynchpins of an economic comeback. And the universities themselves—unusually independent of each other in Ohio, and traditionally fiercely competitive—have slowly bowed to the pragmatism of collaboration, steered by a chancellor who is not shy about using new financial realities to prod them into it (along with public scrutiny that risks embarrassing any campuses that fail to meet his goals).

"The University System of Ohio is going to be the model of the 21st-century university system," vowed the chancellor, Eric Fingerhut, a former state senator and congressman who ran against Strickland in the Democratic gubernatorial primary and is now the point man on one of the governor's most high-profile issues.

It's a tough job. Even though Ohio produces more bachelor's degrees per capita than the national average, it ranks a distant 36th in the proportion of adults with at least an associate's degree, 35th in the proportion with a bachelor's degree or higher, and 26th in the proportion with a graduate degree. That's because, like the students in that Bowling Green lecture hall, nearly two-thirds of graduates—and half of those with graduate and professional degrees—leave the state.

"In Michigan, and I think it's becoming true about Ohio, the joke has always been that the biggest export is college graduates," said David Jackson, a political science professor at Bowling Green. "Why do they leave? Because they need a job."

Even before the current economic recession, manufacturing-dependent Ohio lost 236,000 jobs between 2000 and 2007, the sharpest decline in any state since the



Larry Hamill, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Ohio State University, with its main campus in Columbus, is part of the University System of Ohio, which was created in 2007 and includes 13 public universities, a medical college, and 23 community colleges.

Great Depression. Only neighboring Michigan fared worse. Since then, as the recession took hold, Ohio has seen another 13.5 percent of its manufacturing jobs disappear, compared to the national average of 9.5 percent. Of the top ten American cities with falling populations, three are in Ohio. By the time Strickland took office, the resulting decline in tax revenue had forced, among other things, years of double-digit increases in public university tuition, which became the fourth highest in America. Two-year tuition was the seventh highest.

But rather than having the worst possible timing for their higher education strategy, which was launched just weeks before the start of the recession, Fingerhut and Strickland may have had the best, since hard times have provided an effective argument in Ohio to drive support for public higher education: unabashedly linking it to economic prosperity.

"If you were trying to impose a system like this in better economic times, it wouldn't be received as well," said Ben Anthony, student government president at Ohio State University. "We wouldn't particularly care about brain drain. We wouldn't need to."

Students get it, Anthony said. "The argument behind education has always been that you're going to get something out of it. If you put that in economic terms, it's more concrete. And I don't see why they shouldn't make that argument, because it's true."

Yet it's a connection universities left to their own devices have often failed, or been reluctant, to make. "There is an

The universities in Ohio—unusually independent of each other, and traditionally fiercely competitive—have slowly bowed to the pragmatism of collaboration.



"The University System of Ohio is going to be the model of the 21st-century university system," says Chancellor Eric Fingerhut. "Our obligation is to drive the economic prosperity of Ohio."

attitude, and I hope it's fading, that universities are largely responsible for thinking and not necessarily doing," Strickland, who once was a professor of psychology at Shawnee State University in southern Ohio, said with a chuckle.

Fingerhut encountered that attitude, too, he said, when he was the ranking Democrat on the state Senate Finance Committee, entertaining funding requests. "I would sit

there and one university after another would come in and tell us how well they were doing," he recalled. "All of that was certainly plausible. And yet we were 38th in the nation in terms of educational attainment. We weren't seeing the startups and tech transfer. Something was not adding up."

The onetime director of economic development education and entrepreneurship at private Baldwin-Wallace College near Cleveland, Fingerhut compared this to a businessperson trying to recruit investors by lamenting, "You've got to save me," versus another saying he's got a great opportunity to offer and there's still room to get in on it. "For too long, higher education was on the Chicken Little side of this, not the, 'We're going to succeed and here's how we can help you' side," he said.

Persuading the public and its elected leaders that the universities are here to help is effective politics, Fingerhut said—something else that public higher education hasn't necessarily been good at. "Yes, this is a campaign, because campaigns are communication tools," said the chancellor, who joked that, within five minutes, he can turn any conversation about higher education into a discourse on economic development. The message of the campaign is this: Ohio's public universities were built and are maintained by the state's taxpayers, and, therefore, "Our obligation is to drive the economic prosperity of Ohio. It's a planned and sustained strategy for building support within all the constituencies that matter," Fingerhut said.

Preeminent among those constituencies is the Republican-dominated General Assembly. There, legislators including Jon Husted, a former Republican speaker of the House who was elected to the state Senate in 2008, had so soured on the competition among the universities that they finally resisted increasing their funding even enough to keep pace with inflation.

Although in name part of a statewide system, Ohio's

universities had only slightly less testy relationships with each other than they had with the General Assembly. Ohio's universities, like Michigan's, are highly independent, in a state that is stubbornly parochial, divided as it is into vastly dissimilar regions ("pockets of city-states," as Bowling Green President Carol Cartwright calls them). The most prosperous regions are on a diagonal from the traditional manufacturing centers of Akron and Cleveland in the northeast to corporate Cincinnati in the southwest and white-collar Columbus in the center, while the northwest on the border with Michigan is industrial, and the southeast is a part of Appalachia.

Each university has its own board of trustees and lobbyists. Each submits its own budget. Described by at least one Ohio newspaper as fiefdoms, the public universities (they prefer to call themselves "state assisted," to the annoyance of legislators) spun off 24 regional branch campuses, squandered scarce resources on redundant programs, and battled with each other not only for money, but for students.

"In the past those board assignments were basically political payoffs, and there were people who were more interested in getting access to football tickets than in advocating for a strong system of education," Strickland said. "It really prevented the needs of the state from being recognized."

The business community thought so too. "That's been one of our biggest problems, that we have these competitive silos, not only in our universities but in our metro areas," said Dorothy Baunach, special advisor to the Ohio Business Roundtable and president emeritus of the Northeast Ohio Technology Coalition. "Each campus is pretty insulated. It's hard for them to think systemically. There's still a lot of work to do to break down those walls."

Elected leaders tried in vain for years to coax the universities into shedding programs that were poorly rated or redundant, in at least one case cutting off state funding in 1995 to get the University of Cincinnati, the University of Toledo, Bowling Green State University and Kent State University to drop their low-ranked doctoral programs in history. Instead, the universities simply found independent sources of money to continue them. In 2003, Strickland's predecessor, Republican Bob Taft, appointed a commission on higher education and the economy, but the universities largely ignored its recommendations.

When Strickland became governor in 2007, one of his first acts was to call the university and college presidents together. Expecting a brief meet-and-greet, they were surprised to be kept in a conference room by the governor for six hours.

"I said to them, 'I am not your enemy. I am your friend,'" Strickland recalled. "And I expressed some dismay that in the past higher education had become the target every time there was a budget problem. I said, 'We're going to bring an end to that. But in order for us to be successful together, I'm going to have to ask for your cooperation.'"

He told the presidents that if the state was going to support them, it had a right to expect that they would operate more efficiently. He urged them to collaborate. Then he held up his side of the bargain by increasing the state allocation for the universities by 3.2 percent in his first budget, and by 8.8 percent in the second. He also backed a tuition freeze that

Ohio produces more bachelor's degrees per capita than the national average, but it ranks a distant 35th in the proportion of adults with a college degree.

had begun in 2006 and would endure until summer 2009. Even after the economy began to slide, causing state revenues to fall \$1.9 billion short of projections, Strickland mostly shielded the universities from funding cuts. In the last round of \$640 million in statewide cuts, only \$25 million came from universities and colleges— about one percent, compared to losses of as much as 30 percent suffered by some other state departments.

That got the universities' attention. And if it didn't, newspaper editorial pages were happy to help. The schools "must put away the daggers and one-upmanship," warned the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. They had to "become team players in a way that they haven't before," wrote the *Columbus Dispatch*. Nor did Strickland rely entirely on good intentions. On August 2, 2007, he signed an executive order creating the University System of Ohio, which includes the 13 public universities, one medical college, and 23 community colleges. Adult career centers and adult basic literacy programs previously run by the Department of Education were added later.

Responsibility for appointing the chancellor was shifted from the often unresponsive Board of Regents to the governor, and the position was raised to cabinet level, making Ohio one of only a few states—including Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota and New Mexico—where the chancellor answers directly to the governor. Under the old system, Strickland would have been two years into his term before he was able to make even a single appointment to the Board of Regents; now the chancellor was directly accountable to him.

The universities chafed, and still chafe, at any hint of the kind of centralization that exists in many other states. They want to be cost-effective, said Bruce Johnson, a former lieutenant governor and now president of the Inter-University Council of Ohio, the universities' lobbying arm. "They want to be collaborative. And they don't want to be run from Columbus," said Johnson in his office near the statehouse in Columbus. Ohio's universities prefer to be part of a system with a small "s," Johnson said. "The universities themselves know how to run universities. No one here in Capitol Square does."

Still, with his changes in place, the governor began to lay out new expectations. Less than a year after the university system was established, Fingerhut delivered a ten-year strategic plan. Before releasing it, he said, he spent a day reviewing it with William "Brit" Kirwan, a former president of Ohio State and now chancellor of the University System of Maryland, who had helped transform the higher education landscape in that state.

Fingerhut's strategic plan called on the universities to graduate an additional 230,000 students over ten years by increasing enrollment from 472,694 in 2008 to 702,694 by 2017, and by boosting the number of degrees awarded at all levels from about 73,000 to 100,000 annually. They would also attract enough federal research spending per capita to move from 30th to the top ten in that category. The General Assembly agreed to base state funding for the four-year universities on outcomes, rather than enrollment; by 2012, some 30 percent of funding could be determined by such things as graduation rates.

The blueprint also gave the universities the role of measurably improving the economy. This got the newspapers

comparing Fingerhut's job, as *Crain's Chicago Business* put it, to Tom Cruise's character's in *Mission Impossible*. "This is easy," Fingerhut said, pointing to a dog-eared, loose-leaf copy of his strategic plan for an objective titled, "Graduate more students." "But this," he said, pointing to the next objective, "Keeping graduates in Ohio," "this is all new to higher education. Isn't this the mayor's job, the chamber of commerce's job? No, it's our job, and we have ways to do this."

Fingerhut promises to persuade 70 percent of graduates to stay in Ohio—roughly the same percentage that now leaves. "We own this metric now, and that's a radical departure," he said. "Sure, there's a huge risk. The pushback I got on this was, 'My gosh, do we really control the economy? Do we control that the hot cities are Chicago or Seattle?' Yes, we can control enough of this to make a difference about it."

In a sector known for endless deliberation and interminable process, the universities have been comparatively quick to catch on to the popularity of this idea. Presidents now speak of making contributions to Ohio—"When each institution does well, all of Ohio does well," said Bowling Green's Cartwright, for instance. And they rattle off statistics about how they are meeting their targets, as if they're reading from a common set of talking points.

"My impression is that they enjoy the respect that they are getting and the recognition that I and others are showing them," said Strickland. Added Fingerhut: "It is a powerful communication strategy, and I believe the universities are starting to understand that."

Bringing the universities together hasn't been entirely without problems. Fingerhut's plan proposes weeding out poor programs by rewarding good ones—designating the strongest programs as "centers of excellence" that can especially contribute to the state economy, in exchange for which they get special funding and attention. "I noticed that

Hard times have provided an effective argument in Ohio to drive support for public higher education: unabashedly linking it to economic prosperity.



"When each institution does well, all of Ohio does well," says Carol Cartwright, president of Bowling Green State University.

Larry Hamill, Black Star, for CrossTalk

previous chancellors spent a lot of capital trying to shut down programs,” Fingerhut explained. The centers-of-excellence idea leaves the decision at the university level “and empowers people on campus who wanted to do this but were hampered by internal resistance.”

Almost immediately, some presidents started jockeying to make sure their universities were given favored status. The president of the University of Akron, with Fingerhut in the audience, said in a speech that it should be designated northeast Ohio’s public research university, even while Kent State’s president was telling reporters almost the exact same thing about his school. The two public universities are only 20 minutes apart.

Persuading everyone on campus to chant the mantra of economic development proved tricky, too. Some faculty members worried aloud that the liberal arts would be neglected. It was the job of politicians to worry about the economy, not the job of universities, they said.

“For a long time universities in general just didn’t think of economic development as part of their mission,” Baunach said. “It was basic research and teaching.” Even now, she said, “You might have an enlightened president, but then the provost is still old line, and the old-line professors are still there who think there ought to be a demarcation between industry and academia. Boy, it still goes back to that academic purity.”

But collaboration has been taking hold. A new Advisory Committee on Efficiency, made up of regents, students, faculty, the universities and colleges, and business representatives, meets in public and produces monthly reports for legislators and the media about which universities are meeting goals based on projects

pioneered at one campus or another. For example, when Lakeland Community College piloted new energy-efficiency standards, all the universities were given the job of meeting them.

“Do you really want to be the campus that’s the least energy efficient in Ohio?” Fingerhut asked, smiling. “That’s not what you want to be. This in my view is the purpose of the central office. I’m trying to structure this so that the public pressures and competitive juices of people kick in.”

The universities and colleges collectively claim savings of \$250 million, after pooling purchasing of everything from office supplies to power. A new joint information-technology purchasing program, which also involves school districts, is projected to save another \$130 million over three years. A purchasing-card agreement with JP Morgan will provide cash rebates estimated at about \$6 million in five years. And Ohio is one of seven states to receive a grant of nearly \$1 million from the Lumina Foundation for Education to find still more ways to consolidate administrative operations such as human resources and payroll services across campuses.

Individual universities have also gotten into the spirit of things by striking deals with each other. The University of Akron has agreed to manage technology transfer for Cleveland State University. Ohio State and Ohio University teamed up



Ohio’s governor, Democrat Ted Strickland, has bucked the trend of huge budget cuts by making public higher education a financial and political priority.

with the state retirement system to save a combined \$4 million a year on their prescription drug plans.

In northwest Ohio, joint degree programs have been hammered out among Cleveland State, the University of Akron, Cuyahoga Community College and Lorain County Community College, under which some students never have to leave their community-college campus to earn a bachelor’s degree. Columbus State Community College and Ohio University have reached a similar agreement. Columbus State students can take Ohio University courses toward their bachelor’s degrees without leaving the Columbus State campus—at a total cost for the degree, said Fingerhut, of as little as \$15,000.

The paths to these kinds of deals have been smoothed since general-education courses at every Ohio public university and college were guaranteed to satisfy basic or general-education requirements at every other Ohio public university and college. University students quickly figured out that they can use these transferable credits to satisfy degree requirements, and that they can earn them much more cheaply between semesters at community colleges, which saw a 19 percent spike in enrollment during last year’s summer session.

Even the University of Akron and Kent State have reached détente. The University of Akron is a partner in an innovation park west of Akron and, in the middle of the city, a polymer innovation center and a biomedical corridor in partnership with Northeastern Ohio Universities Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy, while Kent State is redeveloping a former bus garage east of Akron into space for startup high-tech firms.

The universities are reaching some economic development milestones, too. The Ohio Skills Bank, a regional workforce initiative meant to link university degree output with economic needs, found that more licensed practical nurses were being turned out than are needed, but not enough registered nurses, so several community colleges and four-year universities teamed up to give LPNs the training they need to become RNs. After Fingerhut gathered every engineering school dean in the state to make a presentation, the private aviation company

Even after the economy began to slide, causing state revenues to fall short of projections, Governor Strickland mostly shielded the universities from funding cuts.

NetJets announced a \$200 million expansion in Ohio, over other states that had competed for the prize, which came with 800 new jobs. Cincinnati-based consumer-products giant Procter & Gamble (whose Swiffer duster was developed by university researchers—in Japan) reached an agreement to underwrite research at Ohio's public universities statewide, after the system cut through red tape that had previously held up research contracts by as much as 18 months.

"Even if I could order everyone to do what I wanted to do across the system, you and I know that wouldn't happen," Fingerhut said of these successes. "If somebody wants to frustrate it or slow it down, they can do that." Gesturing toward Capitol Square, 36 stories below his office in Columbus, he added, "I am under no illusion that I can drop a missive out this window, and by the time it flutters to the street everyone is going to follow it. It's much more an approach of strategic leadership."

Increasing enrollment to meet Strickland's target has been slower going. That is in part because, after 14 years of going up, the number of high-school graduates has started to decline, and won't rise again in Ohio until 2015—two years after the rest of the country. Enrollments are creeping higher at the public universities, though the number of students has risen 23 percent in three years at the community colleges. To lure more, Ohio has done such things as announcing it will charge in-state tuition to any veteran from any state attending on the GI Bill, and has started a program under which 305 high school seniors are enrolled in freshman university classes and can matriculate to the universities as sophomores.

On the campuses, there is palpable optimism. At Bowling Green, a new center for the arts is going up, along with a 5,000-seat arena, and new residence halls. The library at the center of the Ohio State campus has been elegantly renovated, there's a gleaming new recreation center, and the student newspaper spent much of this academic year breathlessly counting down the days until the huge new student union opened.

"Students have just come off three years of no increase in tuition," said Anthony, the Ohio State student president.

Ohio is one of seven states to receive a grant from the Lumina Foundation to find ways to consolidate administrative operations across campuses.

"It's very hard to not be grateful, compared to 40-something percent in California. When you look at the big picture, it's really hard for us to be upset."

Well, not that hard. The tuition freeze ended last summer, and students have been hit with two cost increases since, capped by the General Assembly at 3.5 percent. Their tuition is still among the nation's highest. Ohio faces another \$7 billion state budget shortfall over

the next two years. And the \$724 million in federal stimulus money that has helped protect the universities from deeper cuts is running out. Bowling Green imposed unpaid furloughs

on most faculty and staff, 149 of whom took euphemistically named "voluntary separation benefits" to retire early or to resign. Fingerhut cut his own pay by nearly five percent.

As the recession has deepened, some initiatives have had to wait. A \$50 million-a-year proposal to vastly increase the kinds of student internships and co-op programs that keep graduates from leaving has been put on hold. So have plans to boost the number of science doctoral degrees and basic research.

Nor has the employment picture changed perceptibly—especially as students see it. "You can't just wave a magic wand and suddenly there are jobs in Ohio," said Danni McConnell, a Bowling Green sophomore from Columbus.

But the interest groups that sometimes divide higher education seem to be warily embracing their new roles. "There's some logic" to eliminating duplication, said the

Bowling Green political science professor, David Jackson, who is president of the Faculty Association there.

"How many Ph.D. programs do you need in one state?" As for contributing to the economy, he said, "Hopefully, that's not all that people think we're good for, but I don't have a problem with that being some of what we're here for."

Meanwhile, of the news from states like California, which are slashing the same types of higher education funding he's been trying to preserve, Strickland said, "We are disarming ourselves in terms of being able to compete in this increasingly competitive global economy. And I believe, as I say over and over, that there is an unbreakable connection between economic growth and prosperity and educational achievement. Those states, and I hope Ohio is one of them, that have protected education and nurtured education, will be the states that will lead the new economy."

If any of his fellow governors asked him why he has made the choices he has, said Strickland, "I would tell them that it's entirely out of selfish motivation." ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.



Larry Hamill, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Ohio's universities "want to be collaborative, and they don't want to be run from Columbus," says Bruce Johnson, president of the Inter-University Council of Ohio.



Hard Times

Tuitions rise, services cut, as university officials try to ride out a severe economic downturn

By Jon Marcus

WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

A CHILLING DELUGE poured from thick black clouds above the College of William and Mary, whose campus, darkened to a bleak gray, seemed deserted but for the occasional unlucky student splashing through the mud to class.

The mood indoors matched the weather. Along with other Virginia public universities, William and Mary had just suffered a seven percent cut in its state appropriation. The university also depends in part on an endowment that had lost an even more dramatic proportion of its value. Increasing numbers of students, whose parents were suffering layoffs or business reversals, were asking for more and more financial aid. And donors, their own investments drying up, had less and less to give.

“We really are a good case study for the perfect storm,” said the university’s president, Taylor Reveley, as rain coursed down outside the windows of his office in a stately building that dates from 1723. “And we’re still early in feeling the full force.”

The university has so far responded with small steps. It has shaved \$2.1 million from its \$245 million budget by delaying a three percent pay raise that was to have taken effect in November, and by doing such things as canceling library database and journal subscriptions. It imposed but then largely lifted a hiring freeze. It considered but decided against a mid-year tuition hike. And it has promised no layoffs on the main campus, no salary reductions, and no cuts in student aid.

“If what we’re looking at is another bad 18 months—that is, finish this academic year and then one more year that’s in the ditch—we’ll try not to cut into muscle and bone,” Reveley said in his folksy manner. “If instead we’re looking at an ever-deepening recession for three to five years, that’s going to force some very difficult decisions. Nobody knows right now. What we’re trying to do is proceed on the assumption that this is going to last 18 months, and that will be it, and I think that’s what everybody else is doing too.”

This seems widely to be true. Universities also have joined the line of bankers and automakers asking for money from the federal government—\$1.8 billion for new science and engineering faculty, \$150 million for research into energy alternatives, huge increases in tuition grants, and an unspecified amount for infrastructure, according to a wish list submitted by the Association of American Universities. Otherwise, even as corporations furiously shed jobs and try to increase productivity, university officials seem to be hoping they can ride things out. After all, they have survived economic downturns before.

But a chorus of voices is warning that this recession will affect higher education in ways that require considerably more drastic action than trimming at the margins or asking for a

handout from the feds. Deferring the inevitable, they say, is to be in denial.

“In this financial crisis, it cannot be business as usual,” said Stephen Golding, vice president for finance and administration at Cornell University. “The nature of this challenge is so much greater than any of us have seen in higher education before. If we’re going to continue to teach, if we’re going to continue to do research, if we’re going to continue to provide students access to our institutions, we have to stop doing other things that don’t support the core mission.”

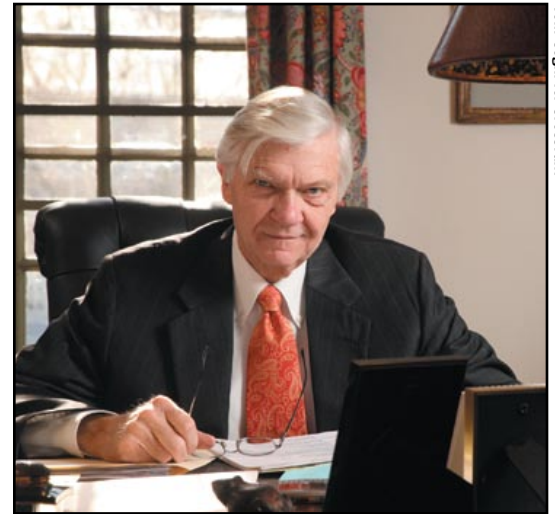
The new problems come on top of existing financial demands, such as billions of dollars in needed maintenance, tightened credit, and unfunded mandates such as requirements for security around research labs. But behind their sense of urgency, and a frustration with the mission creep and academic arms race that has left it even harder to contain costs, higher education finance leaders see something surprising in this latest financial predicament: opportunity.

“The phrase I hear people around here use is, don’t waste a crisis,” Golding said. “Let’s go after things we’ve known are among our inefficiencies and make them better.”

Many critics “would suggest that higher education is a bit slow to change and respond, given its very traditional and academic nature,” said Daniel Hurley, who is watching this scenario play out in his role as director of state relations for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

“There is nothing like a recession to instill a greater sense of urgency. Rather than whine about the cuts in state support, let’s look at the flip side: What can we do to make ourselves stronger? We need to seek, and seek very actively, the silver lining in this economic downturn.”

Golding, who previously worked in the private sector



Taylor Reveley, president of the College of William and Mary, a Virginia public university with 7,700 students, says if the recession lasts longer than another 18 months, “that’s going to force some very difficult decisions.”

Tom O’Neill for CrossTalk

Many are warning that this recession will affect higher education in ways that require considerably more drastic action than trimming at the margins or asking for a handout from the feds.



Although its operating budget is tight, William and Mary presses on with an ambitious new building program.

as head of philanthropic services for Morgan Stanley, cited that company's sale of its Discover Card division in 2007 as a model. "When Morgan Stanley started going into the tank, one of the first questions was whether or not to jettison Discover Card and allow the company to focus on its core mission of investment management. For institutions of higher education the challenge is to be able to define what makes you the institution that you are, and to sustain those things while identifying where there are opportunities to evolve or reprioritize." (In this context, "reprioritize" seems like a euphemism for "cut.") Or, as Terry Meyers, a professor of English and philosophy at William and Mary, put it, "What's fascinating to me to watch is what businesses do in this kind of situation. They sit down and say, what is our core mission? And that's what higher education needs to do."

This points to another reason why it is hard for universities to respond to economic downturns: There are so many interests to attend to. Reveley, for example, held public meetings at William and Mary about potential budget cuts,

though he said that, in the end, the tough decisions must be made from the top down. Yet, when the chancellor of the Tennessee university system proposed, among other ways of dealing with a 20 percent reduction in state appropriations, adding more online teaching and requiring upperclassmen to tutor underclassmen, the head of the faculty senate at one Tennessee university described it as a "radical attack," and students protested outside the fall commencement.

"Not many of the tradeoffs are willingly offered," Reveley said. "Once we begin making those choices, we almost immediately hear, 'There has been a reduction in this, that, or the other thing that is important to me—why are you doing this?'" In higher education, Hurley said, "there is a long history of perhaps a compulsiveness about including everybody. That's exactly why there isn't change in higher education. And that's where bold leadership comes in."

Many critics agree with Reveley, and contend that campus leaders have to lead—especially considering that universities have defended years of spiraling salaries for presidents by comparing them to corporate CEOs. "We are in this mixed model of feeling we have to pay these people like superstars. Then we wonder, what do we get for it?" said David Breneman, director of the University of Virginia's master's program in public policy, who studies the economics of higher education.

"If university presidents are truly leaders, they have to make painful, bold decisions that are going to be unpopular," said Richard Vedder, an Ohio University economist who also follows higher education finances. "This is the time they need to earn the big bucks by showing leadership and cutting costs."

One way of doing this is to reduce duplication, which is rampant on university campuses, to hear some managers talk of it: duplicate e-mail systems in different departments, duplicate facilities management, duplicate administrative offices. "These replicative services simply drive up the cost of our operations," Golding said. Streamlining them is one way to cut spending, he said; sharing resources among not only departments within a university but among universities within a state or an even broader purchasing consortium is another. "We refer to this as strategic sourcing, where you get into a group and go to Microsoft and say, 'We'll guarantee you 80 percent of what we spend, and what's your best deal?'"

Some schools already do this; others have resisted it. When William Glavin, a onetime Xerox vice chair, became president of Babson College, he tried to get neighboring universities to collectively negotiate for lower prices on such things as health insurance, and to merge their information-services departments. "There's one school in particular where the president was totally in support of what we were trying to do," Glavin said. "And this president couldn't get her own subordinates to do it, because it meant that there would have been fewer of them."

Now there might have to be fewer of them. The number of support staff at universities has swelled, from three for every student in 1976 to more than six today. In fact, the proportion of university spending that goes directly toward instruction has declined over the last ten years, according to the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity and Accountability, an ongoing foundation-supported initiative to gather data that can be used to improve the management of higher education costs. "The explosion in non-teaching professional staff that has gone on—PR specialists, wellness coordinators, diversity czars, associate provosts... I expect to see some major paring in what you might call the bureaucratic armies," said Vedder.

It is demand from students and their families that has helped drive the rise in the number of those non-faculty employees and the services they furnish, while also driving the construction of pricey dorms and fitness centers, food courts and other amenities. Another factor is the increasingly influential university rankings, although, said Breneman, "those just measure wealth."

Concessions on both fronts might be necessary. The question now, said Golding, "is not just what we can do in the sense of streamlining it, but also, quite frankly, in managing expectations."

Universities have joined the line of bankers and automakers asking for money from the federal government.

Students might be willing to forgo some luxuries to avoid the kind of tuition increases universities project. “I think the students are smarter than we give them credit for,” Vedder said. “There are a lot of things they would get rid of that the university doesn’t want to get rid of because it’s going to gore the ox of special-interest groups.”

Intercollegiate athletics, said Vedder, is the quintessential example. “If that were put to a student referendum, to not have to pay that, and get out of intercollegiate athletics completely, it would probably pass,” he said. “When you start seeing huge increases in class size and laying off lots and lots of people around campus, the campus community is going to be in an uproar if the athletic department is exempt from all this.”

Meyers, in fact, has long proposed that William and Mary’s required fee for intercollegiate athletics—this year, \$1,259 per student—go instead to academics, while alumni be hit up to pay for sports. “If this really is the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, if things are really that dire, you’ve got to take a serious look at what the university is here for,” Meyers said.

Students think so, too. The independent William and Mary student newspaper, the *Virginia Informer*, recommended its own budget cuts. “I don’t think it’s that students are expecting so much,” the editor, Andrew Blasi, said. “Universities just provide it out of concern they won’t be competitive. The university could be doing a much better job of finding places to cut costs,” he said, especially when “the only alternative right now is to increase tuition significantly.” In a survey, the organization Public Agenda found that 56 percent of Americans think universities can find ways to spend less without jeopardizing quality.

Student amenities and university rankings are not the only competitive elements that have been driving up the cost of higher education. Another is the dog-chasing-its-tail quest by universities to match the faculty salaries of their peer institutions. William and Mary is behind in this race, and Meyers said some of his colleagues have begun to look for new jobs. But the reality is that, as many universities impose hiring freezes, there are precious few places to go. And the salary chase is almost certain to slacken.

“There’s this bidding war that’s been occurring with faculty, not unlike what’s been happening with college coaches, and I believe, along with many others, that that is out of hand,” said Stan Nosek, vice chancellor for administration at the University of California, Davis, and chairman of the National Association of College and University Business Officers. “Do I think that’s going to slow down? Yes.”

New construction will slow down, too. “That saves us cash and debt service,” Golding said. And new buildings have to be lighted, heated, cleaned and staffed. Even Harvard has announced that it is “reconsidering the scale and pace” of its already begun expansion on the Boston side of the Charles River.

Nevertheless, a handsome new School of Education building is going up outside Breneman’s window at the University of Virginia, and construction is taking place everywhere on the William and Mary campus—new schools of business and education, a state-of-the-art science center, and renovations to the law school, student recreation center,

dining hall, and more. “I don’t think if we knew that we were coming into this international flapdoodle that we wouldn’t have built, but it does put pressure on the budget,” Reveley said.

Universities also will have to make better use of the buildings they already have. Some are empty on Fridays, weekends, and all summer, critics complain. “Let’s face it, the square footage of a typical university facility is probably occupied 40 or 50 percent of the time of a similar facility in the private sector,” Vedder said. Nosek said this is already changing. “We have gone through a transition where you don’t see that Friday-at-3:00-it’s-a-ghost-town,” he said. Still, he added, “there are more opportunities there.” (Some schools are shortening the time they are open. The University of Louisiana at Monroe, for example, has cut the work week to four and a half days, saving \$400,000 a year in utility costs.)

Instead of building, many universities are making infrastructure improvements that will cut costs in the long run. UC Davis, for instance, just spent \$900,000 retrofitting parking lots with new lighting that will pay for itself within four years. A survey conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities found that energy management is the top area of cost containment by universities. And “there’s still low-hanging fruit at many colleges and universities for this,” said Nosek.

There are considerably more dramatic methods to change the way that universities do business. One is differential pricing—basing tuition on the actual cost of teaching different disciplines. “A lot of people have problems with that at the undergraduate level,” Nosek said. “But at the graduate level, shouldn’t you be paying more for a veterinary degree or a medical degree” than for a lower-cost humanities degree?

Some schools have considered charging less for courses on the weekends, to maximize the use of faculty and classrooms. Hurley said instructional delivery is a major area for savings. “If there can be some innovative changes in that sphere, that would be a real breakthrough,” he said. One example is hybrid courses, taught partly online and partly in the classroom. Another is William and Mary’s plan to allow undergraduates to earn a combined bachelor’s and master’s degree in public policy, in an accelerated five years instead of six.

There are also likely to be calls for greater productivity from faculty, said Vedder. “As the cost of teaching per credit hour among full-time faculty has gotten much, much higher than for adjunct faculty, or online faculty or

Increasing numbers of students are asking for more and more financial aid. And donors, their own investments drying up, have less and less to give.



David W. Breneman, director of the University of Virginia’s master’s program in public policy, questions the need to pay campus leaders as much as some corporate CEOs.

Dennis Brack, Brack Star, for CrossTalk



Terry Meyers, a professor of English and philosophy at the College of William and Mary, is a harsh critic of some campus spending practices—especially intercollegiate athletics.

graduate student faculty, I think it's a place where you're going to have to see some changes," he said. Universities will be more reluctant to put newly hired teachers on the track to tenure, for example. "You certainly don't hire any more tenured faculty, but you switch as much of the teaching as you can into these non-tenured faculty. Or, rather than saying, 'Professor X has retired this year so we're going to replace him,' they're going to say, 'No, professors Y and Z will fill in.'"

One effort to reduce costs that is already under way is the Kuali project, a prime example of strategic sourcing, started by Indiana University, the University of Hawaii, the National Association of College and University Business Officers and others to develop

open-source software that can replace the hugely expensive commercial software universities need to manage payroll and other functions. And after years of trying to ignore them, mainstream universities now are looking for lessons in the way for-profit and proprietary schools do business—bringing classes closer to where students live, for example, and maximizing the use of space.

The hunger for more revenue, in place of state government appropriations and endowment yields, has some schools boosting their ranks of foreign students who pay full tuition. The University of California at Berkeley tripled the number of foreign students it admitted this year, and plans to raise it again next year. There also is a spirited debate under way in California about whether public universities should increase the enrollment of higher-paying out-of-state students,

following the example of universities in Michigan, Virginia, Vermont and elsewhere that already are vigorously recruiting such students. At the College of William and Mary, 35 percent of the students come from out of state.

Students will almost surely feel the most pain. More than two-thirds of private colleges and universities plan to increase tuition next fall, according to a survey by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. At half of those schools, as many

as ten percent of students were already expected to withdraw because of financial hardship.

No one appears to have surveyed public universities on this question, but almost all of them are being squeezed. "When [governors] cut our budgets, there's sort of a wink and a nod that they know we're going to raise tuition, so go ahead and do it," Breneman said. "There's a deafening silence from the leadership of American higher education on this—about affordability." When reports show that tuition has increased

dramatically (the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's *Measuring Up 2008* pointed out that tuition and fees have risen 439 percent in the last 25 years, surpassing even the 251 percent increase in medical care costs), the presidents "just get mad, because it makes it harder for them to raise tuition," Breneman said.

"Students are expecting a hefty tuition increase, come the end of this year," said William and Mary student Andrew Blasi. "When the solution is just so easy—to raise tuition—it makes it harder to convince [the universities] to cut costs." He has a point, said Nosek. "Even when you make what you consider to be reasonable increases in fees, how much of that needs to go back into aid?" he asked.

Reveley defends the price of a William and Mary degree. "A really splendid undergraduate education has enormous value, and if a family can pay for it, they ought to pay for it," he said. "If what you want is really first-rate teaching in small classes, it's got to get paid for." Yet even though the proportion of the William and Mary operating budget underwritten by the state of Virginia has fallen from 42 percent in 1980 to 18 percent today, William and Mary students "are getting an incredible deal," Reveley said. "Even the out-of-state students are getting an incredible deal." (Annual tuition, room, board, mandatory fees and incremental costs at William and Mary total \$10,300—\$19,800 for students from out of state.)

Reveley does not support imposing layoffs. "They are enormously destructive of the fabric of the school, and we don't have enough people to begin with," he said. William and Mary has 2,528 non-faculty support staff for its 7,625 students, or one for every three, half the typical ratio. "I suppose everyone says they're anorexic and miserly. But we are overachieving with a pretty small cohort of people," Reveley said. "We put less into the administrative side, which makes it harder to find places to cut when push comes to shove."

Inevitably, however, changes that are more dramatic than hiring freezes and journal cancellations will eventually become necessary, said Golding. "We are doing those things first because we have to deal with the immediate problem that's facing us, and then we can step back and look to see where there are opportunities for such things as programs we want to get out of because they don't define the institutions. And that takes time." Besides, he said, just cutting a program may not save much money: "If you have a tenured professor, you still have to deal with that obligation." And some programs generate revenue. Breneman, in his role as an administrator during the 2001 recession, proposed eliminating a master's program in his department in order to cut costs, only to find out that it had more full-tuition-paying students enrolled in it and was making money for the university.

The rain at William and Mary finally let up. The next week, Virginia's governor slashed another eight percent from the state appropriation for the college, on top of the seven percent already announced. Since October 2008, the total cuts in state funding alone had reached \$8.6 million. It was time to go back to the ledger. ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Students might well be willing to forgo some luxuries to avoid the kind of tuition increases universities project.

Kentucky's Rocky Road

Recent reform legislation produces results, but faces tough challenges

By Kay Mills

MOREHEAD, KENTUCKY

WHEN KENTUCKY PASSED its ambitious higher education reform legislation in 1997, the authors doubtless had never heard of Janie Spurlock or Teresa Younce of Prestonsburg, in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. But these two women have demonstrated what the landmark effort was all about—helping more Kentuckians receive education beyond high school.

Spurlock, 47 and mother of six children, and Younce, 44 and mother of two, might never have realized their dreams of a college degree if they had been forced to commute from Prestonsburg to the nearest public four-year university, Morehead State, an hour and a half away. The reform legislation not only encouraged universities to collaborate more fully with community colleges to smooth transitions into four-year institutions but also sought greater access for students to bachelor's degree programs; Spurlock and Younce benefited from both provisions.

Both women first attended Big Sandy Community and Technical College in Prestonsburg, then transferred to the Morehead State off-campus center there in 2003. While the center has existed for 30 years, it was only four years ago that the university, building on the momentum

In 2001 the economy soured, and higher education budgets were cut for three years in a row.

of the reforms, began an extensive outreach program and started offering the bachelor of social work program at Prestonsburg. When she graduated in May, Younce was honored as the outstanding undergraduate student in Morehead State's department of sociology, social work and criminology. Spurlock, just

two electives shy of her degree, was named the outstanding social work student.

Thousands of students have benefited from the reforms, as these indicators show:

- Undergraduate enrollment increased to 205,832 students in fall 2005, up from 160,926 in 1998, according to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.
- By 2004, 81.8 percent of adults 25 or older had a high school diploma or a general equivalency diploma, up from 77.9 in 1998. Adult education enrollment increased from 51,177 in 2000 to 120,051 last year.
- The six-year graduation rate from the state's public universities rose from 36.7 percent in 1998 to 44.3 percent in 2004.

- The patchwork of two-year community colleges and technical schools was transformed into the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS); enrollment grew from 52,201 in 2000 to 81,990 in 2004.

- The Research Challenge Trust Fund, inelegantly known as "Bucks for Brains," poured \$350 million into higher education over the first six years after the reforms passed, enabling the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville to hire dozens of new research-minded professors. The goal is to lift UK into the top 20 American research universities by the year 2020 and to make the University of Louisville a nationally recognized metropolitan research institution.

When former Democratic Governor Paul Patton took office in 1997, he was determined to move Kentucky away from its traditional economy based on bourbon, horse racing and tobacco, toward one that relied more on science and technology. To achieve this, Patton knew the state needed a better-educated citizenry and an improved public higher education system.

The legislature agreed, passing House Bill 1, which established "Bucks for Brains" and five other trust funds to finance the reforms. The legislation gave the Council on Postsecondary Education the authority to determine how the new money should be spent, but the council works with the universities on developing the criteria. The legislation also provided the council with a stronger role in coordinating the public system of two research universities, six four-year colleges and 16 community and technical colleges.

The council's first president under the new setup was Gordon K. Davies, an outspoken man who insisted that legislators stop funding their home universities when they didn't perform well, and encouraged university presidents



President Lee Todd of the University of Kentucky says part of his job is to "build a fabric of approval for higher education among Kentuckians."

Elaine Shay for CrossTalk

to work together rather than competing for programs and money. “It was worth being blunt—and it was worth being fired,” said Davies, whose contract was not renewed in 2002. “Putting aside the petty stuff that occupies many people in Kentucky higher education now, we started a revolution. And even revolutions that fail add something to our experience.”

Thomas Layzell, former commissioner of higher education in Mississippi, succeeded Davies. To him fell the task of brokering distribution of cuts that were made in the universities’ budgets during an economic slowdown. “That was an important event to make that happen,” said Ron Carson, senior fellow for policy development at the postsecondary council. “It was an early test.”

“Gordon brought a degree of intensity that was really necessary to take the details in the legislation and make them happen,” said Aims McGuinness Jr., of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a consultant on the reforms. “One of the skills that Tom brings to the job is that he is very much a peacemaker, bringing people together. They simply have different leadership styles for different times.”

The question remains, however, whether the council is strong enough to keep the universities from slipping back into their old competitive, territorial ways. For example, the reforms call for the regional universities to be four-year baccalaureate institutions with only UK and Louisville offering Ph.D.s. Yet by 2002 the *Lexington Herald-Leader* was reporting that the presidents of both Eastern Kentucky University and Western Kentucky University wanted to offer doctorates in education. Davies had resisted such ambitions, calling them “mission creep,” and so far the council has received no formal proposals for these programs.

Layzell said that having the reforms both written in law and as part of a public agenda “gives you a very strong basis to argue against institutional self-interest. You can say, ‘Hey, this isn’t about you. This is about Kentucky. This is about the needs of Kentucky.’ As long as that framework remains in place, this is going to continue.”

State spending on higher education increased by 40 percent in the early years of the Patton administration. But in 2001 the economy soured, and higher education budgets were cut for three years in a row. A new governor, Republican Ernie Fletcher, took office in 2003, and there was deep concern that the reforms might be derailed by either budget constraints or politics or both.

“Governors don’t adopt their predecessor’s babies,” Patton said in an interview. “I didn’t, and I didn’t expect my successor to adopt mine. Education is a little more universal than a pet program, though, and I’m sure Fletcher understands that. The reforms should be able to survive. And I hope the universities will concentrate on trying to make the pie

bigger instead of fighting over the pieces.”

Fletcher said he had no problem with adopting Patton’s reform agenda as long as it was good policy—“and this is,” he said in an interview. Fletcher wants to take the reforms



Stewart Bowman for CrossTalk

Teresa Younce, helped by Kentucky’s higher education reforms, graduated from Morehead State University with a degree in sociology.

to the next level, which he described as having universities and colleges look not only at academics but also increasingly at their roles in community and economic development. “We’ve had some challenges” economically since the reforms were passed, Fletcher added, but he pointed out that the state increased higher education budgets by 12 percent, or \$81.6 million, this year over last.

The budget increases generated renewed hope among educators. “If you had asked me this time last year (about how the reforms were doing), I’d have said awful,” Morehead State Provost Michael Moore commented. “Now I’m optimistic. The legislature and governor’s office gave a clear positive signal in support of higher education.”

However, other leaders say the three years of budget cuts have left Kentucky higher education several years behind. “The rate of improvement has slowed down,” said Michael Nietzel, former provost of the University of Kentucky. “We got off to a fast start in 1998 and it wasn’t reasonable to expect that it would continue, but it decreased more quickly than we expected.” But Nietzel added, “I don’t think that the economy was the only reason. It’s hard to stay with the reform agenda.” It’s also hard to divorce politics and regionalism from a state in which higher education was set up to be regional.

The low levels of educational attainment that prompted the reforms stemmed not only from Kentucky’s poverty but also from what some say is the state’s historical failure to value education. University of Kentucky President Lee Todd

“It was worth being blunt—and it was worth being fired... Even revolutions that fail add something to our experience.”
—Gordon K. Davies

Jr. says that part of his mission is to help “build a fabric of approval for higher education among Kentuckians.” Using a metaphor from one of the state’s favorite sports, Todd said that “coaches will say that a player has a great basketball IQ. We want Kentuckians to have a great research IQ and a great cultural IQ.”

Some in Kentucky are skeptical that UK can become one of the nation’s top 20 research institutions. (UK ranked 63rd out of 100 top institutions in federal funds for academic research in 2004, the National Science Foundation reported.) But in fiscal year 2005, UK researchers brought in a record \$273.9 million in outside grants and contracts—the fourth year in a row that the university exceeded \$200 million in sponsored project awards.

Since 1997, UK has increased the number of endowed chairs (each supported by at least \$1 million) from 22 to 88, with 56 of them filled, and endowed professorships (\$100,000 minimum endowment) from 45 to 226, with 134 filled. Among those joining the UK faculty through “Bucks for Brains” financing have been Gail Robinson, who headed the young talent development program at the Metropolitan Opera and who now teaches voice; David Wildasin, an economist who came from Vanderbilt; and Greg Gearhardt, a professor of anatomy from the University of Colorado who is studying Parkinson’s disease.

However, UK faculty salaries, which averaged \$71,026 in 2004, lag behind those of its benchmark institutions, such as UCLA, the University of Michigan and Ohio State, where the median salaries were \$81,681 last year. As a result, the university has lost some outstanding faculty members to other institutions. Officials cite the examples of Mike Desch, who left the Patterson School of Diplomacy directorship to go to Texas A&M, and Winston Ho, a chemical engineer who left for Ohio State University soon after being named to the National Academy of Engineering.

Todd pointed out that UK lost \$73 million in cumulative cuts from 2001 to 2004, then received \$18 million in additional appropriations this year. “We had had a pretty rapid ramp upward after the legislation was passed, but then it plateaued,” he said.

John Thelin, a professor in UK’s educational policy studies department, thinks the university administration is being a bit unfair in talking about how much money it has lost since 2001, because that year was such a high water mark. Thelin believes that Kentucky “has been relatively generous to higher education and allows it flexibility. It doesn’t micromanage.” And he considers the action of Governor Fletcher and the legislature this year a “mild win-win situation.”

University of Louisville President James Ramsey, who was Patton’s budget director when House Bill 1 passed, said that the reforms brought a broader public agenda to the state than just teaching English and math efficiently. The reforms created an energy on his campus that has lasted despite budget cuts, he said.

Louisville is concentrating its efforts on research and teaching in the life sciences and medicine, early childhood education, entrepreneurship, and logistics and distribution (that is, focusing on getting goods to market), according

to Ramsey. Much of the money it has received from the state and in federal grants has gone into the health sciences area. For example, Bucks for Brains money helped bring Donald Miller from the University of Alabama, Birmingham, to run the James Graham Brown Cancer Center. Eric Lentsch, an otolaryngologist, came from the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston to study how neck and head cancers invade and spread.

Bucks for Brains faces an uncertain future. The final round to date—in the 2002-04 biennium—was financed by state-supported bonds. For 2004-06 the Council on Postsecondary Education requested \$61 million for the program, but it was not funded. There is some talk that the bigger need now is for additional space for all the researchers who have been hired, yielding the possibility of a “Bucks for Bricks” program, but that hasn’t happened yet.

Although much of the new money to implement the reforms has gone to UK and the University of Louisville, the six regional campuses—Eastern Kentucky, Western Kentucky, Northern Kentucky, Kentucky State, Morehead State and Murray—also have benefited. For example, at Northern Kentucky, the Center for Integrative Natural

“I hope the universities will concentrate on trying to make the pie bigger instead of fighting over the pieces.”
—Paul Patton,
former governor of Kentucky



Mike McCall is president of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, where enrollment increased from 52,201 to 81,990 between 2000 and 2004.

The reform legislation encouraged universities to collaborate more fully with community colleges to smooth transitions into four-year institutions.

Science and Mathematics has as one of its goals improving teaching and learning of math and fostering increased science activity.

“Public engagement is a big piece of what we do,” said Northern Kentucky University President James Votruba. Through its strategic planning process, the university learned that among community concerns was the fact that too few high

school graduates go on to college. NKU is starting a program this fall through which working adults can get a four-year degree in four years by taking two courses at a time in the evenings on eight-week cycles.

Local people also have taken the initiative. Residents of Hazard, in the southeastern Kentucky coal belt, had long wanted a four-year institution, because of the region’s low educational attainment. In 1990, only 7.4 percent of the population had bachelor’s degrees.

Eventually it became clear that the area was not going to get a university, so a consortium made up of Hazard Community and Technical College, Morehead State, Eastern Kentucky and the private Lindsey Wilson College established the University Center of the Mountains. Hazard’s instructors provide the first two years of courses, and Eastern, Morehead or Lindsey Wilson faculty members (either on site or on

television) provide the final two years, leading to bachelor’s degrees in criminal justice, nursing, social work, human services and counseling, early elementary education and business administration.

Jay Box, Hazard’s president, said that his institution is also attempting to become the Appalachian arts college, with programs in bluegrass music, storytelling and the visual arts, and by training artisans at the Kentucky School for Craft in Hindman, about 20 miles from Hazard. The school, which opened last year, offers courses taught by craftsmen in jewelry and wood, and will add ceramics, architectural ironwork, and various fabric-related crafts such as weaving. There are 25 students now; eventually there will be 75.

One of the biggest controversies during the reform debate involved removing the community colleges from the University of Kentucky’s authority and placing them and the two-year technical schools under a single administration, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Now, some observers consider KCTCS to be the most successful of the reforms.

“The community college part of the reforms worked better than I expected, faster than I expected,” former Governor Patton said. “We disavowed the word merger, but that is in fact what happened,” said Patton, crediting the new system’s first president, Mike McCall, with the patience and toughness to make it work.

In addition to consolidating the colleges and improving the rate of transfers to four-year institutions, McCall said, his system is “constantly looking at our communities—

UPDATE
Kentucky’s Reforms Produce Mixed Results
May 2008

TEN YEARS AFTER the state of Kentucky approved a set of major postsecondary education reforms, some goals have been met, but others remain elusive.

In a report for the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce published in December 2007, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) concluded that the state’s public colleges and universities have made significant gains in the last decade but that the most important reform goal—to boost the state’s economy and to improve the quality of life for all Kentuckians—has not been achieved.

The study by NCHEMS, a higher education policy analysis group, found a lack of coordination between higher education and economic development. Despite major gains by many Kentucky public campuses, the state’s per capita income remains what it was a decade ago—82 percent of the national average.

Although the reforms have not yet had a major impact on the Kentucky economy, they have brought important improvements to individual campuses. Enrollment has increased at all eight public universities, and there has been spectacular growth in the two-year Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

However, there has been little progress in preparing high school

students for college work. According to the NCHEMS report, of 100 Kentucky ninth graders, only 65 complete high school in four years; only 37 directly enter college; only 24 enroll for a second year; and only 12 complete an associate’s degree in three years or a bachelor’s degree in six.

The “education pipeline leaks at every seam,” the report said.

To deal with part of this problem, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the coordinating body created by the 1997 reform legislation, launched a “double the numbers” campaign in 2007, hoping to increase the number of bachelor’s degrees from 400,000 to 800,000 by 2020.

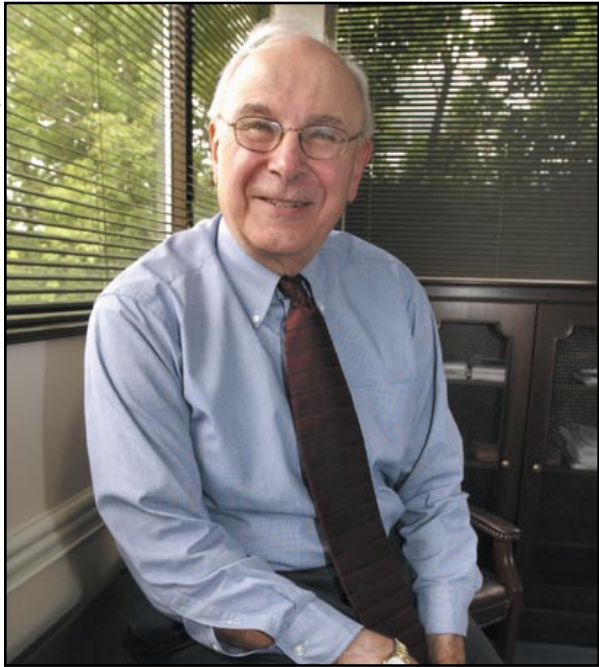
State spending for higher education was strong in the first few years after the reform legislation was passed but has been erratic since then, ranging from a 0.4 percent cut in 2003-04 to an increase of 8.2 percent in 2005-06.

Financial conditions worsened in 2008. Newly elected Governor Steve Beshear, a Democrat, faced with a substantial budget deficit, trimmed spending for all state agencies, including postsecondary education, by three percent for 2007-08. Beshear then proposed a budget for the 2008-10 biennium that included a further cut of 12 percent in higher education spending.

The most important reform goal—to boost the state’s economy and to improve the quality of life for all Kentuckians—has not been achieved.

doing environmental scans—to see what kinds of jobs are being created. For example, there’s a resurgence of coal in Kentucky...But we’ve lost a generation of miners, and the equipment is 20 years old.” So KCTCS is working with

Elaine Shray for CrossTalk



Thomas Layzell, president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, has brokered state budget cuts of recent years.

industry to prepare simulators to help train new high-tech miners.

“Creating this centralized community and technical college management is one of two changes that may have the most long-term effects,” said consultant Aims McGuinness. The other is the effort to improve adult education and literacy under legislation passed in 2000. “If adult education gets forgotten, that’s going to cause severe problems.”

The legislature gave the Council on Postsecondary Education responsibility for policy, planning and budgets for adult education, and the state increased annual funding for its programs from about \$10 million to \$22 million between 2000 and 2005. The council has set goals and accountability for those who provide the programs, including local boards of education, community and technical colleges, and community-based organizations.

Across the state 4,397 people were enrolled in family literacy programs in 2004, compared to 1,357 in 2001. “People come to learn to read, often because they want to help their children with their homework,” said Cheryl King, the council’s vice president for adult education. “Or they’re embarrassed (because) they want to read the newspaper and they can’t. They desperately need a job that requires some level of literacy.” Workforce education programs also enrolled

The Research Challenge Trust Fund, inelegantly known as “Bucks for Brains,” poured \$350 million into higher education over the first six years after the reforms passed.

A 12 percent cut “would have a devastating impact on the university,” Lee Todd, president of the flagship University of Kentucky, told the campus community.

The legislature agreed and reduced the cuts to three percent. Still, this meant the public campuses had received two cuts of three percent in succession. This amounted to a \$20 million loss for the University of Kentucky, which responded by laying off some faculty and staff, by not filling empty positions, and by postponing some projects.

The campus presidents said the proposed cuts would make it difficult to pursue the higher education reform program and asked permission to raise tuition and fees substantially. The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, which must approve tuition hikes, agreed to some of the increases but reduced others.

Mike McCall, president of the rapidly growing Kentucky

Community and Technical College System, asked for a 13 percent tuition and fee increase, but the postsecondary council allowed only a 5.2 percent increase. The council’s action “will have a long-lasting impact on the future of higher education in Kentucky,” McCall warned.

The state’s “Bucks for Brains” trust fund survived the budget trimming, enabling

Kentucky’s “Bucks for Brains” trust fund survived the budget trimming, but it faces an uncertain future because of the state’s financial problems.

the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville to increase their research capabilities by hiring top scholars, establishing more endowed professorships and expanding lab space. However, “Bucks for Brains” faces an uncertain future because of the state’s financial problems.

The budget cuts have chilled the University of Kentucky’s hopes to become one of the nation’s top 20 research universities by the year 2020. But skeptics already had questioned whether this was a realistic goal, noting that the National Science Foundation ranked the university 65th in federal research and development expenditures in 2006.

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education has achieved a degree of cooperation among public campuses that were known for squabbling among themselves. “We’re working together much better now,” said Gary Ransdell, president of Western Kentucky University. All of us (campus presidents) have come to an understanding that we’re responsible for higher education in the entire state, not just in our own regions.” However, the council’s reputation was damaged in 2007-08 by two poorly conducted searches for a new chief executive.

Budget cuts and the postsecondary council’s floundering have caused some to wonder if the postsecondary reform movement is dead. Kentucky “has lost its way,” said James Votruba, president of Northern Kentucky University, whose request for a 9.6 percent tuition increase was trimmed to 8.5 percent by the postsecondary council. Others believe the setbacks are temporary and that progress will resume if and when the financial situation improves.

—William Trombley

more than 51,000 students learning communication and computer skills.

Despite these gains, the Council on Postsecondary Education is increasingly concerned that higher education is becoming too expensive for average Kentuckians. Tuition went up this year at all the four-year public universities and for the two-year college system as well. Eastern Kentucky University raised its tuition 23 percent, to \$4,660, the highest percentage increase, while UK's tuition went up 12.5 percent, to \$5,812. The KCTCS Regents boosted that system's tuition by 6.5 percent, from \$92 to \$98 per credit hour.

Each public university sets its own tuition, but the council must approve all increases. In May, however, the council—prodded by Fletcher, other politicians and the public—voted to require colleges and universities to provide more justification for tuition hikes. The schools also must submit proposed tuition rates next year in time to allow for public comment and student notification. Fletcher said he was pleased to see the council exercise its role “a little more aggressively than in the past.”

The council has also undertaken two affordability studies to determine if the state is pricing low-income Kentuckians out of higher education. One of these recently concluded that “by most measures, Kentucky higher education is within reasonable range of affordability for most students.” It added, however, that independent students from low-income groups do not get as much state aid as those still living with their parents and must borrow more money.

To succeed, Kentucky educators must maintain the collaboration between universities, independent colleges and community colleges, said Ed Hughes, president of Gateway Community and Technical College in northern

Kentucky. “I have felt, and see, a falling off of that collaboration,” he said, adding that it is a critical issue for the council to push. “We cannot go back to the days when one university never talked to another.” Kentucky higher education also needs “another 15 years” as a top funding priority for both the governor and the legislature, Hughes added.

“Yes, all of us would like more money,” said Northern Kentucky University President Votruba. “But the challenge is to use the funds that we have in creative ways. We have to demonstrate, in the governor’s language, ROI—or return on investment. I think if we do that, that can be Governor Fletcher’s stamp on what was a Governor

Patton initiative.

To continue expanding enrollment, Kentucky must reach more people like Janie Spurlock and Teresa Younce. And it’s not always easy for adults even when they are highly motivated.

“When you start something like this, you’re scared you can’t do it,” Spurlock said. She took some of her first courses over instructional television, and when she got into conventional classes Spurlock did very well, eventually maintaining a 4.0 average. “I realized I wasn’t stupid. I could do this,” she said, adding that her older children and several



Elaine Sharp for CrossTalk

The Kentucky reform legislation has led to gains in family literacy, said Cheryl King, vice president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

local high school students helped her to learn the computer skills she lacked.

Faculty members helped as well. Several professors traveled regularly from Morehead to the Prestonsburg center to teach in the social work program. “They did a lot of personal things for us—like picking up books on the main campus so we didn’t have to stand in a line there after driving an hour and a half—as well as educating us,” Younce said in gratitude. “They were like a family.” ♦

Kay Mills is the author of “This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer,” and four other books.

In fiscal year 2005, University of Kentucky researchers brought in a record \$273.9 million in outside grants and contracts.

The “Seamless System”

Florida’s flurry of dramatic changes in the governance of public education

By Jon Marcus

ORLANDO

BEYOND THE FRESHLY planted, carefully manicured landscaping fringing the new roads, there’s not much to betray what is planned for the area of Central Florida called Lake Nona. Only a few bored-looking cattle graze past the lonely new strip malls that are the unmistakable early warning signs of looming development in this state.

What is about to happen here is symbolic both of the remarkable growth of higher education in Florida and the dramatic way the public universities are governed after two revolutionary changes in just five years. Those changes served to decentralize a system that was once tightly centrally controlled (just as has been happening in other states), and then to rein it in again. Through it all, politics in this politically obsessed state became even more of a factor in what happens at each campus.

In January, VIPs will come from all over Florida to Lake Nona to mark the groundbreaking for a biosciences building that will be the first component of a new medical school and the 13th satellite campus for the University of Central Florida, a school that did not exist until 1968 and is now (along with two other Florida universities) one of the ten largest in the United States, with more than 45,000 students. “The biggest university you never heard of,” people in Orlando like to joke. Students call it “UCF—Under Construction Forever.”

UCF made its argument for a new medical school with a survey it commissioned that shows the demand for new physicians in Florida will grow from 2,800 a year now to 4,200 a year by 2021. Despite its aging demographic in need of healthcare, Florida ranks 37th per capita among the states in medical school enrollment. And Central Florida, whose elderly population will nearly double by 2025, has no medical school at all.

But numbers alone were not the crux of the university’s strategy. UCF also teamed up with public Florida

International University in southwest Miami, which wanted a medical school, too, citing, among other things, the prestige it would attract along with a projected tripling of the \$80 million a year in sponsored research FIU conducts today.

The two proposals, which together will cost an estimated \$500 million over ten years, were made into a single package,

channeling the impressive political clout of two of the most politically dominant sections of the state. “That was just arithmetic,” UCF President John Hitt said unabashedly. “If you look at the delegations and the politics, you’ve got Southeast Florida and Central Florida. It’s very hard to stop that in the legislature.”

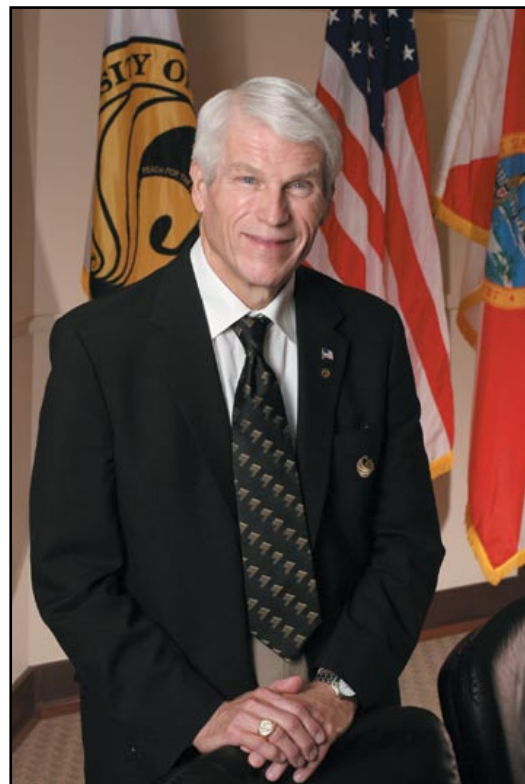
The university also brought in John Thrasher, a former Republican speaker of the House, who had earlier managed to get a medical school for his alma mater, Florida State University, over the objections of the Board of Regents. Thrasher was paid \$7,500 a month to lobby for UCF. “If somebody’s working for you, they’re not working against you,” Hitt explained. In all, the UCF Foundation hired eight lobbyists to push the medical school.

Though some members questioned whether a new medical school was needed, let alone two (critics argued that expanding residency programs was a better way to increase the number of Florida doctors), the new university oversight committee, now called the Board of Governors, approved them last April, by a vote of 16 to one. Within weeks, so did the legislature.

Politics like these are not a new part of Florida higher education, of course. It would be “incredibly naive” to believe so, said John Cavanaugh, president of the University of West Florida and head of the resurgent State University Presidents Association. “You’re dealing with a political system. By definition it’s political.”

It was politics that brought things to this condition in the first place.

For 35 years, Florida’s university system was largely controlled by the Board of Regents, which served in part to protect the schools from interference by legislators who wanted to put pet programs on the campuses in their districts. The regents also kept a tight lid on the universities, representing their interests collectively but minimizing (while



John Hitt presides over 45,000-student Central Florida University, one of the nation’s largest.

Todd Anderson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Backers of the new K-20 “seamless system” insisted it would bring an end to fighting among the various levels of education over finite resources.



Chairman Carolyn Roberts of the state university Board of Governors hopes to cut down on the “end runs” that campus presidents make around the board to reach key legislators.

not entirely preventing) direct lobbying by universities of friendly legislators.

This, not surprisingly, created tensions. It all came to a head in 2000, when the regents rejected an elaborate political horse trade designed to bring a new medical school to Florida State, and law schools to Florida International and Florida A&M universities. In each case, angry legislators—led by the powerful Thrasher, who threatened to hold up all other business until the deal was approved—stepped in and reversed the board.

The legislators didn't stop there. Within a year, on July 1, 2001, under a sweeping statewide education reform famously hashed out by

Thrasher and Governor Jeb Bush on a napkin over dinner and called the K–20 initiative, the Board of Regents itself was dissolved. It was replaced by a single education “super board” to oversee primary and secondary schools, the state's 28 community colleges, and the 11 public universities, with their 285,289 students, 13,600 faculty, and \$6.9 billion budget.

This new “seamless system,” putting all levels of education under a single governing authority, was also ostensibly meant to improve coordination, especially among community colleges and universities—even though Florida was already a leader in this area, with long-established articulation agreements, common course numbers, and other partnerships.

Regardless of the merits of the K–20 idea, it really came down to this, said Robert Atwell, retired president of the American Council on Education, who lives part-time in Florida: “The Board of Regents was correct to try to stop the (Florida A&M) law school and the Florida State medical school, but it cost them their life.” The scheme to get rid of the regents, the *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized, “was plainly tinged with malice on the part of House Speaker John Thrasher and

other legislators who favored pricey new programs... that the regents opposed. For more than 35 years, most legislatures had allowed the regents to do what they were created to do: minimize competition among the schools; get Florida the best bang for a buck. Occasionally, however, legislators tried to get

rid of the regents. Finally, they succeeded.”

Backers of the new system insisted it would bring an end to fighting among the various levels of education (and among the public universities) over finite resources. The seamless system, they said, also would result in better student preparation for universities and better teacher preparation by them. And they contended that another facet of the plan, which established local boards of trustees for each of the public universities, would help them better serve their own regions—an outcome of the change that almost everyone now seems to agree has been its greatest strength.

Critics countered that the fighting over resources would be worse than ever. And, in fact, the University of Florida soon had hired eight lobbyists, as political pressure for more campuses and more programs grew. Long prevented from offering four-year bachelor's degrees, some community colleges started to do so, to the consternation of the universities. The local university boards of trustees started their work by vying to see who could pay their presidents the most. Some universities began to encroach on one another's turf; for example, Florida International University started offering master's degree programs near Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Florida started an M.B.A. program 314 miles away in Broward County, where Florida Atlantic University has four campuses. It was warlike enough to make one university president ask what the “rules of engagement” were.

Meanwhile, another powerful legislator pushed through an Alzheimer's research center at the University of South Florida, and named it for his father. With the Board of Regents no longer serving as a buffer, many such “member projects,” as they were euphemistically termed (“little turkeys,” one higher education official called them privately), showed up in the budgets of community colleges and universities. Santa Fe Community College, for example, was compelled to open a branch in a legislator's sparsely populated home district. When the agricultural arm of the University of Florida tried to close a facility in the Senate president's hometown, he passed legislation preventing services there from ever being cut. A bipartisan group of former state officials and educators would ultimately call Florida's higher education governance system “a banana republic rife with gamesmanship.”

Within months, statewide budget problems threatened a billion dollars in cuts for education, and the various factions dug in. Opponents of the “seamless system” said they had been right all along—that the different education sectors would be at each other's throats for money. There was no question that the funding was needed to serve the state's exploding population. The primary and secondary schools that year found themselves with 16,000 unanticipated students. It was a familiar problem.

Public universities have grown by 100,000 students in the last 15 years. (Florida Gulf Coast University alone, which opened in 1997 on former swampland near Fort Myers, already has more than 6,000 students, and expects 15,000 by 2010.) Yet while three Florida public universities now rank in the top ten in size, only the University of Florida ranks nationally in quality. As the budget crisis raged, Florida continued to be near the bottom of the 50 states in education

Florida's sweeping 2001 education reform was famously hashed out by Governor Jeb Bush and Florida's speaker of the House on a napkin over dinner.

funding, according to a study by the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

Only 28 percent of Florida high school graduates go immediately to college, compared to 54 percent in the best performing states. Many begin their work toward a degree at the community colleges, which struggle to keep up with the demand. It was the community colleges that the education “super board” singled out for protection from the budget cuts, citing their soaring enrollment (especially of minorities) and the need for worker training.

“It was pretty disastrous,” Atwell said of the early days of the new system. “You had chaos. Each of the individual institutions and their lobbyists and supporters worked Tallahassee, competing with each other for resources. It was absolutely Darwinian.”

In the end, the universities and community colleges treaded water, ending up with their budgets undiminished from the previous year, but also not raised. And even that was only possible because of a significant increase in student tuition.

The more surprising outcome of the disarray came in the familiar figure of U.S. Senator Bob Graham. The former governor had been watching from the sidelines and complained that, while the old Board of Regents had its flaws (he once vetoed an earlier attempt by the legislature to abolish it), the new structure invited too much political interference in higher education. Along with E.T. York, former state university system chancellor, and others, Graham started campaigning for a referendum to revive a Board of Regents-like governing body. Local boards of trustees would remain in place, but there would again be a statewide governing council that would determine how money allocated by the legislature for the universities would be spent—on, say, medical or law schools, or not. The Graham proposal went on the ballot as Amendment 11 in November 2002.

State university presidents, many university trustees, and the community colleges lined up against the measure. The community colleges were particularly opposed, saying Graham’s new board ignored the community college system, which serves four times as many students as the state universities. “The dynamics of it are, you have the children in the K–12 system that everyone wants to take care of; and the universities seem to be where people—even people who go to community colleges and then on to universities—have more of a connection than with their community colleges,” said Michael Comins, chief executive officer of the Florida Association of Community Colleges.

Backers of Amendment 11, including former Board of Regents member Joan Ruffier, said that, whether they liked it or not, the universities needed some form of a statewide governing body to advocate for their collective interests. “Florida is trying to build the best university system in the country, if not the world,” Ruffier said. “To have a single board overseeing all of education was just too much. We felt we couldn’t go back to the way things were because the boards of trustees had been put in place. But there was no overriding system to prevent the universities from competing to mutual extinction.”

“To the surprise of a lot of people,” as Atwell put it, the

amendment was approved by the voters, creating a new Board of Governors to oversee Florida’s public university system. It would be the third higher education governance structure in the state in as many years. And it already had a big problem: The members were to be appointed by the governor, and showed no signs of wanting to rock the boat. “That was a terrible thing to do, and it haunts us today,” Atwell said.

The Board of Governors, loaded with Jeb Bush appointees, met for the first time in January 2003 and almost immediately refused much of the power voters had given them. They filled the university boards of trustees with the same people who had been on them before, using a list provided by the governor’s office. While the people who had written the amendment said the board should set tuition, it left that to the legislature. Although it was authorized to set presidential compensation and bargain with unions, it let the trustees do that. And it ruled that a proposed chiropractic school at Florida State University did not need its approval.

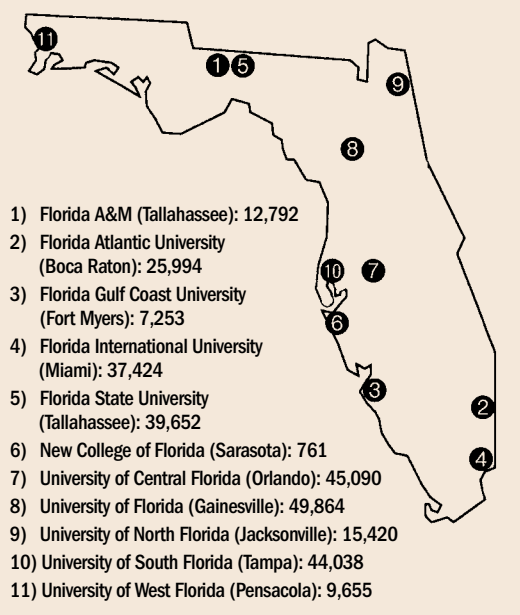
The chiropractic school proposal marked as much of a milestone as had Amendment 11. With shades of the medical school that had been snagged by John Thrasher, the chiropractic college was the baby of Senate President Jim King, a Florida State University alumnus, and then-Senate Majority Leader Dennis Jones, a chiropractor. It was a formidable lineup.

The university’s faculty came out against the school, calling chiropractic medicine a pseudo science. So did alumni who feared that it would hurt their alma mater’s academic reputation. Florida already has more chiropractors than the national average; a new private chiropractic college had just opened near Daytona.

Then, nearly two years after deciding that it would not weigh in, the Board of Governors voted unanimously that the chiropractic college did, in fact, require its approval. Two months after that, on January 27, 2005, the board rejected the proposal. “That was when we really came of age,” said Carolyn Roberts, the chairman and a veteran of the Board of Regents. “We are an evolving system. Anything healthy evolves.”

It wasn’t an entirely spontaneous epiphany. The backers of Amendment 11 had sued the board to do what they said it was supposed to do—stop legislators from funding pet projects at the universities in their districts or at the schools they had attended, for example. In a hearing, the plaintiffs compared

Florida’s Public Universities and Their Fall 2005 Enrollments



The University of Central Florida, along with two other Florida universities, is among the ten largest in the United States, with more than 45,000 students.

the local trustee boards to “little bitty kingdoms,” and charged that, “Whoever had the best politicians, the best lobbyists, got a medical school, got all this stuff. You’re dealing with a provision passed by the people that has not only been mismanaged, but deliberately converted or perverted to be a power play.”

Although the Board of Governors seems to have begun to flex its muscles, few on any side of the various debates are entirely

happy with it yet. The board did little to challenge the political blockbuster medical school proposals at the University of Central Florida and Florida International University, for instance.

While he’s optimistic, York said, “there are a number of things I think need to be done that they haven’t done. For example, there was no credible evidence that we needed two new medical colleges, yet the Board of Governors has now approved two. The chair says she’s concerned about alienating the legislature. Well, hell’s bells, what was the purpose of the amendment in the first place?” Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida union, complains the board is “always looking over their shoulder and being careful not to do anything the governor doesn’t want or the legislature

doesn’t want. I think that eventually the Board of Governors will have the kind of power and authority and composition that it needs to do its work, but not for 15 years or so.”

As for Roberts, she said Florida’s governance system “is going to work very well. It has not been without some serious conversations,” she said, choosing her words carefully. “But I believe, overall, people are becoming comfortable.”

They had better settle in. Florida continues to face huge challenges. A voter referendum that mandated smaller class sizes in primary and secondary schools has turned out to be impossibly expensive, leading universities to wonder whether the money will come out of their budgets; already, the education commissioner has proposed diverting cash for K–12 construction from a fund supported by utility taxes that has long been designated exclusively for university construction. “That is going to take a large amount of money, and we have to compete with that, too,” Roberts said. “But, you know, [the universities] have class size issues, too, as I keep telling the legislature.”

The Florida Board of Education has instituted a new process for community colleges to offer still more four-year degrees, largely over the universities’ objections. While Florida’s community colleges lead the nation in associate’s degrees granted, the state ranks 47th in the number of bachelor’s degrees. And the breakneck population growth shows no signs of abating, which will force important decisions about whether to send even more students through the community colleges or build new state universities or

UPDATE **Florida’s Governance of Public Education** **March 2008**

THE STRUGGLE over Florida higher education governance, described in *National CrossTalk* articles in 2001 and in 2006, has continued unabated.

The basic issue is control. The Board of Governors of the State University System believes it is empowered to make major policy decisions for the 11 campuses and their 300,000 students. But the Florida Legislature insists it has the authority to make those decisions, especially the setting of tuition rates.

The issue was joined in the summer of 2007, when the Board of Governors, which had been acting cautiously since its establishment through a state constitutional amendment in 2002, seized the initiative and approved a five percent undergraduate tuition increase to take effect in the spring 2008 semester. However, the legislature then passed its own five percent increase, nullifying the board action.

Later, legislators and Governor Charlie Crist agreed to allow the state’s four largest campuses—the University of Florida, Florida State, the University of Central Florida and the University of South Florida—to impose differential tuition increases of 30 to 40 percent over five years.

Board members argued that tuition increases were needed because the state’s average tuition and mandatory fees (\$3,361 at the time) were the lowest in the nation, while its student-faculty ratio of 31:1

was far higher than the national average of 25:1. They also pointed out that state spending for the university system, already near the bottom nationally, had been cut by \$157 million in 2007-08, with even deeper cuts expected in 2008-09.

“Quality is at risk,” board chair Carolyn Roberts told the *St. Petersburg Times*. “Access is important to our state, but quality has to be the number-one priority.”

But the Board of Governors’ action displeased the legislature, which over the years has favored keeping tuitions low. State Senate President Ken Pruitt, a Republican, introduced a resolution to abolish the Board of Governors, as part of yet another overhaul of postsecondary education governance—the third in six years.

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The Pruitt resolution sought to abolish the present Board of Governors, replacing it with a board “subservient to the legislature,” a spokesman for the Board of Governors said. There also would be changes in the composition of the State Board of Education and the boards of trustees of the 11 state university campuses.

Finally, the resolution would create a Commissioner of

branch campuses.

The University of Florida, in the small city of Gainesville, has said it simply can not get any bigger. It announced in the fall that it would cut faculty in departments including English, philosophy and religion because of a budget deficit that occurred when funding for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences failed to keep pace with enrollment. The cuts will come through retirements, but Auxter, himself a philosophy professor there, estimates that a quarter of the demoralized younger faculty are shopping around for new jobs.

Nor has the politics abated. In May, the University of Florida and Florida State got more than \$40 million in construction money from the legislature that had not been requested by the Board of Governors. "Somebody cut a separate deal," John Delaney, president of the University of North Florida, told the board in a contentious public conference call. Board member Charles Edwards added, "We actually had our own universities out lobbying against us. We need to look at how our universities' lobbyists work with us. They should not be allowed to lobby against the interests of the board."

Roberts agrees with Edwards. She has appointed a committee to decide what penalty university presidents will face if they bypass the board and go directly to the legislature for programs or money. "We're all pro-university," she said. "But this competition among the universities in Tallahassee is not appropriate." Said Atwell: "This outfit (the Board of Governors) is not a joke, but it certainly has been rather weak,



Joan Ruffler, a veteran of Florida higher education politics, believes the Board of Governors is needed "to prevent the universities from competing to mutual extinction."

and the dog-eat-dog situation in Tallahassee continues."

The presidential pay arms race persists, too. The legislature capped presidential salaries at \$225,000 in 2003, but local university trustees continue to award huge raises to their presidents by using money from their private fundraising foundations. After winning the medical school vote, the

Education over all public education, from kindergarten to graduate school. This would be a return to the "seamless system" put in place by former Governor Jeb Bush that was widely considered to be ineffective.

(The reorganization called for by the Pruitt resolution would make little difference to Florida's 28-campus, 850,000-student community college system, said Will Holcomb, the system's chancellor. "The present system has worked pretty well for us and we support it," Holcomb said, but the new arrangement "would not make much of a change for us.")

On March 27, the Senate approved the resolution, but Republican House leaders failed to garner the three-fifths vote needed to put the measure on the November ballot. "We tried; we tried hard, but the support's just not there," said Ellyn Bogdanoff, Republican House majority whip, in the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Richard Novak, vice president for public programs at the Association of Governing Boards, opposed the measure. "Florida needs a governing board to establish policy leadership. The state is growing fast, enrollment is increasing rapidly, there has been a proliferation of law schools and medical schools. There doesn't seem to be good overall planning."

State spending for Florida's university system, already near the bottom nationally, had been cut by \$157 million in 2007-08, with even deeper cuts expected in 2008-09.

In the meantime, former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham and others have filed a lawsuit, arguing that the 2002 state constitutional amendment (also pushed by Graham, among others), creating the Board of Governors, had transferred authority to set tuition rates from the legislature to the new board. The Board of Governors joined the lawsuit, further antagonizing Senator Pruitt and other lawmakers.

"This lawsuit is nothing more than an attempt to get unbridled tuition increases," Pruitt said. "God help our students if they win."

Those who follow the twists and turns believe the Graham forces will try to defeat the referendum but, failing that, will seek a new constitutional amendment that once again would establish the authority of the Board of Governors.

All of this has taken place against a background of financial distress. Florida, with no personal income tax, relies heavily on sales and real estate taxes, both of which have slumped due to declines in both the housing market and tourism. The result was an estimated \$1.8 billion state budget deficit in 2008-09, leading to sharp cuts in higher education spending.

State university campuses have responded by freezing enrollments and hiring, and by postponing construction of new academic facilities.

"The governance and funding of higher education are a mess," Robert H. Atwell, a Sarasota resident and former president of the American Council on Education, wrote in an op-ed in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. "The primary victims will be those thousands of qualified students who will be turned away from the senior institutions or the community colleges."

—William Trombley



Michael Comins, chief executive officer of the Florida Association of Community Colleges, says the two-year schools have been generally ignored in formation of the various new higher education governance arrangements.

president of Florida International University got an \$80,000 bonus and a salary increase bringing him to \$542,608 a year. Six weeks later, Hitt, at UCF, got a \$100,000 bonus, \$80,000 in deferred compensation, and a raise to \$450,000.

There are good things going on in Florida, too. There is now finally a chancellor of higher education, Mark Rosenberg, former provost at Florida International University, who university officials rate highly but who has so far kept a fairly low profile. (Citing scheduling pressures, a Rosenberg spokesman said he was unavailable to be interviewed, in

response to requests made over a four-week period.) The state continues to be a leader in the relationships between universities and community colleges. “Left to our own devices, we might have eventually gotten here anyway,” said Cavanaugh, the University of West Florida president. “But the (K–20) initiative really speeded up that process.”

Cavanaugh said there is also less competition than collaboration among Florida’s 11 public universities. “Quite honestly, and we can set the medical school debate aside, I have not seen the university sector slug it out for who’s going to get the next Ph.D. in English program or anything of that sort.” Besides, he said, “a certain level of competition is good for the system. To squelch competition would pretty much lock in mediocrity.”

Decentralization in the form of their local boards of trustees has tied the universities more closely to their communities than most of them once were—and vice versa. Local residents and, by extension, legislative delegations these days take a deeper interest in the universities’ needs for buildings, equipment and other resources. (It is also an unaccustomed disadvantage for the University of Florida in Gainesville and Florida State in Tallahassee; because of their small-city hometowns, they don’t have the political clout that they enjoyed before.)

Back at the University of Central Florida, the rush-hour traffic on University Boulevard is even heavier than the traffic driving toward fast-growing downtown Orlando 13 miles away. Four stories above the teeming campus, workers are preparing to remodel Hitt’s outer office to make more room. On the wall behind him at a conference table is a satellite image of the school, carved out of a cypress swamp and arranged in concentric circles with the parking on the outside. There’s a 45,000-seat football stadium going up, along

with a 10,000-seat arena, new engineering and psychology buildings, and new residence halls. More than \$50 million in land and cash has been raised for the new medical school. The university already has a \$14 million recreation center with an indoor track, a 41-foot climbing wall, a pool, and a smoothie bar. Its Rosen College of Hospitality Management is housed in a \$28 million facility near Walt Disney World. Its College of Optics and Photonics is developing lasers used in warfare and to detect chemical and biological weapons. And its engineering program produces graduates ready to work at nearby Lockheed Martin.

Hitt worries most that some future governor will centralize Florida’s university system again. “That’s the one concern about it, that if you have another governor who didn’t believe as Governor Bush did in devolution or decentralization, then you might go back to one-size-fits-all. And it doesn’t work. It just doesn’t.” With one exception, Hitt said: There is a need for a central board “to divvy up enrollment, to divvy up construction funds. You can’t leave that as a food fight among the presidents. It does make sense to have a professional, centralized body overseeing that.” The Board of Governors is preparing a strategic plan, and that, said Hitt, “is the kind of thing they ought to be doing.”

More than just Floridians will be watching. Decentralization is a trend among public university systems. From Illinois to New Jersey to Virginia, legislatures are giving more autonomy to individual institutions. “I think it was the realization of greater competition, a feeling that the higher educational market needed nimble institutions to be able to respond quickly to student demand and changes in the market—for example, research projects that could be moved more quickly from the laboratory to the market,” said Richard Novak, vice president for public-sector institutions at the Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance in Washington. Still, he said, “There’s a great concern about public purposes and the need for a state-level entity of some sort that can ensure that public purposes, particularly access, affordability and participation, don’t fall too far down the priority list.”

Yet on the whole, said Atwell, state governing bodies have been weakened, not strengthened, despite the fact that “good public policy is more than the sum of individual institutional interests.” ♦

A bipartisan group of former state officials and educators would ultimately call Florida’s higher education governance system “a banana republic rife with gamesmanship.”

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Virginia Tries Restructuring

Financial stress leads to new arrangements between state and campuses

By Robert A. Jones

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

THROUGH MUCH of the last decade, Virginia's public universities have served as a kind of canary-in-the-coal-mine for higher education systems undergoing financial stress. Few have suffered as much as Virginia's, and many watched to see if the canary would wither under the strain.

Beginning in the '90s, the state legislature repeatedly cut financial support to the campuses, once whacking 22 percent from the higher education budget in a two-year period. Governors alternately froze and then rolled back tuition, occasionally using the universities as a political whipping boy. Virginia's reputation as a nurturer of excellence in higher education teetered on collapse.

The despair expressed by education officials was notable. One college president described the state as delivering "grievous wounds" to the campuses. The director of the state's Council on Higher Education departed his post, saying any more time on the job would amount to "cruel and unusual punishment." A dean at the University of Virginia said the starving of public institutions represented "insane, ideological, odd thinking" in Richmond.

Now, however, there are signs that the poisoned atmosphere of the last decade may be lifting. This spring

Governor Mark Warner, a Democrat, signed legislation reconfiguring the entire relationship between the campuses and the state, offering new financial formulas and giving unprecedented autonomy to some institutions. It has been heralded by some as a potential model for other states facing similar dilemmas and has inspired the first optimism in several years at the state's colleges and universities.

"The script is a happy one so far," said Timothy X.

Sullivan, president of the College of William and Mary. "We have the chance of creating an environment that is predictable and controllable. That alone represents a real break from the past."

All acknowledge that the change was born out of desperation. By spring 2004, the accumulated campus deficits had grown so dire that three of the state's leading institutions proposed to dismantle their relationship with the state, replacing it with a charter status. The schools—the University



Dennis Brack, Black Star, for CrossTalk

State Senator John H. Chichester, a Republican, worked with Democratic Governor Mark Warner to restructure Virginia higher education.

of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary—offered to accept a cut in financial support from the state in exchange for their freedom to raise tuition and conduct their own affairs.

That plan did not fly in the legislature, but, with the support of Warner, it soon morphed into the restructuring of the traditional relationship that was signed into law in April. Under the new structure, some campuses will operate as de facto contractors with the state. They will negotiate management agreements, or contracts, that will grant them widespread autonomy, including the right to set tuition and fees and to carry out campus operations without interference from state agencies. In return, the campuses will be held accountable for meeting a series of state-imposed goals.

But here in Virginia no one is celebrating yet. The arrangement is so complex—the legislation alone consumes 50 single-space pages—that few pretend to know exactly how it will play out. The true impact of the change, college officials say, will be known only after the management agreements have been put into practice and survive the political currents in Richmond.

In a nutshell, the management agreements will spell out the rights and responsibilities for college administrations in virtually every aspect of campus operations, from new construction and personnel to tuition increases and course offerings. The agreements will be drafted by individual campuses and then sent to Warner's office for a round of negotiations with the state.

"Now the hard work begins," Warner said on a recent

Virginia Governor Mark Warner recently signed legislation reconfiguring the entire relationship between Virginia's public universities and the state.



Dennis Brack, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Virginia Governor Mark Warner hopes higher education restructuring will cause campuses to consider state manpower needs.

afternoon in his office. “We have constructed these worthy goals for both sides, things like access to higher ed, and focusing on more research. The question is, can we translate these goals into a working arrangement that gets us where we want to go? I’m an optimist and I believe we can, but it’s going to take patience and good will on both sides.”

Asked about potential sticking points in the negotiations over management agreements, Warner paused and then offered a hypothetical example. “Say the state needs more teachers and more engineers, and say a university campus comes to us with a proposed agreement that puts heavy emphasis on literature or the humanities, and less on the development of teachers and engineers. At that point we will say, ‘Hold it, that’s not part of the deal. You need to re-work your plan to reflect the state’s needs.’”

Exactly how campuses such as UVA or William and Mary would react to such directives remains to be seen. But most college administrators seem guardedly optimistic that the agreements will leave them better off than before.

“Things are not going to change instantaneously,” said Leonard Sandridge, executive vice president at the University of Virginia. “This is an agreement to develop a joint plan with the state, and the benefits will come with time. We have every intention of looking back over the next decade and saying, yes, the [restructuring] was smart, and it improved the system of higher education in Virginia.”

The changes will be slow in coming because the new structure alters the management of the campuses, and alters *who* will have ultimate management authority, but does not directly address the underlying cause of the preceding decade’s trauma: the paucity of dollars coming from Richmond.

“Nothing in the legislation changes the amount of state funding for higher education,” said John Bennett, the state’s finance secretary. “When the legislation was proposed, the

argument made by the universities was that state funding was completely unreliable from year to year. They were right. So this legislation, among other things, is an attempt to make the funding more reliable, not necessarily to increase the amount.”

The new structure seeks to accomplish that goal by using a teeter-totter formula for balancing state funding and tuition hikes. As one element goes up, the other goes down.

For example, each campus is required to submit to the state detailed financial projections over a six-year period, estimating tuition hikes under a variety of scenarios. Under a “good” scenario of increased state funding, a particular institution might commit itself to tuition increases in the range of eight to ten percent. Under a “bad” scenario of reduced funding, tuition would rise more sharply to make up the difference.

While that tradeoff might make common sense, it is a tradeoff that was denied Virginia’s institutions through most of the ’90s. On more than one occasion, the legislature reduced state funding and simultaneously froze tuition.

“We think the agreements will make transparent the relationship between state funding and tuition increases, and that’s good,” said William and Mary’s Timothy Sullivan. “In Virginia, the real question should not be, ‘How high is tuition?’ but ‘Why is tuition as high as it is?’ With the agreements in place, the answer to that second question should become clear.”

The political momentum for restructuring grew out of an unusual coalition of Republican legislators and Democratic Governor Warner that supported the notion of a thriving higher education system. This coalition also worked together in 2004 to pass a \$1.3 billion tax increase that was aimed, in large part, at restoring some of the lost funding for Virginia’s public colleges and universities.

“It may sound hard to believe, but politics never entered the picture in the discussions about higher education,” said John H. Chichester, a leading Republican in the state Senate. “We started talking with the governor two years ago about the state of higher education which, at the time, was very rocky. Both sides wanted to improve things and sometimes we had different issues, but it never became a Republican-Democratic thing.”

No one knows, however, whether the coalition will hold in the future. Warner is scheduled to leave office early next year, and the political chemistry in the capital could change under a new administration.

“The extent to which other governors will feel bound by the deal is unknown,” said David Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. “Already, one of the candidates running to succeed Warner

The new structure uses a teeter-totter formula for balancing state funding and tuition hikes. As one element goes up, the other goes down.

State Goals

UNDER Virginia's restructuring plan, state colleges and universities will be required to work toward meeting 11 state goals in return for greater campus autonomy. Here are the eleven goals:

- Provide access to higher education for all citizens of Virginia, including underrepresented populations.
- Ensure that higher education remains affordable regardless of family income.
- Offer a curriculum that addresses Virginia's needs for sufficient graduates in particular shortage areas.
- Maintain high academic standards.
- Improve student retention and raise graduation rates.
- Allow smooth transition for students moving from two-year to four-year institutions.
- Stimulate economic development of Virginia.
- Increase externally funded research and facilitate technology transfers.
- Aid elementary and secondary schools to improve student achievement.
- Prepare six-year financial plans for submission to the state.
- Increase campus management efficiency and economy.

has said that he believes tuition should not rise faster than the CPI (Consumer Price Index). That is not exactly encouraging."

On the other hand, some college administrators argue that the existence of the signed management agreements will make the deal difficult to violate. For that reason, the universities and the governor's office are working to get the first management agreements approved this December, before Warner leaves office.

The tuition/state funding tradeoff is only part of the structural change, however. The other major component involves a turnover of operational authority from the state to campus administrations. Once a management agreement is approved for a particular campus, college officials will assume control over areas such as construction, purchasing and personnel.

This part of the deal, in fact, was central to the coalition between Warner, a former tech tycoon, and the Republican leadership in the legislature. "You had a Democratic governor who wanted the institutions to be more entrepreneurial," said Peter Blake, the state deputy education secretary for higher education. "And you had a legislature concerned about unnecessary bureaucracy and local autonomy. It all made for an interesting constellation of political interests and motivations, and resulted in widespread support."

Campus administrators also delight at the idea of controlling their operations. Many have war stories about their bureaucratic fights with Richmond. One describes sending staffers on the long drive to Richmond every two weeks to pick up payroll checks because the state would not allow the institutions to process payroll checks themselves. Another recalls weary negotiations with a state agency over how many windows would be allowed in a new building.

The autonomy moves will also save money, but most agree that the amounts will be modest. "When you get the state government involved in every decision, it slows things down and adds costs. You will achieve greater efficiency by turning a job over to campus administrators," remarked Finance Secretary Bennett. "At the same time, the universities will create bureaucracies to handle the jobs that were being done in Richmond. The real dollar savings is probably not great."

For all the hoopla surrounding restructuring, however, the benefits will not be extended evenly across Virginia's institutions. The greatest autonomies will be extended to UVA, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary—the state's acknowledged "Top Three."

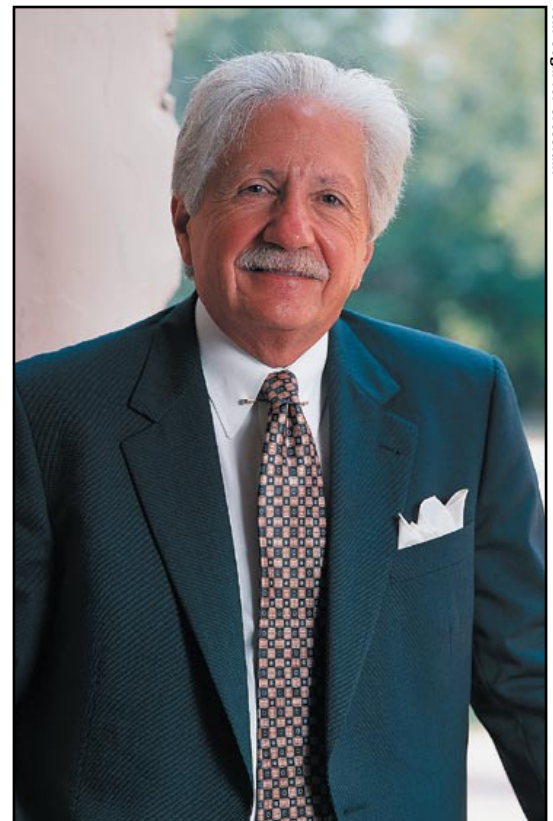
The plan's structure, in fact, almost guarantees that outcome. It creates three levels of participation, and Levels I and II entitle schools only to limited autonomies and do not require management agreements.

To qualify for a Level III application, a campus must demonstrate broad competence in managing campus operations or carry an AA-bond rating. Only then will it be allowed to develop a management agreement.

At present, only the top three meet those qualifications, so other institutions must settle for Levels I or II. This situation contains some ironies. Campuses such as George Mason University in northern Virginia and Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond now educate far more students than any of the top three and have become substantial institutions in their own right.

Virginia Commonwealth, for example, sprawls over a large part of downtown Richmond, with 29,000 students in 15 schools and one college. It operates one of the largest medical research centers in the state, attracted \$185 million in sponsored research

In spring 2004, three of the state's leading institutions offered to accept a cut in financial support from the state in exchange for their freedom to raise tuition and conduct their own affairs.



William and Mary President Timothy X. Sullivan supports the restructuring plan but would have preferred "charter" status for his college.

Tom Cogill for CrossTalk

Most college administrators seem guardedly optimistic that the new management agreements with the state will leave them better off than before.

programs in 2004, and is the largest employer in Richmond.

But a crucial difference exists between VCU and its much older counterpart, UVA. Virginia's flagship university has an endowment in excess of \$2 billion, which contributed \$83 million last year to campus operations.

Further, it can easily attract out-of-state students willing to pay \$35,000 a year for a UVA

degree, and it could also raise in-state tuition substantially and have no difficulty filling its classrooms. In short, UVA has financial clout, or what is known in Virginia higher education circles as "market potential." And market potential is a major factor in earning a high bond rating.

Virginia Commonwealth University, on the other hand, has little in the way of endowment, and, with many of its students coming from lower-income families, has limited capacity to raise tuition. It lacks market potential, and President Eugene Trani says the university will forego a Level III application. "I want all the operational flexibility I can get (from the restructuring)," said Trani. "But the truth is that operational flexibility pales in importance to other issues at

VCU." Those other issues can be boiled down to scrambling for more funding from the state.

During Warner's tenure the state began employing a conceptual figure for each institution known as "base adequacy." Essentially, base adequacy is a dollar figure that the state calculates will be needed to operate a campus over a fiscal year. Pursuing base adequacy has become the Holy Grail for schools like VCU because they have few other sources of income.

"When I see the governor I don't talk so much about restructuring," said Trani. "I say, 'Governor, what about our base adequacy?' Over and over again, I talk about base adequacy. For us, it's far more important than restructuring."

In one sense, then, the restructuring legislation has divided Virginia's public campuses into two groups: At the top sit UVA, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary, who are pursuing Level III status in the hope they can make maximum use of their "market potential." Below them are the remaining campuses, without market potential or Level III status, who will be left scrambling for base adequacy funding.

"In Virginia, there are no statewide bodies like you have in California with the Board of Regents," commented one state official. "So when it comes to making a deal with the state, each campus operates on its own. Those with the most moxie usually win, and that's been the case with restructuring."

Even for the top three, the value of the restructuring prize

UPDATE **Virginia's Restructuring Is a** **"Work in Progress"**

April 2008

THE ATTEMPT by Virginia's public colleges and universities to obtain more freedom from state control has produced mixed results.

When *National CrossTalk* reported on this subject in summer 2005, legislation had been passed to grant public institutions autonomy over some operations, in exchange for their agreement to pursue a set of state goals. Since then, the schools have gained considerable autonomy in the areas of capital outlay, purchasing, human resources and information technology. However, the most important change they sought—the authority to set tuition rates—has remained in the hands of the governor and the legislature.

"They got sort of half a loaf," said David W. Breneman, director of the Master's in Public Policy Program at the University of Virginia, "but that's pretty good" for a new set of policies that involves so many changes from past procedures.

"Overall, there are more positives than negatives in the new approach," said Colette Sheehy, UVA's vice president for management and budget.

So far, most of the changes have taken place at UVA, Virginia Tech and the College of William and Mary—designated as Level III schools in the plan. (Virginia Commonwealth University became the fourth Level III institution in 2008.)

These institutions now plan and build their own academic buildings without prior approval from state agencies, as long as no state dollars

are involved.

"Basically, we now have authority to manage a project from beginning to end, including a certificate of occupancy, without getting approval from Richmond," Sheehy said. "This saves time and money." New buildings for the College of Engineering and the College of Arts and Sciences, both financed by private donations, have been added to the Charlottesville campus since the new policy was adopted.

Samuel E. Jones, vice president for finance at William and Mary, said the college was free to build a new \$75 million business school, paid for by donations and college-supported bonds, without prior approval from the state. This has cut several months off the process, Jones said.

Officials of the Level III schools agreed that the ability to do their own purchasing, instead of depending on a central office in Richmond, has been helpful. But all three reported some problems in implementing their new authority to handle information technology.

Moving responsibility for "human resources" (including job classification and pay scales) from the state level to individual institutions has been a slow process, encountering many obstacles, but none that seem insurmountable.

However, the all-important ability to set tuition rates for in-state undergraduates, which UVA, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary

The most important change Virginia's public colleges and universities sought—the authority to set tuition rates—has remained in the hands of the governor and the legislature.

A \$1.3 billion tax increase in 2004 was aimed, in large part, at restoring some of the lost funding for Virginia's public colleges and universities.

remains in doubt. When the top three universities first proposed their charter initiative, for example, they never envisioned an eventual outcome that would obligate them to meeting a host of state goals in return for gaining control over tuition and management. But that's what they got.

Amy Sebring, higher education

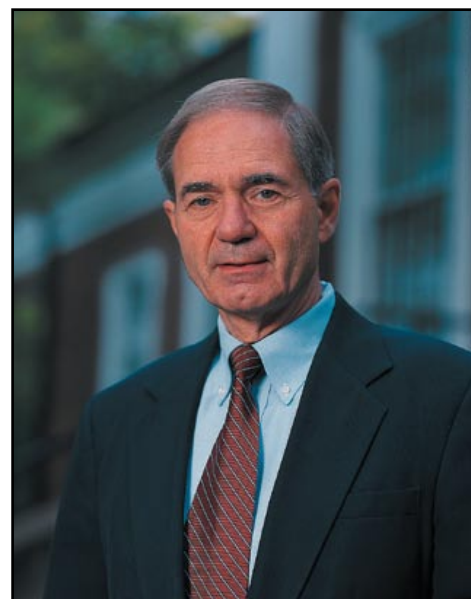
analyst for the Senate Finance Committee, said the idea of imposing goals on the universities grew out of concerns that the public needed to be well-served by any structural change. "As the conversation moved on," she said, "legislators and the governor's office began asking the questions, 'What does the state get out of this? How does this process translate into improved education opportunities?'"

Numbering 11 in all, the state goals range widely from increasing enrollment of lower-income students to stimulating economic development and raising graduation rates.

Meeting the goals could leave the universities in something of a sweat. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) will first develop "metrics" to measure progress toward the goals, and the universities will be required to show how they will satisfy those metrics in their management agreements and various other documents.

SCHEV will then employ a "gap analysis" to determine whether the plans will, in fact, achieve the goals. If a gap is detected between the plans and the goals, the schools will be required to upgrade their proposals.

Even after the management agreements are approved, the goals will continue to haunt the universities. Each year, SCHEV will review the performance of each campus, measuring their success. If a campus is found to be lacking, its agreement can be revoked.



Tom Cogill for CrossTalk

The University of Virginia's Leonard Sandridge believes the benefits of the agreement "will come with time."

consider vital to retaining academic quality, has eluded them.

In 2008, with state revenues lower than expected, the legislature approved a tuition increase of only three percent for the 2008-09 academic year, plus an additional one percent for student financial aid. "The General Assembly view was that the state is having tough times, families are having tough times, so higher education will have to pick up its share," said Don Finley, president of the Virginia Business Higher Education Council.

But most institutions had planned for larger increases. For instance, George Mason University raised tuition 8.5 percent in 2007-08 and had envisioned a similar increase the following year.

In an attempt to hold tuitions down, the legislature created a "Tuition Moderation Incentive Fund" that would provide the schools with an additional two percent (for a total increase of six percent) from the annual tuition and fee revenue that flows to the state. For 2008-09, that amounted to about \$17.5 million, to be divided among the institutions.

This fell far short of what the schools said they needed, forcing them to face a dilemma: They could accept the limit, or raise tuition more than that, risking the legislature's displeasure. But the issue turned out to be short-lived. In 2009, faced with a continuing state budget shortfall, the

The University of Virginia, Virginia Tech and the College of William and Mary can now plan and build their own academic buildings without prior approval from state agencies.

General Assembly decided to discontinue the incentive fund for 2010, and no tuition increase limit was set for in-state undergraduate students.

"That's a serious problem," said Richmond attorney Lane Kneeder, one of the architects of the restructuring plan. "If the major schools decide to raise tuition eight or nine percent, they need to be prepared for a battle to avoid caps."

"Many think this goes against the whole idea of restructuring," Finley said.

In return for the new grants of authority, schools must agree to pursue a set of state goals. These include improving student retention and graduation rates and taking steps to make postsecondary education more accessible and more affordable. ("The original 11 goals have subsequently been expanded to include a 12th: "Seek to ensure the safety and security of the Commonwealth's students on college and university campuses.")

All of this is spelled out in "management agreements" between each school and the state. The State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) monitors these agreements and issues annual certifications to those that have complied.

"This is kind of murky work, and it's hard to know what has been achieved," said Peter Blake, vice chancellor for workforce development in the Virginia community college system. "We're still looking for a coordinated vision of where the state needs to be" in areas such as enrollment, tuition and achievement.

John Bennett, senior vice president for finance and administration at Virginia Commonwealth University, summed up the restructuring efforts this way: "It's a work in progress. All of the elements are in place but it's going to take a while to work out the details."

—William Trombley

At UVA, the pressure already is being felt. Goal number nine—“Work actively with elementary and secondary school administrators. . .to improve student achievement”—resulted in the Curry School of Education receiving marching orders from the UVA administration to seek out and improve a local school. The school was located, and two education professors are now working halftime on the project.

Breneman, the school’s dean, views the scrambling with some amusement. “In the effort to get themselves deregulated, the schools may have breathed new life into SCHEV and got themselves re-regulated,” he said. “The fact is, every campus is fumbling in the dark with this thing. No one knows how it will turn out.”

Warner, whose office had a major hand in developing the goals, predicts the outcome will be good for the schools and for the state. In some areas, he said, the universities have proved themselves sorely lacking, and making them accountable will give the state some powerful leverage.

“Take the area of fostering the careers of women and minorities,” he said. “Universities have been some of the worst performers in the state in this regard. That may surprise people, but university systems tend to be run by old-boy networks. I think we’re going to see that change as this process moves along. The universities will get their freedom, and the state will get what it needs also.”

Campus administrations will also have to tread delicately when it comes to exercising their hard-won authority over tuition and fees. While the new legislation explicitly confers control over tuition to the campuses, it is universally recognized that the General Assembly could snatch it back at any time.

“The schools got the authority, but I wouldn’t characterize that authority as unchallenged,” said Finance Secretary Bennett. “In effect, the General Assembly was saying, ‘Yeah, you’ve got the right to do 25 percent (in tuition hikes), but if you do 25 percent, we will come back and slap you around.’”

College administrators largely agree with this assessment. Grabbing control over tuition proved to be a popular political gambit by governors and the legislature during the ‘90s, and there is nothing to prevent it from being employed again.

But, administrators say, tuition hikes in the foreseeable future will probably run only two to three percent above the inflation rate and thus will be unlikely to attract the ire of politicians. At UVA, tuition increases were projected in the eight to ten percent range last spring, on the assumption that the state carries through on its funding goals. Projections at other schools were somewhat lower.

Given all the uncertainties, was the two-year effort over restructuring worth it? Most university officials, especially those in the top three, appear to believe it was—with caveats.

“We would have preferred to end up where we started (with charter status),” said Sullivan at William and Mary. “What we eventually got was a framework to work out these management agreements that may offer us the chance to plan



Tom Cagill for CrossTalk

“Nothing in the legislation changes the amount of state funding for higher education,” says John Bennett, Virginia’s finance secretary.

ahead several years at a time. That would be a huge advantage over the last decade, which left us with zero predictability.”

At UVA, Vice President Sandridge noted that the university hospital was granted widespread autonomy in 1996 under a similar restructuring arrangement. That effort has proved very successful, he said, and he expects the same experience this time.

“It is quite clear that the state always has the authority to overrule their agreement with us. We acknowledge that,” said Sandridge. “But it is my experience in Virginia that parties usually operate in good faith. So we are going into this with the expectation that we can work out a reasonable financial plan with the Commonwealth and that we will be able to make decisions at UVA, to operate the campus, and to set tuition consistent with that plan.”

The true outcome of the restructuring plan likely will be revealed in stages. By this December, the Level III management agreements are scheduled to be approved and, at that point, the institutions will know exactly what authorities they have gotten from the state and what they have given up. The agreements will be put into practice next July, and the performance of individual campuses will be reviewed by SCHEV the following year.

“It’s a case where the final product is never really the final product,” said state Senator Chichester. “We will take small steps, see if they work, and then take more steps. And a real judgment as to whether we have succeeded is probably some time away.” ♦

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

For all the hoopla surrounding restructuring, the benefits will not be extended evenly across Virginia’s institutions.

“Effectiveness and Efficiency”

The University System of Maryland’s campaign to control costs and increase student aid

Photos by Dennis Brack, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Kay Mills

ADELPHI, MARYLAND

THREE YEARS into an “Effectiveness and Efficiency” campaign, the University System of Maryland has achieved some successes:

- Costs have been cut by \$40 million.
- Faculty workload has been increased by ten percent.
- Need-based student financial aid has risen substantially.
- Steps have been taken to shorten the time it takes a student to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Cliff Kendall, who chaired the Board of Regents when the “E and E” initiative was launched in June 2003, said that, faced with lean budget years and rising enrollments, the board decided to act. “We could sit and do nothing or we could take action,” he said. “We elected to do something.”

The system’s efforts have won support from Republican Governor Robert Ehrlich Jr., and from the Maryland General Assembly. After taking budget cuts of 7.4 percent and 6.8 percent earlier in this decade and boosting the system’s average tuition by almost 40 percent over the last four fiscal years, the university system (ten campuses, two research centers and a largely online college) received a 5.9 percent budget increase last year and a 14.4 percent hike (including a cost-of-living adjustment of almost two percent) this year.

Even so, the Board of Regents approved a 4.5 percent tuition increase for this fall, but Democratic legislators introduced a measure to eliminate the increase, and the state Senate passed it. Soon thereafter, Ehrlich, who had previously labeled the legislation an “election-year gimmick,” included an additional \$17.2 million in a supplemental budget, thereby

freezing tuition at current levels for full-time, in-state students.

Other factors helped to account for the swing in USM’s financial fortunes—the state has a budget surplus of more than \$1 billion this year, and Governor Ehrlich is running for

re-election. But the university system’s efforts to become more efficient and more effective turned the governor “180 degrees. He saw how serious this effort was,” Chancellor William E. “Brit” Kirwan told a group at the American Council on Education’s annual meeting in Los Angeles in February. “The governor and the General Assembly are at war in our state. But one thing they agree on is higher education. So we’re in this sweet spot. How long we can stay there, I don’t know.”

Ehrlich wanted quality and efficiency in Maryland higher education, in the midst of what his chief of staff, James C.



Regent Cliff Kendall says rising enrollments and declining state support led the University System of Maryland to change its budgeting approach.

DiPaula, called a “near crisis situation” when he took office. The state was facing a potential \$2 billion deficit when Ehrlich became governor in 2003. “The regents took that challenge and ran with it,” DiPaula said.

In Maryland, the governor determines the budget, and the legislature can only decrease, not increase, his proposals unless it finds a source of revenue to pay for budget additions, said Joseph Vivona, USM’s chief operating officer. “You succeed in this state by having good relationships with the governor and the legislature. You don’t win by criticizing the governor.”

Susan Woda, a former student member of the Board of Regents who is writing her doctoral dissertation on the creation of the system, said, “A lot of people in higher education want to paint Ehrlich as the devil, but he has done what every governor has done in similar circumstances. When he ran, he said he had been left with some tough decisions. He said, ‘If you won’t do it, I’m going to cut you.’ Kirwan knew that it was important to see where Ehrlich was coming from and then give him what he wants.”

Kirwan and the regents streamlined some administrative procedures to provide more money for academic priorities. For example, the system leveraged its buying power by purchasing electricity as a group, not campus-by-campus, with savings estimated at ten to 15 percent, or \$5 million over the three-year life of the contract. Another \$5 million will be saved over five years through a new agreement with Microsoft. Kirwan and the regents also required each campus in the system to identify one percent in additional savings that

Maryland was facing a potential \$2 billion deficit when Robert Ehrlich Jr. became governor in 2003.



University System of Maryland faculty members were “not happy at all” with a recent ten percent workload increase, says Martha Siegel, who heads the systemwide faculty council.

could be realized over the last two fiscal years. And they agreed to enroll an additional 940 students without additional state money in the 2005 fiscal year.

USM increased its faculty teaching load by ten percent, always a difficult step for any university or system of universities. “There was tremendous hostility in legislatures across the country, whose members think that faculty teach two or three hours a week and then go off on our boats or whatever,” said Stephanie Gibson, professor of communications design at the University of Baltimore and a member of the Council of University System Faculty. The changes were “a response by the regents to try to address that.”

“We spent many hours at the regents’ meetings explaining that there was more to the workload than teaching,” said Martha Siegel, who has taught mathematics at Towson University for 30 years and heads the systemwide faculty council.

The ten percent workload increase, which began to be implemented last year, does not apply to individual faculty members but to every academic department, systemwide. Typically, faculty workload includes teaching, preparation, advising, serving on committees, research and other activities. Faculty at research institutions (the flagship campus at College Park and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County) are expected to spend half of their time on instruction—that is, five or six three-credit classes a year—and the other half on research and public service.

At “comprehensive” institutions such as Towson, located just northeast of the Baltimore city line, faculty are expected to expend two-thirds of their effort on instruction (seven or eight three-credit classes a year) and the remaining time on research and public service. The regents said that by this fiscal year (2006), faculty at each institution should be halfway toward those goals.

While faculty workloads were very heavy at some campuses (for example, Coppin State University, in West Baltimore), others had fallen below the new requirements. Towson, under pressure to hire more faculty because of rapid enrollment growth, was offering lighter teaching loads to attract new people.

After Robert Caret returned to Towson as its president

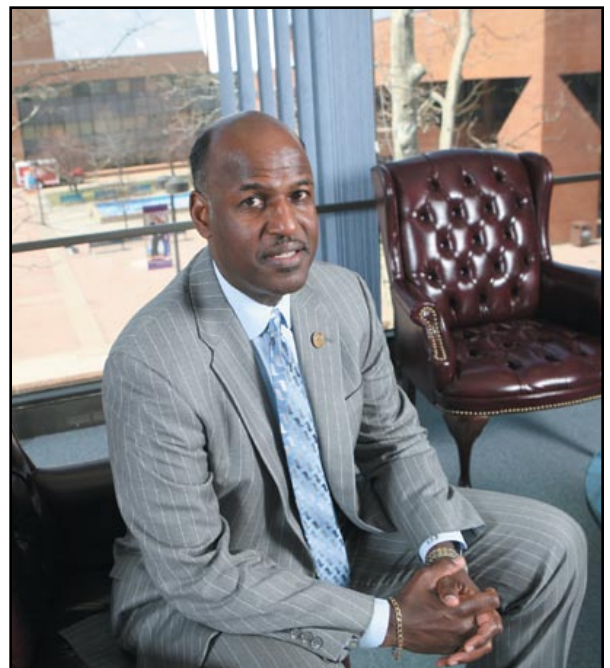
in 2003 (he had been at the school for 21 years before becoming president of San Jose State University), he imposed the tighter workload standards, in effect taking back what the faculty thought it had been given. “I said that we can’t be a campus of 20,000 and be a small liberal arts college,” Caret said. So lighter teaching loads would be granted only to faculty members whose research productivity warranted them.

“The faculty was not happy at all” with the ten percent workload increase, Martha Siegel said. The feeling was that the system should increase the number of tenure-track faculty, since they do most of the advising and committee work. Instead, the system was hiring less expensive part-time and adjunct faculty. Siegel also pointed out that professors who once taught classes with 20 students now might have 35 students but still received credit for just one teaching unit.

“Workload is the biggest issue on my campus,” Stephanie Gibson said. “It’s partly because the pay isn’t always commensurate with time and effort expended, but it’s also that there’s just so much work. The number of administrative tasks that we’re asked to do seems to increase exponentially every year.”

This is not to say that pay isn’t a faculty concern. “Salaries are my biggest issue,” said Dennis Coates, an economics professor representing UM-Baltimore County on the

The University System of Maryland streamlined some administrative procedures to provide more money for academic priorities.



Both enrollment and state financial support have risen sharply since Stanley Battle became president of Coppin State University, in West Baltimore, in 2003.

faculty council. "At my institution, in my department, there's nobody who makes the average salary at the institutions we consider our peers," like the State University of New York at Binghamton.

In an effort to move students toward earlier degree completion, the system now requires them to earn at least 12 credits outside the traditional classroom—through online courses, study abroad programs, internships or Advanced Placement credits. Because capacity on some UM campuses is limited, first-time freshmen sometimes enroll in the spring instead of the fall. They are encouraged to earn at least 12 credits before arriving on campus, either through USM's largely online University College or at a Maryland community college.

The Maryland system expects an enrollment increase of 20 percent by the end of this decade, hence the urgency to save money, increase faculty productivity and encourage students to graduate sooner. Not only is Maryland experiencing the "baby boom echo," but more students are preparing themselves

for postsecondary education, Kirwan said in an interview. Towson University and Salisbury State, across the Chesapeake Bay on Maryland's Eastern Shore, will absorb much of the new growth. Towson,

with a current enrollment of 17,867, is expected to add another 3,000 by 2010, and 4,300 more by 2015.

For the first time ever, Governor Ehrlich included money in this year's budget for enrollment growth, allowing the system to accept almost 3,400 additional students. "We had said that we would take 700 students over the next three years without any additional money, but beyond that the state would have to provide more support," Kirwan said. "I cannot overstate the importance of that 'but.' Maryland has never funded enrollment growth. As a result, there was no incentive for campuses to grow." USM made this a centerpiece of its budget request this year, and the governor and the General Assembly agreed. Going forward, Maryland will recognize and fund enrollment growth, the chancellor said, although he added, "It's not written into law."

"We are very conscious of the fact that we have a surge of students coming and we need to prepare for them," said Regent Cliff Kendall. Re-examining the budget "gave everybody a chance to think differently" about how the system was going to do that.

As president of UM-College Park from 1988 to 1998, Kirwan was opposed to creating the system, fearing too much centralization. But he lost that argument, and the new system was knit together from four University of Maryland institutions (College Park, UM-Baltimore, the University of Baltimore and UM-Baltimore County) and six former state colleges (Frostburg State, Salisbury State, Towson State and three historically black schools—Bowie State, Coppin State and UM-Eastern Shore). There are also two research centers,

two education centers and University College, which offers distance education courses largely, but not entirely, online.

Over time, major changes were made, and now "it's a different system, one of the most decentralized systems in the states," Kirwan said. "There is an appropriate degree of autonomy vested in the presidents. I don't think there is a perfect way to organize higher education. If there were, we would have all done that."

Kirwan feels strongly about the urgency of increasing student financial aid, and he has been backed by the regents and the governor. American universities have been shifting to financial aid based more on merit than on need, the chancellor said, as they sought to improve the quality of their students. That was in part to look better in the influential *U.S. News & World Report* ratings, which Kirwan thinks "quite frankly, have done enormous harm to higher education." In the early '90s, Kirwan added, "90 percent of our aid had a need component. Now that's only about 60 percent."

In June 2004, Kirwan appointed a financial aid task force of legislators and business people, with Nancy Kopp, the state treasurer, as chair. "The guiding principle was providing affordable access to higher education for all qualified students and securing ample state support to enable us to achieve that end," the chancellor said. The task force urged that more of the money raised through tuition increases be directed toward decreasing undergraduate student loan debt and to helping those students with the greatest need.

The students worst off economically are graduating with 25 percent more debt than other students, Kirwan said. "That's not the way it's supposed to work. It's a powerful disincentive for going to college if you're going to come out with all this debt. We have to step back and look at what's good for society. It is that we provide access to students of economically disadvantaged backgrounds because higher education has become the primary means to move up the economic ladder and enjoy a better life."

USM has set as a goal that by 2009, the lowest-income students must graduate with 25 percent less debt. Toward that end, Governor Ehrlich has doubled need-based aid since taking office, this year putting \$87

Governor Ehrlich has doubled need-based aid since taking office, this year putting \$87 million into that pot.



Susan Woda, a former student member of the Board of Regents, says the university system now receives more state money because its "effectiveness and efficiency" campaign has won support from Governor Robert Ehrlich Jr.

million into that pot.

As Maryland looks ahead, tuition increases are likely to remain a touchy subject. State Senator Patrick J. Hogan, vice chairman of the budget and taxation committee and sponsor of the legislation freezing this year's increase, said the current budget surplus is a one-time event, because costs of Medicaid and K-12 education are going up, and deficits loom.

"These are students and their families who've gotten 20 to 35 percent (tuition) increases in the last couple of years," Hogan said. "I fully respect the regents' role to set tuition based on projected revenue," he added, but said that the one-year freeze was necessary because "it is only fair to do this for students, to give them a break."

In addition to spending more for operating expenses and for student aid, Ehrlich provided more money this year for the state's historically black campuses.

For example, state funding for Coppin State increased by \$9.4 million—45 percent—to \$30.1 million, enabling the campus to improve its public safety and maintenance services, and to support its recent 11.1 percent enrollment increase. The school now has 4,300 students and could reach 6,000 students by 2015, said President Stanley Battle. Coppin also broke ground last year for a \$57 million health and human services building, providing classrooms, labs and offices for its nursing, counseling, social work and criminal justice programs.

His campus had been "woefully underfunded," said Battle, who became Coppin's president in 2003 after serving as vice chancellor for student and multicultural affairs at the

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. "The governor made a commitment to help the university," he said. "That was courageous. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have come otherwise."

But shortly after Battle arrived at Coppin, the campus faced cuts, along with the rest of the system. "I was not going to lay anybody off. For a new president, that was not going to look good," he said. So everyone on campus, Battle included, took from four to 11 furlough days without pay, for a savings of more than \$300,000. "The regents recognized what we did," he said. Evidently so did the governor.

Reflecting on USM's "effectiveness and efficiency" effort, Kirwan said his motivation and that of the Board of Regents was the sense that although

higher education is "still valued as something good for a person—to enter and achieve a degree—it is considered a private benefit." Higher education had begun to lose the public goodwill, he explained. "Because of this decline, we didn't have a lot of support in legislatures," he said. "Higher education took a beating in the first couple years of this decade. The public



As chancellor of the University System of Maryland since 2002, William E. "Brit" Kirwan has led efforts to cut costs, increase the faculty workload and provide more student financial aid.

thought we had begun to turn our back on the neediest."

Higher education had been unwilling "to recognize the way the rest of the world operates," Kirwan added. "[We] had been unwilling to take a serious look at our operations and to take steps to control costs." In order to restore the support higher education had enjoyed in the past, Kirwan became convinced that it would be necessary to address the two critical issues of costs and student aid. So the university restructured its budget submission—aligning it very carefully with state priorities such as enrollment growth and workforce development. And the effort has paid off, winning more support from the governor and legislature. ♦

Kay Mills is the author of "This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer," and four other books.

The Maryland system expects an enrollment increase of 20 percent by the end of this decade, hence the urgency to save money, increase faculty productivity and encourage students to graduate sooner.

Florida's Unnatural Disaster

The state's economic bubble has burst, leaving higher education in a double bind

By Jon Marcus

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

WHAT FLORIDA NEEDS right about now is a hurricane. Not a major one that hurts anybody, T.K. Wetherell, president of Florida State University, is saying. Just big enough that people use their homeowners' insurance to buy roofing materials, new air conditioners, and other goods.

Wetherell is kidding—more or less. Considering that Florida has no income tax and depends almost entirely on sales taxes for government revenues, hurricanes over the last few years have generated jackpots for the state and, in turn, its higher education system. Recessions like this one, on the other hand, have proven unnatural disasters.

Even as Wetherell spoke, the legislature, meeting just a few blocks away, had just sliced another \$114 million from Florida's 11 public universities, or nearly five percent, to help close a \$2.3 billion budget shortfall. That was on top of a \$174 million decrease imposed just a few months before. The state's budget has shrunk by \$8 billion since last year, and even more money is likely to be slashed later this year, by which time revenues are expected to be another \$2.5 billion shy of original projections.

Add to this a history of political pressure that has forced the universities to open branch campuses all over the map but has prevented them from raising tuition above a level that remains the lowest in the country, and the situation in Florida may be as bad as it gets for higher education. All of this is happening in a state where the population growth, while slowing, remains the sixth highest in the nation, and at a time when a flood of people who have been laid off—or expect to be—need career retraining, putting huge pressure on besieged community colleges.

"It was destined to crash at some point," said Wetherell, who has watched the evolution of this problem from all sides as a former speaker of the state House of Representatives and former president of Tallahassee Community College. "It's the worst I've ever seen in my tenure in education or politics, and I was speaker in 1991 and '92, which was the last big one. That was mild compared to this. All the chickens have come home."

What they've brought with them to FSU is an abrupt \$45 million worth of cuts so far this academic year alone. The university has eliminated 250 positions and canceled plans to hire 100 new faculty. Teaching loads for existing faculty have increased, and at least 62—including some of the brightest stars, 27 of them tenured and 35 on the tenure track—have quit since August, many for higher-paying jobs at universities with more stability. "We lost people we didn't want to lose," said Wetherell. "They're thinking, 'I don't need to put up with this anymore.'"

Classes are growing larger, and more of them are being led by teaching and graduate assistants and adjuncts; the student-faculty ratio in Florida is more than 31 to 1, compared to the national average of 25 to 1. The planned completion of a \$100 million campaign called Pathways to Excellence to boost

Florida State University's national reputation has been pushed back by at least two years. Journal subscriptions, professional memberships and travel have been curtailed. So have mail delivery, trash collection and landscaping. Even the university's National Magnetic Field Laboratory, which is the source of almost as much pride as its football team, has had its hours shortened to save money on utilities.

But perhaps the most widely felt move is a dramatic cutback in the number of freshmen the university accepts. Florida State took 5,053 this year, down from 6,326 the year before, and might cut

the number further in the fall. This would shut out students previously considered qualified to join the lucky 39,136 who have won the privilege of attending this historic red-brick campus, with its carefully manicured grounds and Spanish moss draped from the branches of huge old oak trees—landscaping cutbacks or not—in the slow-paced, southern-accented state capital.

The University of Florida has also cut its freshman class, by 1,000 students, and the University of South Florida has frozen its enrollment.

And that's just the beginning. Some estimates predict that the state's four-year universities, which together have 300,000 students, will collectively shrink their enrollment by as many as 17,000, even while demand continues to increase. At both Florida and Florida State this year, for example, there were more than 20,000 applicants for those coveted, fast-disappearing places in the freshman class. To get into the University of Florida last fall, the average freshman needed an SAT score of 1293; at Florida State, 1261. The universities are also losing hard-earned minority enrollment. The number of black students in the entering class fell 27 percent at the University of Florida, 15 percent at FSU, and 23 percent at the University of



Colin Heckley, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Florida's budget condition is "the worst I've seen in my tenure in education or politics," says T.K. Wetherell, president of Florida State University and former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives.

The Florida Legislature sliced \$114 million—on top of a \$174 million cut imposed just a few months before—from 11 public universities, to help close a \$2.3 billion budget shortfall.



“The fact of the matter is we’re serving a population that the universities refuse to serve,” says Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami Dade College, the largest two-year college in the U.S.

South Florida.

These cuts at the public four-year universities have pushed more students into community colleges, which have open admissions, and whose enrollment is soaring while their own resources are in freefall. The same week the universities lost \$114 million in state funding, the state’s 28 community colleges were cut by a collective \$44 million.

As with many things, Florida provides an extreme example here, too, of what is happening more slowly elsewhere in the country: the creation of a two-class system in which largely white graduates of private and suburban public high schools enjoy the prestige of attending four-year flagship universities, while urban, rural, low-income and non-white students fill beyond capacity the classrooms of community colleges.

“The fact of the matter is we’re serving a population that the universities refuse to serve,” said Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami Dade College—a community college in the throbbing heart of Miami that is now the largest institution of higher learning in the United States, with nearly 165,000 students. “We’re open-door, while the universities are becoming more selective, limiting enrollment, requiring higher SATs and GPAs. The result of that is we’re getting the bulk of the students.”

Bridging neighborhoods of bodegas, exotic-smelling cafes Cubano, and check-cashing stores on one side, soaring new condo towers and the Miami cruise-ship port on the other, the main campus of Miami Dade has, if not a grassy quad, at least a brick pedestrian plaza. But rather than scattered students strolling unhurriedly from one class to another, it teems with people of different hues and speaking different languages walking briskly or standing in long lines everywhere, from the office where they pay their bills to the entrance to the parking garage that seems to be the largest building at the college.

Miami Dade has the highest number of Hispanics, and the second-highest enrollment of blacks, of any college or university in America. Nearly 60 percent of its students earn \$25,000 or less, and half of those live below the poverty line. They come from 192 countries and speak 93 languages, and most are the first in their families to go to college.

Community college enrollment in Florida is up 14 percent in the last two years, to more than 800,000 students, even as funding plummets. Yet unlike the four-year universities or even primary and secondary public schools in Florida, the state’s community colleges aren’t funded ahead of time for their predicted enrollments, but are allocated money based on a rolling average of the number who attended in the previous three years, which means they are constantly falling behind. “When it comes to funding, community colleges are the Cinderellas of the system,” Padrón said. “We get the money after the fact, if we’re lucky.”

One upshot of this is that Miami Dade is getting no money at all from the state for 13,000 of its students—equal to the total that attends the private University of Miami in nearby Coral Gables. The college’s facilities are 40 percent over their capacity. Students say that as many as 60 of them at a time are being packed into what are supposed to be seminar-style classes, forced to scrounge around the corridors for desks, or at least folding chairs, and taking notes on their laps.

Evidence of why the college is so crowded, and why Florida higher education is in so much trouble, is all around the campus. Those pricey condo towers are largely empty, cruise-ship bookings have flattened out after years of increases, hotel occupancy is way down, and things are slow at the fancy shopping mall across Biscayne Boulevard, even on a sunny, 78-degree winter day. All of which means that less sales taxes are being collected—a staggering \$31.4 billion less in the next four years, economists predict—an amount equal to half the current annual state budget.

Florida’s growth machine fueled, and was fueled by, the state’s historical aversion to taxes. Low taxes, after all, attracted the retirees, and, later, families with children, who moved here. Now, after years of breakneck population growth that kept government coffers flowing, Florida’s bubble has burst. Long dependent on real estate, tourism and construction, the state has gone from leading the nation in job creation to leading in job losses, and from the lowest unemployment rate to the ninth highest. The construction industry alone has shed 79,000 jobs. Florida is second in foreclosure filings, and 300,000 homes remain unsold, six times the previous average. From first in the country in the value of its gross domestic product, Florida has plunged to 47th.

When times were good, politicians seldom had to make particularly hard decisions about how to spend the money. Now, like T.K. Wetherell’s chickens, that legacy of political expediency also has come home. Years of haggling over control of it has had the effect of leaving all levels of the state’s higher education system particularly vulnerable to the worsening recession.

Governance of public higher education after World War II was assigned to the seven-member Florida Board of Control, which in practice controlled very little, while the legislature micromanaged universities and colleges. The same was generally true of its successor agency, the Board of Regents, set up in 1965. By the 1990s, legislators decided to rid themselves of the regents, who often got in the way of their plans for campuses in their home districts. The end for the board came in 2001, when it resisted Governor Jeb Bush’s resolve to eliminate affirmative-action policies at public universities. Bush pushed to replace the Board of Regents with boards of trustees for

Florida’s bubble has burst. Long dependent on real estate, tourism and construction, the state has gone from leading the nation in job creation to leading in job losses.

each school. Instead, the next year, distrustful voters approved a new Board of Governors, ostensibly to run the universities independently of both the legislature and the governor.

It didn't work out that way. Bush stacked the new board with political allies, including a conservative radio talk show host. It had the distinction of being, according to consultants hired by the board itself, "the least-experienced higher education entity in the country."

Meanwhile, legislators continued to demand new branch campuses, which the consultants (from the Connecticut-based Pappas Consulting Group) found were undersized and overly expensive but were politically popular. The Board of Governors approved new medical schools at Florida International University and at the University of Central Florida, in addition to the two that already existed and the one at the University of Miami, for which the state provides financial support. The price was so high, the consultants said, it could have paid for up to five new universities.

A prepaid tuition program locked in the cost of tuition, fees and housing from the time a family opened an account. And a much-heralded new scholarship program to be paid for with lottery proceeds, Bright Futures, was launched to reward students who met certain academic criteria with up to full tuition at a public university, whether or not they had financial need for it. These things also were wildly popular with voters, as was Florida's consistently low public university tuition, which remains the cheapest in America—from \$3,400 to \$4,000 a year, depending on the campus. But the consultants proved to be killjoys at the party. "All of these economic decisions, while fueled in many ways with good intentions, will bankrupt the state's higher education system," they warned soberly.

In fact, Bright Futures, which one Florida newspaper called a middle-class entitlement program, will cost \$436 million this year, even as falling discretionary income has left lottery revenues flat. It is so expensive that it has drained money from need-based financial aid, which now accounts for barely 20 percent of all state tuition assistance. That puts Florida 42nd among the 50 states in the availability of need-based financial aid. And one in five students now at Florida universities and colleges has a prepaid tuition contract, meaning their tuition cannot be raised more than 6.5 percent per year.

Tuition itself has been the thorniest problem of all. Legislators haven't wanted to increase it, because every time tuition goes up, they have to spend more on the ravenous Bright Futures scholarships. As for the governor, Bush's successor, Charlie Crist, vetoed a proposed five percent tuition increase just two years ago. It was the wrong time to raise tuition, he said, when residents were facing increases in property taxes, insurance rates and gas prices. In response to criticism about the veto from university presidents, he told an interviewer they could hand over their jobs to someone else.

Crist has since changed his position in the face of the widening hole in his budget, allowing a "premium tuition increase" of up to 15 percent for Florida State, the University of Florida, and three other of the largest public universities. Flanked by the mollified presidents, he has also announced his support for extending the same tuition flexibility to the rest of the campuses, letting them raise their own tuition by up to 15 percent a year until it reaches the national average. The

University of Florida, for instance, which now charges \$3,788 a year, would reach the national average tuition of \$6,900 by 2015, bringing in about \$21 million in new revenue. For an average student, the cost of attending a Florida public university next year would go up \$370. In all, the plan would raise \$1.5 billion over seven years, and nearly a third of that would be earmarked for need-based financial aid.

The proposal is awaiting action by the legislature, and a ruling in a typically Floridian lawsuit over who exactly has the right to set tuition, the legislature or the Board of Governors. There also is concern that lawmakers will use the money from tuition increases to supplant, rather than enhance, its state appropriations—a bait and switch about which the loudest warnings have come from Senator Bob Graham, a former governor and a longtime advocate of higher education. After all, Graham said, that's what happened when they decided to use lottery proceeds to pay for public education. Instead of supplementing the state appropriation for schools, the lottery revenues replaced it.

Resistance to increased tuition is lessening. As growing numbers of middle-class high school graduates started to be turned away by their first-choice four-year universities, Floridians surveyed last year said they were willing to pay more to keep the campuses afloat.

Nodding toward the window of his office, Wetherell used a favorite example: His grandson goes to private kindergarten "right here in Tallahassee, for \$8,000 a year," more than twice what it costs to go to Florida State. "I don't care who you are—liberal, conservative—you can't run a major research university on half a kindergarten tuition." Students, he said, who pay more for their cell phones than for their educations, were willing to shoulder more of the burden.

Opinion was slightly more mixed outside on the campus. "Students need to step back and realize it's not as bad as it could be," said Sarah Benvenisty, a freshman whose parents have a prepaid tuition account and who also receives a Bright Futures scholarship. It's also cheap to live in Tallahassee, her friend, Aaron Saltz chimed in. Still, he said, as the recession deepens, an increase will not be easy for students or their parents to pay. "No one has money anymore. And we don't have time to work."

Asia Williams, a junior, agreed. "We just don't have the money," she said. "We'll have to turn to loans, which will bury us deeper," her classmate Michol Wimberly added. "Cut it from something else. Not education. That's how you

Community college enrollment in Florida is up 14 percent in the last two years, to more than 800,000 students, even as funding plummets.



"A lot of people come here just because it's cheaper," says Ricardo Chirito, a freshman who chose Miami Dade over more expensive Florida International University.

Len Kaufman, Black Star, for CrossTalk



Miami Dade student leader Ophelia Somers says class size has increased, and courses needed for graduation often are not available.

get ahead.”

Aside from Graham, businesses have become the biggest advocates of Florida’s beleaguered public universities—partly for the very reason Wimberly cited. Improving higher education, they believe, is how Florida can get ahead, diversifying its economy and dodging downturns like this one in the future. It was businesses that lobbied Crist to let the universities increase their tuition, complaining that Florida ranks 46th in bachelor’s degree production, and 47th in degrees in science or technology—important measures of its economic competitiveness. Barely a quarter of adult Floridians have a bachelor’s degree or higher,

compared to more than a third in other states.

But even double-digit increases in tuition seem unlikely to undo the damage of the chronic underfunding of the higher education system here. Constantly feuding with the legislature, it turns out, was the wrong way for the Board of Regents and the Board of Governors to win higher state appropriations, which climbed by just under 65 percent in the last ten years. That places Florida at 44th among the 50 states. New York, by comparison, increased its higher education spending 76 percent during the same time period, and North Carolina 86 percent. With less than half the population, North Carolina now spends about the same as Florida on public higher education.

The same day Wetherell was expounding about the impact of the budget cuts on FSU, his hometown *Tallahassee Democrat* was editorializing bitterly that Floridians “live in their fantasy of wanting what they want, but paying naught.” Among the state’s many retirees especially, said Wetherell, “There’s a mentality of, ‘I did my job in Ohio or New York, or wherever. We’ve done our deal on education, and I respect it, but I don’t want to pay for it anymore.’”

Meanwhile, students continue to trickle down—it’s actually more of a flood—to even less well-funded community colleges. More than half of Florida students already end up there, compared to the national average of 45 percent. “Students who don’t get into the universities come to places like Miami Dade because, I guess, they think we have room,” said Ophelia Somers, president of the Student Government Association at the college’s main campus. But room is a long-lost luxury.

“When I first started out here, during registration, you would have to wait, but it was only 20 minutes or so,” Somers said. “Now you’ll be in a line of 200 people. Class size has gone up a lot. The classes you need to take are filled way before the beginning of the semester. They can’t open up more because there aren’t enough professors or classrooms.”

And for students at places like Miami Dade, Padrón said, increasing the price is more than an inconvenience. “For our students, raising tuition a few dollars could be the difference between putting food on the table or not,” he said. The average

family that sends a child to a community college in Florida pays 25 percent of its income to do so, up from 18 percent ten years ago. That is a larger percentage than is paid by families that send their kids to a four-year public university.

“A lot of people come here just because it’s cheaper,” said Ricardo Chirito, a freshman and the son of Colombian immigrants. Chirito could have gone to four-year Florida International University but chose to attend the vast expanse of pre-cast concrete that is Miami Dade’s campus in the strip-mall Miami suburb of Kendall. “I hate to say it,” said Christian Moreno, Kendall’s student-government head, but if tuition goes up—and it almost certainly will—“people are going to drop out.”

Yet when voters statewide were asked in November to let counties have the authority to raise their sales tax half a cent to pay for community colleges, the measure—also pushed by businesses—was defeated. “Some people don’t view community college as important,” said Moreno, who graduates in May from Miami Dade’s honors program and plans eventually to go to law school. “They see it as vocational. But the level of maturity here is probably higher, since students have to juggle a lot of things.”

“Community colleges are constantly underestimated,” added Somers. “People in Florida—people everywhere—have a lot of bias against community colleges. But we truly represent the fact that everybody deserves the right and the privilege to learn. We may get that student from an urban neighborhood, but that student will come out of here being able to converse with different cultures and handle diverse situations, and go to any job and any career, and do well.”

Students also worry that cash-strapped four-year universities will stop honoring articulation agreements that guarantee them the right to transfer in as juniors, assuming they meet certain standards—especially as their numbers continue to swell. Already, more than 15,000 community college graduates move on to four-year universities each year. Their concerns may be warranted. “If you assume that that wave is coming through, we can’t handle ‘em,” said Wetherell. For now, however, he is sticking to the guarantee.

Currently, with that wave approaching, the four-year universities overloaded, and businesses pushing for more graduates with bachelor’s degrees, there are plans to let some of the community colleges grant four-year degrees in high-demand fields including nursing and teaching. Eight, including Miami Dade, already do so.

There is also a proposal to change the way the higher education system is governed, for the fourth time in ten years. It calls for an elected commissioner of education, and would do away with the appointed Board of Education, whose role would be taken on by the elected cabinet officers. It also would include a statewide coordinating board for community colleges.

The idea is to eliminate the constant battle for control, and to refocus attention on fixing Florida’s embattled public higher-education system.

Or, there could be another solution, Wetherell joked: “You could also give me a little hurricane.” ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Calamity in California

State's battered budget leads to huge fee increases and less access to public universities

By Jon Marcus

SAN DIEGO

CARVED FROM the rust-colored Palomar Mountains along the coast of the churning Pacific, the University of California at San Diego seems as close to paradise as any public higher education institution is likely to look.

A racial and ethnic rainbow of students stroll beneath clear blue skies wearing T-shirts and flip-flops in the 80-degree heat. The student newspaper prints the surf report on page one. Butterflies flit around the eucalyptus trees while hundreds gather on a manicured athletics field for the Chancellor's Challenge, a 5K road race.

The race has been organized to raise money for scholarships to help the poorest students afford the quickly escalating cost of attending this university, whose price increased almost ten percent this fall and will soon rise again by nearly a third.

In all, this event will generate about \$200,000, an inconsequential amount compared to the \$2.6 billion in cuts and added costs suffered by this and California's other public universities since the start of this recession, which came on top of a 40 percent inflation-adjusted drop in state support since the early 1990s.

"What I see in California and around the rest of the country is an emerging catastrophe," said California State University system Chancellor Charles Reed.

The Golden State has stumbled from higher-education success story to poster child for the crisis at American public universities. Its university system—by far the nation's biggest, divided into 110 community colleges, the 23 campuses of the California State University, and the ten University of California campuses—has traditionally also been among the best, including as it does UCLA and UC San Diego, both ranked among the nation's top 20 research universities, and flagship UC Berkeley, consistently named the best public university in America. Faculty at all the UC schools combined have won 55 Nobel prizes.

But huge and continuing population growth of about 50 percent since 1980, corporate tax cuts, a largely dysfunctional state government, an enormous increase in spending on prisons, and overdependence on income tax, capital gains and sales taxes—exactly the revenue streams most affected by recession—have combined to leave California with a staggering \$26 billion shortfall this year in revenues for public services.

The result has looked like something out of a Hollywood disaster movie. State buildings were put up for sale, healthcare services were cut for the poor, office equipment was auctioned off on eBay to raise money, parks and beaches were closed or left unsupervised, and departments had to resort to issuing creditors IOUs.

State allocations to California universities and colleges were slashed by up to one-fifth, with \$680 million cut from the

community colleges, \$584 million from the Cal State system, and \$813 million from the University of California—creating, as the university figures it, a \$1.1 billion hole, when increases in utility costs, health benefits and overenrollment are taken into account. This even after California's share of federal stimulus funding was applied against the leak—funding that will eventually run out.

"Higher education is in a competition it has never been in before," Reed said in his office in Long Beach, counting the many problems on his fingers. "It's in that competition with healthcare, and the burden Medicare and Medicaid have put on states." But mostly it's in competition with prisons, he said, in a folksy manner that evoked the years he spent in Tallahassee overseeing Florida's now equally troubled public university system.

"Somewhere in the mid to late '80s,"

Reed said, "legislatures all around the country... began to try to figure out how they could 'out-crime' each other. They didn't look at the consequences and the outcome of these severe penalties for nonviolent crimes." An inmate in a California prison, Reed said, costs the state five times as much as a student at a state university. "It's nuts," he concluded. Yet when the state Senate passed a bill that would have released 34,000 prisoners, the Assembly balked.

Most of the 180,000 faculty and staff at the University of California are being forced to take unpaid furloughs of from 11 to 26 days, depending on their salaries. At Cal State, faculty are being furloughed for about two days a month. "To call people profoundly demoralized is to be kind," said Lillian Taiz, president of the California Faculty Association. "Those who can leave are leaving."

Recruitment of new faculty has skidded to a halt. At Berkeley, which typically hires 100 new professors, only ten positions will be filled this year. At UCLA, the number of courses was reduced by 165 this fall, or ten percent. Average class size there has soared to 60. UC Irvine has halted admission to its doctoral program in education, UC Davis has eliminated 44 humanities and cultural studies courses and its liver-transplant program, and UC Santa Cruz has canceled courses with fewer than 100 students and deferred planned majors in earth sciences and environmental sciences. San



Axel Koster for CrossTalk

"When people start to be denied—and denied access for their children—they're going to get mad as hell," says Charles Reed, chancellor of the California State University system.

**"What I see in California and around the rest of the country is an emerging catastrophe."
—California State University Chancellor Charles Reed**

On November 19, the University of California Board of Regents voted to approve a 32 percent increase in the cost of attending a UC school.

Francisco State University has cut 354 courses, turning the first day of the fall semester into a chaotic free for all, with students “crashing” courses that were well beyond capacity and begging faculty to let them in. Some said they were giving up and quitting school, unable to enroll in the required courses they needed to eventually earn a degree.

In fact, in spite of the increased demand, California’s universities and colleges are intentionally shrinking their

enrollments. The overburdened community colleges, flooded with a record 2.9 million students this fall, nonetheless reduced course offerings by 20 percent. That’s 600 classes in the San Diego Community College district, for example, which told some 18,000 students—more than most American community colleges enroll—to come back in the spring.

The Campaign for College Opportunity, a coalition of business, labor and education leaders, estimates that the community colleges will ultimately have to turn away as many as 250,000 students. The Cal State system is following through on threats made during state budget deliberations to slash enrollment by 40,000, or almost ten percent. “It’s become this game of chicken, where the university says, ‘Well if you’re not going to give us money, we can’t take people,’” said Nancy Shulock, director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy at Sacramento State University. Responded Reed: “What am I going to do? If I have half a billion dollars

less, what am I going to do? We have to ensure that the degree still means something.”

Whatever the degree means, it certainly costs a lot more than it used to.

On November 19, in a UCLA meeting room ringed by helmeted police in riot gear with tasers, surrounded by a crowd of angry students chanting, “Shame on you,” and singing “We Shall Overcome,” the University of California Board of Regents met. They voted 20-1 to approve a 32 percent increase in the cost of attending a UC school, which will rise by \$2,500 per student, to about \$10,300, not including room and board and other fees—more, for the first time, than top public universities in New York, Illinois, Michigan and Virginia. Students will see a mid-year increase of 15 percent starting in January.

The regents said they had no choice,

and that the blame belonged with the legislature. Fourteen of the protesters at UCLA, 12 of them students, were arrested. In the following days, protests erupted at Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz (where students occupied campus buildings), and at UC Davis. Scores of people were arrested at Berkeley and Davis. Protesters at Santa Cruz relinquished an administration

building after a tense standoff with police officers in riot gear.

On the same day that the UC Regents voted, Cal State’s Board of Trustees approved an \$884 million budget request to the legislature, which would restore money previously cut and add new funding. However, it will not be known how likely this is until the governor releases his next budget in January.

In the meantime, the highly publicized reductions in enrollment at California’s colleges and universities have driven record numbers of panicked high school seniors to apply early for admission to the public universities. More than 25,000 submitted applications on the first day of the admission period, and 66,000 in the first week, double the usual number, heeding warnings that at least 12 campuses would slam the doors shut on November 30—not only on prospective freshmen, but also on transfer students from the community colleges.

Even the University of California has said that it is overenrolled by 11,000 students and will likely take fewer applicants next fall. At Berkeley, there is a conscious effort to accept fewer state residents, in deference to out-of-state students whose considerably higher fees generate an extra \$23,000 apiece. Berkeley wants its proportion of out-of-state students to nearly double, from 12 percent to 23 percent. “We’re rationing education here,” one insider grumbled.

As in many states, which have steadily reduced their share of the cost of public higher education, the calamity in California started well before this academic year. The share of the battered state budget that goes to higher education has been cut nearly in half, from almost 20 percent in the 1980s to ten percent today, while the proportion spent on prisons has tripled, from three percent to nine percent.

California has climbed to fourth among the 50 states in payments for prisons as a percentage of personal income, while plummeting to 29th by the same measure in spending on education.

Combined with previous rounds of cuts, California’s universities have lost two-thirds of their state allocations, when adjusted for inflation, since the early 1990s. That means they now get \$7,730 from the state per student, compared to an inflation-adjusted \$15,860 in 1990, University of California President Mark Yudof has said.

In a state whose celebrated 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education guaranteed tuition-free access, California’s public universities have responded by increasing educational fees (in an Orwellian twist, it’s still not called tuition) by 127 percent since 2001 at the University of California, even before November’s increase, and by 161 percent at Cal State—11 percent and 13 percent per year, respectively. That’s far above any increase in inflation or household income.

Meanwhile, financial aid to students provided under the Cal Grant program was mostly shielded from the budget cuts, which is a relief to students, after Governor Schwarzenegger in the spring proposed eliminating the program entirely. With the increased fees and stagnant economy, there appears to be plenty of need: The number of recipients of Cal Grants has exploded by 68 percent since 2000, from 179,860 to 301,972.

“We’re losing sight of what a public higher education means—something that’s affordable and accessible to everyone,” said Utsav Gupta, student body president and a neuroscience major at UC San Diego. “Students are looking at the system and

Axel Koster for CrossTalk



“We’re losing sight of what a public higher education means—something that’s affordable and accessible to everyone,” says Utsav Gupta, student body president at UC San Diego.

wondering, why are we taking the brunt of this?”

The state has already slipped dramatically in the proportion of its population with a bachelor's degree, falling from first among the 15 largest states in 1981 to 14th. It is now 49th in the share of its population over the age of 24 that has graduated from even high school, and 46th in the proportion of 19-year-olds enrolled in college. Even in better times, only about 106,000 of those nearly three million community college students were managing to successfully transfer to a UC or Cal State school, or even to private or out-of-state universities.

More than 300 University of California faculty have warned Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—himself the product of a California community college—that the latest cuts will imperil not only the universities' prestige, but also the state's economy. Public universities produce 75 percent of all the bachelor's degrees in California. And if current trends continue, according to the Public Policy Institute of California, the increasingly knowledge-based economy will face a shortfall of a million educated workers by 2025. “I just don't think that people understand how that affects everybody—the tax base, the crime rate, everything,” said Shulock.

And there is little sign that things will turn around. Another \$7 billion state budget shortfall is projected for next year. Other areas, including primary education, have been promised first dibs on the money when revenues pick up again. In an October memo to campus business administrators, Cal State's chief financial officer wrote ominously that “tinkering with reductions at the margins will be insufficient. It will be necessary to change radically business processes and service delivery systems so that personnel costs and other expenditures can be reduced significantly on an ongoing basis.” Yet rather than banding together to defend the universities, higher education interests are feuding among themselves.

United Professional and Technical Employees, which represents 10,000 healthcare, research and technical staff at UC, took out ads criticizing bonuses and perks paid to administrators under President Mark Yudof. “Whose university,” the ads read—“yours or Yudof's?” The system responded that some administrators, mainly at medical centers, got more pay for taking on management responsibilities, but that most have accepted pay cuts. So has Yudof, though he still makes \$540,000 and has a home provided for him in Oakland that costs the university system \$10,000 a month.

In the middle of the budget crisis, the University of California paid \$125,000 to an administrator to move 70 miles from Santa Cruz to Oakland, then hired new chancellors at UC Davis and UC San Francisco at salaries of \$400,000 and \$450,000, respectively, about ten percent more than their predecessors had earned, along with free housing and, for the UC San Francisco chief, a \$100,000 relocation allowance. This so angered some legislators that they proposed an amendment to the state constitution that would put the system under their direct authority. Although it editorialized against the bill, the *Los Angeles Times* blasted the universities for what it called their “too-cool-for-accountability” attitude.

The attacks have not subsided. Yudof is particularly unpopular, especially after telling the *New York Times* that “the shine is off” public higher education. The chairs representing all ten University of California academic senates responded

with a letter declaring themselves “emphatically not ready to concede the defeat of California's exceptional experiment... If the legislators and the public have come to see investment in an educated citizenry as anything less than the central pillar of social and economic growth, then we educators must redouble our efforts to make the case.”

Students are not exactly thrilled with Yudof either. In a speech before the regents, he defended huge fee hikes by saying that, if more courses had to be canceled because of a lack of money, it would take students longer to graduate. “So raising tuition may, in fact, ultimately save students money.” On the day of the UC San Diego 5K, the student newspaper there and at the other University of California campuses published an open letter from Yudof (the UC San Diego editors gave it the headline, “A Few Desperate Words from Your President”), ending with the line: “Anybody game for a march on Sacramento?” Upstairs in the student government office, Gupta is frustrated by what he calls a lack of advocacy from the president's office. “We'd like to see more from the top down, but we aren't seeing anything, so we're working from the bottom up,” he said.

Administrators concede that they could do a better job of forming alliances. “The real dramatic decline in the budget happened very late in the budget year,” said Nathan Brostrom, interim executive vice president for the University of California system. “That precipitated a lot of things that are really jarring and unsettling. A lot of what we've seen this fall will be ultimately constructive, but I think it was people reacting to these dramatic events.”

Cal State's Reed has also been a target. In a vote taken by that system's faculty union, 79 percent expressed no confidence in him, and signs reading “Remove Reed” popped up in a protest at Cal State Fullerton. The central administration functions of Cal State cost \$75.1 million a year, more than the budgets of three of its campuses and almost as much as a fourth. “Does the chancellor need a whole bloody building to do what he does?” asked Taiz, the faculty union head. “Do we need all of these associate vice presidents? I don't begrudge people a decent wage, but I think they get a little carried away with themselves. These are public institutions. At the very least, if you're making that much money, with the free house and the free car, you should go out and find us a way to get more money.”

Reed said the blame game starts in Sacramento, where the politicians who cut state financial support are fully aware that the universities can, and likely will, pass the burden on to students. “Legislators know that,” he said. “They're going to



Nathan Brostrom, interim executive vice president for the University of California system, says that the dramatic decline in the budget has been “really jarring and unsettling.”

The share of the state budget that goes to higher education has been cut nearly in half since the 1980s, while the proportion spent on prisons has tripled.

In spite of increased demand, California's universities and colleges are intentionally shrinking their enrollments.

criticize me and Mark (Yudof) and other leaders for raising tuition, but they know we can do this. So there is the shift to fund higher education, from a public good that government needs to pay for, to a private good that individuals will have to pay for themselves.”

As for the labor unions, Reed thinks they have a limited perspective. “They’re very insular,” he said. “In California the labor unions seem to think there’s a golden goose that’s going to fly over Sacramento and drop money. Guess what? There isn’t any money in Sacramento.” Taiz disagrees. “California is still the eighth largest economy in the world,” she said. “It’s not true that there’s no money here. It’s true that people don’t want to tax the money that is here.”

Some faculty also have attacked the ill-timed expansion of the UC system with the addition of a new campus in Merced in 2005, a time when resources already were becoming thinly stretched. In a letter to Yudof, 23 department chairs at UC San Diego called for the Merced campus to be closed. The system, they said, should “drop the pretence that all campuses are equal, and argue for a selective reallocation of funds to preserve excellence, not the current disastrous blunderbuss policy of even, across-the-board cuts.”

New construction, which continues at the universities, also is a lightning rod for anger in a time of budget cuts. Faculty have a saying—“The cement never dries at a UC campus”—and, in fact, construction cranes and hardhats seem ubiquitous. UC Berkeley alone is in the midst of a \$760 million building boom, including \$430 million on a new office, training and locker-room complex for athletics, and renovations to the football stadium.

But buildings don’t come out of operating funds, said Brostrom, even as he prepares to defend the football renovations before the academic senate. Many of the projects predate the economic downturn. And it’s a good time to build; bids are coming in at 20 to 30 percent below budget. Still, Brostrom said, “I can understand the frustration of faculty who are not only not getting raises, but getting furloughs, and still seeing buildings going up.”

That’s not the only spending that has drawn public ire. So has the handling of donations from foundations that now account for \$1.34 billion a year, or 20 percent, of the Cal State budget. Legislators passed a measure making the foundations more transparent and accountable, but Schwarzenegger vetoed that, too.

Reed said he is not reluctant to impose reforms, even radical ones. For starters, he would like to see an end to the 12th grade. “That’s the biggest waste in education,” he said. “Those resources could be so much more effectively used.” Reed also likes the idea of reducing the number of credits—and, as a result, the time—it takes to get a degree. “We’ve got to figure out how to open ourselves to change. You’ve got to push down, and you’ve got to pull up. We’ve got to provide incentives to have faculty, students and others come up with ideas for doing things differently.”

Inviting inevitable ridicule, UC Berkeley hired a private consulting firm to sniff out administrative efficiencies, for \$3 million. “We took some brickbats,” said Brostrom, who also serves as vice chancellor for administration at UC Berkeley. But

he said there is the potential for saving as much as \$75 million.

In addition to finding savings, there are efforts being made to find more cash. A coalition of students proposed a one percent tax on residents who make \$1 million or more a year, using the proceeds to freeze university fees for five years. Predictably in tax-averse California, it failed. Now they have joined with the faculty unions and some legislative allies to call for a 9.9 percent tax on oil drilled from under California—the only oil-producing state that does not have such a tax—to raise \$1 billion for higher education.

State officials have been pushing for the feds to step in, beyond the \$26 billion in stimulus money for all purposes (including \$4.35 billion for all levels of education), which the state is due for last year, this year and next. Yudof, in a policy paper, called for more federal support for public higher education.

Reed said Title I, under which Washington helps underwrite public elementary and secondary schools that serve low-income students, ought to be extended to the universities. “If Title I was such a great idea in equalizing opportunity for education, why does the federal government quit supporting the added cost of educating those students at the 12th grade? It doesn’t make sense to not guarantee a successful outcome,” he said.

Even if that succeeds, though, the budget crisis has exposed a lack of coordination among California’s massive higher education systems. “In general, across policy areas, California has a weak culture for planning,” Shulock said. “We don’t have strategic plans, we don’t do any kind of performance budgeting, we don’t do long-term planning. It’s just been part of the California culture, which I think can be attributed to its size and lack of unity.”

And students continue to be shut out. “The people who drop out are the newcomers, the immigrants, the first in their families to go to college,” Shulock said. “They don’t have the flexibility in work hours or the car to get to another community college across town. They don’t know that if they sit in the class long enough the professor will just let them in.”

Reed said that “students who are less prepared and less knowledgeable about what the requirements are to get into college,” will be left behind. The 20,000-plus students who were once accepted, even though they fell short of admissions standards, will not be anymore.

“When people start to be denied—and denied access for their children—they’re going to get mad as hell,” Reed said. “That’s a constituency that’s going to wake up.”

Back at the road race, UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox said the unfortunate prospect is that America’s public universities “will slip into mediocrity. Everywhere around the world, when people want the very best in higher education, they come to the United States. Anything that impugns that is to the detriment of everybody, not just in the United States, but around the world.”

Then she mounted the podium and blew an air horn to start the race. ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Overcrowded and Underfunded

New York's public university systems, and beleaguered students, are an extreme example of national trends

By Jon Marcus

NEW YORK

JUST UPTOWN from the epicenter of the world's economic crisis, Borough of Manhattan Community College is a symbol of how the financial cataclysm that began a few blocks away on Wall Street has battered public higher education in America.

It's crowded. Very, very crowded. Every seat is taken in every classroom you can see. Some of those seats are in the aisles. There are lines outside the computer labs. Lines snake through the food court. There are particularly long lines at the financial-aid office.

With a central campus built to handle 8,000 students, Borough of Manhattan is straining to contain some 21,700, part of a 12 percent enrollment increase at the six community colleges of the City University of New York and an eight percent jump at CUNY systemwide, including in its 11 senior colleges. Enrollment at CUNY's upstate counterpart, the 64-campus State University of New York, hit an unprecedented 439,523 this fall. At CUNY, there are more than 259,000 students, surpassing the previous record set in 1974, when it was free.

And free, it isn't. Already the seventh highest in the nation, New York's community college tuition rose again this year to help fill ever-worsening multibillion-dollar state revenue shortfalls that also have resulted from the deep recession. Tuition at the four-year SUNY schools spiked by double digits. More price hikes are likely. This at a time when nearly two

Even as demand soars, the state allocations for CUNY and SUNY budgets have plummeted by more than \$400 million. Per-student funding has declined for four straight years.

thirds of CUNY's community college students come from families earning less than \$30,000 a year. Many are so poor there's a program to help them register for food stamps. One city council member said the tuition increase would force at least one in five to drop out. But there are plenty more waiting to take their places. Helping fuel the enrollment surge at CUNY and SUNY has been a record number of applicants from outside the state—applicants, officials say, who have given up on even more expensive private universities, and for whom a public university education is still a comparative bargain. Good thing, too, since the public universities are taking on so

many students largely because they need the money from tuition that each student brings in. Plus, although the subsidy is dropping, CUNY and SUNY still get \$2,675 from the state for every full-time equivalent community college student they sign up. Like public universities in many states, they are increasing both enrollment and tuition to compensate for falling state support.

What's happening in public higher education in New York, whose dual public university systems are the nation's second and third largest (after the California State University system), is an extreme example of what's happening to public higher education all over America. Public universities are among the first to be cut when

government revenues get tight, making state allocations and tuition unpredictable and inconsistent, and shutting out poor and, increasingly, middle-class students who don't meet income cutoffs for financial aid.

New York tends not to raise tuition when revenues are steady, because that would trigger a dog-chasing-its-tail increase in the cost of its self-adjusting state financial aid program. But when times get tough, tuition rises sharply anyway—28 percent in 1995, another 28 percent in 2003, yet another 15 percent this year. Funding for public higher education in New York “is like a drunken sailor lurching from lamppost to lamppost,” one insider said. “The state waits till things get really bad. Then, when no one can afford it, it raises the price.”

There are other ways that problems in New York mirror those in other states—although, as with so many things, what happens in New York seems that much more dramatic. At a time of dwindling resources, some SUNY campuses are chafing to expand and add attention-grabbing research, while CUNY plans a research center that faculty say will shortchange students in the name of institutional prestige.

Campuses are so overloaded that there aren't enough seats in required courses, meaning getting a degree takes longer—costing students, and the state, still more. “That's the last thing hard-pressed New York families need right now—families who



New York's tuition increases are nothing less than a tax on students, critics say. “We call it the SUNY tax,” says Maria Davila, a 21-year-old senior at SUNY New Paltz.

Nathaniel Brooks, Black Star, for CrossTalk



“We need to do a better job of educating people,” says Phillip Smith, president of the SUNY faculty union. Campuses are so overcrowded that there aren’t enough seats in required courses.

planned financially for four years of college for their kids, not five,” said Phillip Smith, president of United University Professions, the SUNY faculty union, and himself the parent of a SUNY student. Only 30 percent of CUNY community college students earn a degree or transfer within three years, although that is better than the dismal national average of 25.7 percent.

Even as demand soars, the state allocations for CUNY and SUNY budgets have plummeted by more than \$400 million. Per-student funding has declined for four straight years. When New York’s \$1.2 billion share of federal stimulus money for education arrived, all but a meager \$35.4 million of it was given to schools that teach kindergarten through grade 12, thanks to a complicated education funding

formula imposed on the state by the courts. And of every dollar collected from the double-digit increases in tuition, 90 cents went not to the universities, but to plug holes in the state’s general fund, doing little to help accommodate the spiraling demand for higher education. Even that was a compromise pushed by an embattled governor past a General Assembly that hoped to dodge the blame for inevitable cuts and cost increases in a state where, by spring 2009, revenues were down an almost inconceivable 36 percent from the previous year. They could have taken all the proceeds from tuition if they’d wanted to—and, in the past, they have.

New York’s tuition increases are nothing less than a tax on students, critics say. “We call it the SUNY tax,” said Maria Davila, a 21-year-old senior majoring in political science at SUNY New Paltz, a crowded maze of chain-link fences circling construction sites, where dorm rooms built for two are now housing three students apiece, after 200 more freshmen than expected showed up last fall.

Almost none of the money actually goes to higher education. “Forget the millionaires,” editorialized the *New York Daily News*. “The people who have been sucker-punched the hardest under New York’s bloated, irresponsible budget are the families whose children are enrolled in the state universities.” And while the cost of

attending CUNY and SUNY might be higher, what students get for their money are courses that are harder to get into, cuts in programs, and services that have vanished or are thinly stretched under the weight of surging enrollment. CUNY has half as many faculty as it did in the 1970s, the last time enrollment was this high. SUNY has cut staff, imposed hiring

freezes, and increased its reliance on adjuncts.

“Classes are packed. You’re shut out. You have to wait up at night and pray for somebody to drop,” said Jermaine Morris, 23, a student at Borough of Manhattan Community College who has been working for three and a half years toward an associate’s degree that should have taken two. “I was supposed to graduate last semester, but couldn’t get the classes I needed.” Morris hopes to eventually transfer to a CUNY senior college to get a degree in civil engineering, but he started at the community college because it was comparatively cheaper. So much cheaper that, while Morris can’t wait to get out, some students say they plan to stick around even after getting their associate’s degrees, in order to pile up more transfer credits at community college rates, only worsening the crowding.

The competition is getting tougher, too. Last year, as a joke, someone at private New York University posted a phony flyer suggesting students transfer to CUNY to save money. It’s no longer a joke. The number of applicants to CUNY from the New York City suburbs jumped by nearly 20 percent this year, and from outside New York State by 12 percent, evidence that families are now picking “financial safety schools”—more often than not, public universities—based not on their children’s likelihood of getting in, but on their ability to pay.

SUNY saw a 20 percent jump this year in applicants from out of state. Officials speculate that these are students who might once have gone to Ithaca or Fordham, but whose families can’t swing private university tuition. SAT scores and high school grade point averages of entering students rose significantly this fall. At SUNY Stony Brook, the average SAT score of the middle 50 percent of applicants was 20 percent higher this year than last. At New Paltz, near the storied town of Woodstock, the entering grade point average has climbed from 85 to 92, and the average SAT score from 1100 to 1160 in the past decade. “We used to be an artsy, hippie school, but now it’s all really smart, collegiate, stuffy people who are majoring in economics,” Davila said. “The people who are gone are the ones who didn’t get very good grades in high school and couldn’t afford to hire SAT tutors.”

It’s not just Stony Brook and New Paltz. SUNY campuses are “getting smarter kids, and kids with more means,” said Michael Trunzo, the system’s vice chancellor for government relations. “It’s a pocketbook issue.” They are threatening to squeeze out others for whom public universities like CUNY and SUNY, with their legacies of serving ethnic and racial minorities and urban and rural families, were set up to serve.

“The schools are pleased that they’ve been able to—quote, unquote—raise standards,” said Deborah Glick, a graduate of CUNY’s Queens College who chairs the General Assembly’s higher education committee. “But who gets left out are people who are more marginal, those who have had some additional struggles. Then they raise tuition. For some students, a few hundred dollars is the difference between making it and not making it.” Added Smith, “We’re seeing a state that is not taking responsibility for what it created.”

In fact, even before the most recent cuts, state aid per student to SUNY fell by five percent, and to CUNY by 14 percent, when adjusted for inflation, according to the independent Fiscal Policy Institute. Since 1991, the proportion of the SUNY budget underwritten by the state has fallen

Campuses are so overloaded that there aren’t enough seats in required courses, meaning getting a degree takes longer—costing students, and the state, still more.

New York's community college tuition rose again this year to help fill ever-worsening multibillion-dollar state revenue shortfalls that have resulted from the deep recession.

from more than 42 percent to less than 33 percent. "That's not a smart economic strategy, and it's not good stewardship of two of the country's great systems of public higher education," said David Kallick, a senior fellow at the institute.

Then again, SUNY, for its part, had no official

stewardship at all for two years. That's how long it went without a chancellor before the appointment of Nancy Zimpher, former president of the University of Cincinnati, who took office on June 1. And it shows the importance to public higher education of something else: leadership. During its time without it, SUNY suffered \$200 million in state cuts. The chaos was exacerbated by the resignation of Governor Eliot Spitzer, a higher education booster, after revelations that he had patronized prostitutes.

Spitzer was not around to implement the recommendations of a commission on higher education he had named, the first in New York in more than 30 years, that called for 2,000 new full-time faculty and billions of dollars in new investment. He wasn't there to follow through on his plan to establish a \$4 billion endowment fund for CUNY and SUNY, either. (He had held a conference call with university administrators about the proposal just a day before the scandal broke.)

Spitzer's successor, David Paterson, by contrast, has been too busy reacting to the budget crisis to advocate for higher education, or much of anything else.

Zimpher started her job with a tour of all 64 SUNY campuses—7,507 miles over 95 days, by land, sea and air—dropping hints here and there about her plans. She said she favored offering four-year degrees at SUNY's community colleges, for instance. But hired in part on the basis of her reputation for strengthening marquee research at the University of Cincinnati, she also said the more immediate priority was to teach and to conduct the kind of research that could translate into commerce. "Academics see themselves as citizens of the world," Zimpher told one campus audience. "They seek national and international recognition for their work. But the greatest pathway to national and international recognition is to serve your state."

It was an important declaration. Like many public universities around the country, several SUNY schools are anxious to expand the research they conduct, even at a time when there is almost no money to do it, and when other states have added programs and entire campuses they now find they can not afford. The most ambitious is the University of Buffalo (wary of the SUNY brand after years of underfunding for the system, it, like Binghamton and other campuses, prefers to drop the "SUNY" from its name), which has proposed adding 10,000 students and 2,300 staff in a quest to become a

nationally ranked research university by 2020. A bill introduced by its legislative delegation would have given Buffalo the right to pay for this by raising its tuition independently of the other SUNY campuses, which all now charge the same amount. The idea was met immediately with demands from the SUNY universities in Albany, Binghamton and Stony Brook that they be allowed to do so too.

During her visit to Stony Brook, Zimpher said that was okay by her. The research universities, after all, now have to get by on the same tuition as smaller teaching campuses. But in an interview back at her desk in Albany, the chancellor cautioned that the desire to do research "sometimes blurs the recognition that public universities were created to serve their communities. We have to reexamine the traditional definition of our mission," she said. "The investment in high-end research provides the jobs for which we are producing graduates. It's not an either-or." The best way for SUNY to win global recognition, Zimpher said, is by helping New York rebound from the recession.

That is the very practical message New York's higher education interest groups hope will bring back their support. Highly educated and well supplied with universities of all types, New York is nonetheless a distant 39th among the states in spending on public higher education. "I don't know why there isn't more voice to the constituents of higher education," Zimpher said. "I know it's there. How could you have half a million students (at SUNY), 2.4 million alumni and all their families, and not have advocacy for public higher education?" The practical answer, she acknowledged, is competition for state funding with such mandated services as health and prisons.

But universities create jobs and workers that can help New York solve the very budget problems that got it into this mess. "This is a time to invest, oddly enough," Zimpher said. "The only way we're going to grow our way out of this situation is to invest in higher education. No other business in the world would starve the growth sector in the process of feeding these mandates."

On this point, the faculty union brass agrees. The union's new motto: "SUNY is the Solution." It is pushing members to drag business and political leaders onto their campuses and show them, close up, what they are doing. "We can no longer live in the world we used to. We need to do a better job of educating people," Smith said in his office outside Albany. In the parking lot, a handwritten sign warned of hornets' nests



Robert Hooman, Black Star, for CrossTalk

"For some students, a few hundred dollars is the difference between making it and not making it," says Deborah Glick, a graduate of CUNY's Queens College who chairs the New York General Assembly's higher education committee.



The best way for SUNY to win global recognition, says Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, is to help New York rebound from the recession. “The only way we’re going to grow our way out of this situation is to invest in higher education.”

on a day the headline in the *Albany Times-Union* read, equally ominously, “Paterson Warns of More Red Ink.” Smith acknowledges some pushback. “Our faculty tend to be rather aloof and don’t really view themselves as an important cog in the economic engine,” he said. “We’ve found a certain resistance.”

Faculty at CUNY are even involving themselves in fundraising, which the system has promised the governor and legislature it will step up, under what it calls the CUNY Compact, a bid for greater and more stable state support. Already, CUNY has raised more than \$1.2 billion toward a goal of \$3 billion by 2015. It claims \$40 million from efficiencies including energy savings and an end to direct-mail advertising. SUNY

has consolidated telephone and electricity contracts and information technology. And both schools practice the kind of collaboration higher education reformers push, by teaming up with Columbia, NYU and other research institutions in the New York Structural Biology Center, collectively underwriting the expensive facilities and faculty required for study in such areas as structural genomics.

But CUNY also plans its own new center to house research in hot, grant-generating fields including photonics, nanotechnology and neuroscience—something not all of its science faculty necessarily support. “One of the concerns the science faculty has voiced to me is that the resources will follow that center, and the already crowded and cramped labs in a college campus in, let’s say, Queens, that those conditions will become even worse as the resources get diverted,” said Barbara Bowen, head of the CUNY faculty union. Jay Hershenson, CUNY’s senior vice chancellor for university relations, responded, “The quality of a university, at the end of the day, is a function of the quality of its faculty. And you must have excellent opportunities for research. A great university must have great research.”

What it also must have, most involved agree, is a more rational, regular system of tuition increases and budgets. “New York allocates funds for construction over a five-year period. Why can’t we do that with tuition?” Zimpher asked. One proposal would tie future increases to the higher education price index. Another would let schools make “modest” and “predictable” annual tuition increases on their own—something that now requires legislative action—and charge tuition that could vary by program and by campus. CUNY, too, seeks more predictable tuition hikes, in part because it is assumed that this is something New York’s beleaguered students would support.

But upstate at Hudson Valley Community College, which is part of the SUNY system, that does not entirely appear to be the case. At this campus in the northwestern New York town of Troy, a onetime steel town a fifth of whose residents live below the poverty line, the crowding manifests itself outside the walls, where there is a sea of cars. Cars spill over from the parking lots, jump curbs, block sidewalks, and sprawl across the grass.

Just days earlier, President Barack Obama spoke at this school about his goal of restoring the country to first in the world in the proportion of college graduates by 2020.

On the walls here, too, among the notices about the pep band and the Frisbee club, are posters about how to apply for food stamps. There’s a student-run food bank. In his office, where a picture of Obama hangs prominently, Clifton Dixon, president of the student government, said that times are tough. “We’re proud to have record enrollment, but if they continue to raise tuition, a lot of people won’t be able to afford it,” said Dixon, who returned to college 13 years after dropping out of high school and hopes to go to law school. “I’ve never heard any student, nor do I think I ever will, say, ‘Please raise my tuition.’ You can’t pay more of what you don’t have.”

Taking time out from preparing for a protest against the budget cuts, CUNY’s Barbara Bowen pondered where the students who can’t afford the public universities—or can’t get in—have gone. Many, she said, are opting for the private, for-profit programs, and are requiring high-priced loans of the type that advertise on subways, buses and late-night TV. “Or they are simply not going to college at all,” she speculated. “They have had obstacles placed in their path since day one, and once further obstacles were put in their path, they just couldn’t do it.”

Those who do go to college, said Bowen, “have the constant experience of having to fight to get their education. It takes a heroic effort when you have to line up for everything, squeeze into a class, hope you can get time with your professor. That’s a betrayal of students who have been led to believe that college is an opportunity for them. The experience of college should not be every day having to fight for a seat in class.” ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Like public universities in many states, CUNY and SUNY are increasing both enrollment and tuition to compensate for falling state support.

Diminishing State Support

Pennsylvania reduces state aid amid relentless tuition hikes and record enrollments

By Kay Mills

UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

THE NATIONAL RECESSION decreased state revenues around the country, but colleges and universities in Pennsylvania faced added drama this fall: The governor and legislators spent more than three months wrestling with closing a \$3.2 billion deficit, so educators had to start the school year without knowing how much the state would be contributing to their operations. Finally, on October 9, Governor Ed Rendell signed a \$27.8 billion budget, which includes \$2.6 billion in federal stimulus money. Even with that federal money included, the state will spend \$524 million less this year than last.

Exasperated by the negotiations at one point, Joe Forrester, president of the Community College of Beaver County, said that “this is like watching a dog on roller skates. You don’t know where it’s going, but no matter where it goes, the outcome isn’t going to be good.”

The budget outcome underscores a trend that President Graham Spanier of Penn State has been talking about for at least five years, that is, “the privatization of American public higher education.” And Angelo Armenti Jr., president of California University of Pennsylvania, said his school is being “privatized without a plan.” Pennsylvania’s community colleges are also caught in the state’s financial squeeze, with less opportunity for raising private funds. For example, Forrester, immediate past president of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, has seen his own school’s state support diminish from 33 percent of its budget to 28 percent in the last five years.

Nationally, only seven states allocated a lower percentage of their tax revenues and lottery profits to higher education than Pennsylvania’s 4.3 percent.

Under the final budget, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education’s 14 universities, of which California University is one, are receiving almost \$465.2 million, plus slightly more than \$38.1 million in federal stimulus funds, for a total of \$503.4 million. That compares with a total of \$538.1 million last year. The state’s 14 community colleges share an appropriation of \$214.2 million, plus \$21.5 million

in federal stimulus money, a reduction of 0.21 percent. Both sectors had record enrollments in fall 2009.

More than a month after the legislature enacted the budget, however, Penn State still did not know how much money it



Michael Robinson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Joe Forrester, president of the Community College of Beaver County, likens state budget negotiations to “a dog on roller skates. You don’t know where it’s going, but no matter where it goes, the outcome isn’t going to be good.”

would receive, because its appropriation had not been passed. Penn State’s status as a “state-related institution”—a designation it shares with Temple University, the University of Pittsburgh and Lincoln University—means that its funding is approved separately.

Penn State is not a state-owned university like California or any of the 13 other former teachers’ colleges that now make up the state system, and it does not come under the same gubernatorial control they do on matters of tuition or governance. It seeks state money for its mission to provide services for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania while avoiding some of the constraints under which the state universities operate.

This quasi-independent, quasi-state position figured in Governor Rendell’s decision this year against including Penn State and the other three state-related institutions in Pennsylvania’s application for federal stimulus money, because the state could not limit tuition increases. But Penn State’s friends in Congress rose up, and the Department of Education decided that the governor had to include these schools.

Penn State would be in line to receive \$15.8 million in federal stimulus money as well as \$318 million in state funding for the current fiscal year, the same amount the university ended up with last year after two rescissions from its original \$338 million appropriation. There is also another \$16 million coming from federal stimulus funds for 2008-09. In the meantime, Penn State is covering its costs by spending \$30 million a month from reserves, said Lisa Powers, a university spokeswoman.

Nationally, only seven states allocated a lower percentage of their tax revenues and any lottery profits to higher education



"It's not that we have a goal of being private," says Graham Spanier, president of Penn State. "It's a reality that has evolved."

than Pennsylvania's 4.3 percent, according to a report this year from the State Higher Education Executive Officers organization. The U.S. average was 6.5 percent. The report also showed that between fiscal years 2003 and 2008, Pennsylvania's public higher education appropriation per student (full-time equivalent) fell by 10.8 percent. Per-student appropriations in only three states—Massachusetts, Michigan and Ohio—dropped more.

These figures are set against rising state support for higher education generally, at least until this year. SHEEO reported that total state support for public higher education grew from \$24.4 billion in 1983 to \$89.2 billion by 2008 (in current dollars), accompanying enrollment increases since 1983 from 7.5 million students to 10.5 million. However, the SHEEO report acknowledged that budget conditions this year

"seem less favorable in many states," and the national trend might not be sustained in the coming year.

Jane Wellman, executive director of the nonprofit Delta Cost Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity and Accountability, cited studies showing that while state spending on higher education, per student, may rebound some after downturns, it does not return to the previous heights. While tuition is going up, "the trend line for state appropriations per student is going down," Wellman said. "Students are paying more and getting less."

"It's not that we have a goal of being private," Spanier said, in reference to the trend in state spending. "It's a reality that has

evolved." According to Spanier, when he became president of Penn State 14 years ago, Pennsylvania was providing 20 percent of the university's total annual budget. Now it's down to eight percent. Overall, state support almost doubled from \$162.7 million in 1984-85 to a high point of \$348.7 million in 2007-08, but the university's budget grew five times as big between those years (from \$683.3 million in 1984-85 to \$3.4 billion in 2007-08). This year's operating budget will be \$3.7 to \$3.8 billion.

Penn State's fundraising has risen steadily, from just over \$31 million in 1985, and just under \$83 million in 1995, to \$182.1 million in the last fiscal year. "It used to be that fundraising was important for private universities, but now public universities are just as heavily involved," Spanier said. "In five to six years we may be receiving more money from donors than we receive from the state."

Seeing what was coming in terms of state financing, last fall Spanier announced that there would be no pay raises this

year. "No one in administration, no one on the faculty, no one on the staff would get them," he said. "And the labor union agreed to change its agreement. We did this in order to hold any tuition increase down to a reasonable amount and to avoid significant furloughs." The freeze saved \$30 million.

With the budget situation remaining uncertain this summer, Penn State's trustees enacted two potential tuition plans. One was a "worst-case scenario" that would have raised tuition by 9.8 percent for lower-division Pennsylvania residents at the University Park campus, and by 4.9 percent for those at one of the university's regional campuses. That was based on the governor's June proposal that would have given Penn State \$277.5 million, the same level as in 1997. The other plan, which later took effect, raised tuition by 4.5 percent for state residents at University Park, and by 3.9 percent at the other campuses. Residents this fall are paying \$13,604, up from \$13,014 in 2008.

At California University and other schools in that state system, Pennsylvania residents are paying \$5,554, a 3.7 percent increase over last year.

"It's a really compelling argument that legislators can latch onto—that higher education is one of the few parts of state government that can raise revenue," said Donald Heller, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Penn State. Tuition at Penn State has increased so much that by 2005, it "surpassed the University of Vermont for the first time to become the most expensive public flagship university in the nation," Heller said.

As part of its efforts to save money for the past two decades, Penn State has required all departments except for the library and student aid to turn back one percent of their budgets each year, said Rodney Erickson, executive vice president and provost. "It creates a leanness to the operation."

Penn State has also been working to reduce energy costs, equipping new buildings with sensors that turn off the lights if there is no motion in a room for a certain amount of time, replacing old dormitory windows with those that are more energy efficient, and installing better thermostats. "There are even teams of students who turn off all the lights around the campus that might have been left on a Friday night," Spanier said.

Between 1990 and 2006, Pennsylvania drastically shifted its priorities away from public higher education, said Angelo Armenti, who has been California University's president for 17 years, thus reducing the share of the state budget devoted to public higher education from seven percent to four percent. The state corrections system now receives the same share of the state budget as public higher education.

If there is any state plan for dealing with this reduction in state money, Armenti said, he has seen no sign of it. He concluded that if his school were going to be privatized, "we had better be ready to compete as a private university." State support for California University has dropped from 63 percent of its budget to 37 percent over the last 25 years.

The college-age population normally attracted to a nearby school in southwestern Pennsylvania was shrinking, so Armenti said the school had to attract students from farther away, and therefore needed to beautify its campus. California also set up a public-private partnership to raise \$125 million

Between 1990 and 2006, Pennsylvania reduced the share of the state budget devoted to public higher education from seven percent to four percent.

“It used to be that fundraising was important for private universities, but now public universities are just as heavily involved.”
—Graham Spanier,
president of Penn State

to build new suite-style residence halls to house those students, adding almost 2,300 beds.

Cutting energy costs was another issue. “No one was thinking green then, except for money,” Armenti said. In addition to using better controls to heat buildings classroom by classroom,

California put in geothermal piping to heat its new dormitories. The system for the first three cost \$1 million, but it paid for itself in two and a half years. The same payback occurred for the next three dormitories, so the university is now saving \$800,000 a year in electricity costs.

California boosted its enrollment by 45 percent in the last ten years to 8,519 students (7,478 full-time equivalent) last academic year. Overall, the 14 schools in the state system grew by 18.5 percent in that period, and this fall the system set its eighth straight enrollment record, 116,935 students.

A big reason behind California University’s enrollment increase, Armenti said, is that it got into online learning early. “The economics of Internet education are that when the world is in your catchment area, you can easily fill all of your classes,” he said. Twenty-two percent of California’s student registrations are online.

“We are obviously not going to compete with the giants in the field,” Armenti added, but the school offers niche programs, those with promise in terms of demand and with little competition from other schools. These include sports management, legal studies and exercise science. Global Online also offers certification programs for principals as well as a master of science in nursing administration.

“The investment you have to make in this area is considerable,” Armenti said. That includes \$1 million for high quality service programs on financial aid and customer relations. “You still have to assuage the doubts of the public about this new kind of education,” he added.

“In no way are these correspondence courses,” said John R. Cencich, interim dean of California University’s School of Graduate Studies and Research. “We have video and audio in them, animations, and quality control.” Faculty members are taught how to set up the courses and obtain fast technical help. Cencich said the staff makes sure the courses are user-friendly; content is peer reviewed.

California is also working in emerging fields such as robotics. In cooperation with Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, California has a \$3.4 million grant from the Defense Department to develop public school curricula to help hook students on science through robotics. California also launched its own robotics curriculum this fall, leading toward an associate’s degree in robotics engineering technology, and then a bachelor’s degree in mechatronics (a combination of

mechanical and electronic engineering) technology.

These are not Star Wars or Terminator robots, explained Anthony F. Rodi, director of California University’s National Center for Robotics Engineering Technology Education. “Robotics is used in many ways, such as embedded robotics when you start your car, or medical robotics,” he said. “A surgeon in the United States can operate on a patient in India.” Robotics can also be used to “keep people away from the dull, dangerous, dirty work and repetitive movement that leads to injury.”

Michael F. Amrhein, the center’s assistant director, added that these courses teach a different way of thinking about how tasks are done. The classes teach skill sets, such as presentation and project management, that can be used in different industries.

Like the state universities, community colleges are also seeing enrollment increases this fall, a common occurrence when the economy turns sour. The Community College of Beaver County, for example, had a ten percent credit-hour enrollment increase during the summer session, a trend that continued this fall, giving the school its highest fall enrollment ever.

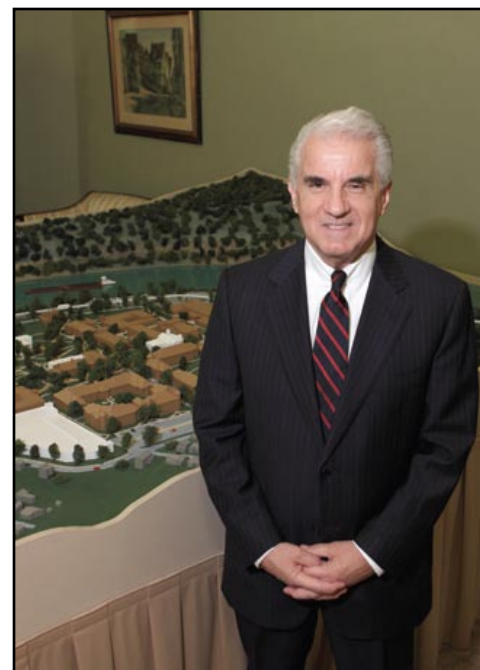
Community colleges have no direct taxing power, so they depend on county government or local school districts for part of their support. And Joe Forrester, the college president, complimented Beaver County commissioners for twice increasing taxes to help support the college, “both times in election years.” Under the act establishing the colleges, they are supposed to receive one-third of their support from the state, one-third from local government, and one-third from tuition.

“In theory, that’s great, but it’s never the reality,” Forrester said. “Fifty percent of our revenue comes from students.” On top of tuition of \$89.50 per credit hour, his students pay a general student fee of \$11 per credit hour, and a technology fee of \$11 per credit hour.

Trying to hold costs down, Forrester said that his school did the standard things like cutting the amount of paper used. “But we also took a hard look at the class schedule” and pledged to reduce it by seven percent.

“We ended up canceling 53 sections,” said Judy Garbinski, provost and vice president for learning and student success. Those cuts affected all departments, with the exception of allied health professions. In making the cuts, Garbinski said, there was an attempt to remain mindful that 80 percent of the college’s 2,400 (full-time equivalent) students work, and that it was necessary to consider the times they could be on campus.

Student aid was affected as



Angelo Armenti Jr., president of California University of Pennsylvania, says his school is being “privatized without a plan.”

Michael Robinson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

well because the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) provided no grants during the budget impasse. Students often use that money for transportation or housing, and they did not get the money they had been counting on at the beginning of the fall semester, Garbinski said. Penn State credited students with the amount they would have received had the budget passed, costing the school \$25 million.

About ten to 12 percent of the Beaver County college's students are defined as academically "at risk," and they need extra services, said Jan Kaminski, dean of academic support services. Many take developmental math and English courses and require tutoring and counseling. "We track them down and entice them with these special programs, but when you get them, you have to give them that added push," Kaminski said. "Just because that door is open doesn't mean it stays open. It won't stay open without those support services."

The state also provides aid to some of its private colleges and universities, some of which existed before any public universities opened, said Don Francis, president of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania. These private universities award 50 percent of the degrees in the state, Francis said. "There is a very robust state grant program" for students at these institutions, he said, because the state considers it healthy to support them. It can contribute less to the overall education at private institutions "because we have more private dollars."

In addition to PHEAA grants for students at private colleges such as Penn, the state provides some support for medical and veterinary education and other specialized programs, as well as institutional assistance grants to reward institutions for enrolling low- and moderate-income students.

Public institutions are not necessarily happy about that state support. "This is a state where everybody gets a slice of the pie," said Joe Forrester. "But this produces inequities, because community colleges enroll 22 percent of all the undergraduates in the state but receive only four percent of PHEAA money."

Penn State's Spanier said that "private education has always been key" in the northeast, pointing out that many American universities began as private, church-related institutions. They were, by and large, the only universities until the Morrill Act of 1862 created land-grant colleges such as Penn State, with the original aim of teaching agriculture and engineering.

"People in the state and in the legislature still have in their heads that there's something special" about these private institutions, Spanier said. In those states

where those schools got started—Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania—there is the lowest level in state support, he added, whereas people in the west and the Great Plains saw education as the key and developed public higher education systems. "I always tell people it's been every governor, every legislature, that's done this. That's just the history here. There's no one person who stuck it to us."

Spanier is concerned that the diminishing state support



William Thomas Cain, Black Star, for Crosstalk

Penn State's requirement that all departments turn back one percent of their budgets each year, "creates a leanness to the operation," said Rodney Erickson, executive vice president and provost.

has affected Penn State's ability to serve the commonwealth. "We are the university that the state has relied on most heavily to provide a broad range of services to the state. The things we do for agriculture, forestry, public safety, economic development—in some other states, the state does it directly. But the state has backed off on supporting these activities. We're at a juncture where we're saying we can't ask our undergraduate students, through their tuition, to pay for these services."

Penn State's Rodney Erickson is concerned about what the drop in state aid and relentless tuition hikes mean for the makeup of the student body. All over the country, "there's a retreat from public higher education," he said. "We have educated large numbers of students who have gone on to successful careers, and now we know the gap between earnings of college graduates and high school graduates is huge. But many of the public view higher education as a private investment," and therefore are willing to put more of the burden on students and their families.

"What will happen eventually as tuition has to rise?" Erickson asked. "Students at flagship public institutions all over the country are going to be coming from families of high-income status, making it difficult to attract a diverse student body. We won't be able to serve as an engine of social change as institutions like Penn State, Michigan State and Illinois have done for decades," he said.

"That aspect really concerns me a lot," Erickson added. "There is so much that we could be doing for the commonwealth," he said. "We want students to have an experience in an institution that's like the world they'll live in." It is an experience he fears they will no longer be having. ♦

Kay Mills is the author of "This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer" and four other books.

State support for California University of Pennsylvania has dropped from 63 percent of its budget to 37 percent over the last 25 years.

UK Adopts “Top-Up” Tuition Fees

British Universities prepare to compete in a more “American” system

Photos by David Levenson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Jon Marcus

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

THERE'S A HUSH over the courtyards of the ancient colleges along the River Cam. Even the tourists speak in whispers. It's examination week for the brainy young scholars who populate this famous university town. But it's something else, too: It's the calm before the storm.

Like every other university in England and Wales, Cambridge is about to undergo a vast change in the way it does business. It's the outcome of a political struggle so contentious it nearly brought down a government, resulting in a plan so laden down with compromises that almost no one seems to like it—including the universities that originally lobbied for it. And while the government insists that all of this will encourage more low-income students to go on to higher education, its many critics expect precisely the opposite outcome.

What accounts for all this drama? Imagine the American system of costly and complex university financing and heavy student debt imposed from scratch on a country where, until six years ago, tuition was completely free.

While the changes don't go into law until two years from this fall, there have already been far-reaching implications. In order to meet printing schedules, universities have to decide by around mid-December what they will charge in tuition. Admissions offices are being flooded with applications from students who otherwise might have taken a year off to travel but are scrambling to enroll before the new arrangement takes effect.

By one year from now, an estimated 100,000 additional students are expected to apply in a deluge that is already being called “the 2005 effect.” One university division reported 900 applicants for 50 places, so many that the overwhelmed

Raising taxes to pay for universities is considered politically unpalatable in a country where people hold mixed feelings toward higher education.

admissions officers admitted to having ultimately chosen the successful candidates at random.

This is one of several ways that, rather than solving problems, the government's controversial plan has made matters

worse. The number of students in UK universities has already nearly doubled from 567,000 to 1.1 million in the last 20 years—but funding per student has fallen by exactly half. Less than one percent of the gross domestic product goes to higher education in the UK, compared to 2.7 percent in the United States. A British university spends \$9,200 annually to educate

an undergraduate, while a top American university spends more than \$36,800.

Yet the number of university-bound students in the UK is still rising. This, along with general population growth, could leave British universities drowning beneath a deluge of 240,000 additional applicants per year before the end of the decade.

To make matters worse, an estimated 30,000 more students from the ten newly admitted European Union nations are expected at these universities, where they now qualify for resident tuition—at a loss to the universities of an estimated \$42.3 million a year.

The schools say they need another \$10 billion to cover annual operating costs. They are also struggling with a nearly \$15 billion backlog of repairs. Salaries, the major faculty union says, have fallen by 40 percent relative to other professions since the 1980s, leaving them far below those paid by universities in the United States. Among the world's top 50 libraries, not a single one is in a British university.

The government's complicated strategy for addressing these problems is colloquially known as “top-up fees.” It will allow universities to charge tuition of up to \$5,520 per year beginning in 2006, for which most students will take out loans that they will be required to repay after graduation—but only once their salaries reach \$27,600. The principal and interest will be deducted from their paychecks at a rate of nine percent on anything they earn above that threshold.

To make this idea more palatable, the government has promised financial aid in the amount of nearly \$5,000 each for low-income students, and has required the universities to add an additional \$520, essentially covering the full cost of tuition (though low-income students still would presumably take out loans to cover personal expenses).

If all universities charge the maximum tuition, they'll collect an extra \$1.8 billion a year. They will then have to subtract a collective \$92 million to pay for required aid to low-income students, leaving about \$1.7 billion more than they



Opposition to the Blair government's tuition plan was intense “because people have always had higher education for free,” said MP Ian Gibson.



Claire Callender, professor of social policy at London South Bank University, thinks the new policy mimics the worst aspects of the U.S. approach to financing higher education.

get now—still far less than is needed. “There’s a big problem, and this does not address it,” said Ben Brinded, president of the Cambridge University Student Union, which has been in the thick of the debate. “Universities are underfunded. There’s a definite consensus that the system needs to change. The problem is, that’s not going to change. Even after this plan takes effect, the universities will still be underfunded.”

Meanwhile, the cost to the government of making all of its many compromises—including paying low-income students’ tuition and subsidizing other students’ loans—will come to about \$2.2 billion, the logic of which is lost on some opposition ministers of Parliament. “In order to raise slightly less than £1 billion a year for universities, the taxpayer is going to have

to spend something like £1.2 billion,” said Conservative education minister Tim Collins, adding (with a British flair for understatement): “That’s an extremely inefficient way of proceeding.”

If there is concern over the effect of this plan on university finances, there’s near rebellion over its impact on students. By one estimate, top-up fees combined with increases in the cost of living could boost average student debt at graduation to more than \$62,000 by 2010. (The government says the average debt will be \$27,600.) Even with financial aid that covers up to

the full price of tuition, many low-income students who are concerned about the debt they might assume in order to pay their living costs may steer clear of higher education.

This comes at a time when it is already the case that only 19 percent of young people from the poorest families go to college in England, compared to 50 percent of the children of the richest. The other group most likely to be affected is the middle-class students who cannot afford to pay the new tuition rate but don’t qualify for grants.

It is a familiar controversy with a different accent. “We are looking with an eye to what has happened in the U.S.,” said Claire Callender, a professor of social

policy at London South Bank University who has studied the potential impact. “That’s not the way we do things in the UK.”

Students in England contributed nothing at all toward the cost of their tuition until 1998, when a fixed fee of about \$1,840

was imposed, payable at the beginning of each academic year. Every university was required by law to charge the same amount to undergraduates, from newly established polytechnic institutes to Oxford and Cambridge. In 1999, government-subsidized “maintenance grants” for room and board were also phased out and replaced entirely with loans.

Callender, whose university is in a low-income district south of the Thames and serves a largely low-income student body, has undertaken the most exhaustive research into student attitudes toward debt and other issues related to the effect of top-up fees. “My personal concerns are very much about the low-income groups. That’s why I’m sitting in a university like this one instead of on the other side of the river,” Callender said, blanketing a conference table with transparencies covered in colored bar graphs.

Among other things, these demonstrate her findings that students from poorer backgrounds have shouldered a larger share of the costs introduced in 1998 than students from wealthier families. But students from all backgrounds have accumulated spiraling debts. Between 1995 and 1998, the percentage of UK students taking out loans rose from 59 to 71. By 2001, 81 percent of students were borrowing to pay their way through school. And the debts of students graduating last year were two and a half times more than those who graduated five years earlier. Low-income students owed an average of about \$17,860, and higher-income students owed about \$12,520.

“Student debt is a class issue,” Callender said. “The policies are regressive, because poor students have to pay relatively more toward their education.”

The government insists that its new policies will actually encourage more students to consider higher education because they’ll no longer have to hand over any money in advance. This, the government says, will also put less financial pressure on these students’ families. The poorest students, the government points out, also will be eligible for aid that adds up to the full cost of tuition. It says that between 35 and 37 percent of students will have their full costs covered. (Today, 45 percent do.)

But Callender says it is less the reality than the perception about costs—and, particularly, debt—that makes low-income students four times less likely to go to college than wealthier students. Of 2,000 prospective students surveyed, those from low social classes said they were more likely to be discouraged from going to college because of their fear of incurring debt. The government’s new policies “are predicated on the accumulation of debt and thus are in danger of deterring the very students at the heart of their widening participation policies,” Callender said.

Like many critics of top-up fees, Callender especially resents the fact that universities will be allowed for the first time to charge different tuitions depending on the perceived value of their programs. Creating a competitive market for higher education risks further dividing people by class and income, critics say. Almost two-thirds of students surveyed said they would have gone to a different university if their first choice charged tuition of \$5,520, and 72 percent of low- and middle-income parents said that, given the choice between two universities with different fees, their children were likely

Imagine the American system of costly and complex university financing and heavy student debt imposed from scratch on a country where, until six years ago, tuition was completely free.

to choose the cheaper. “In an ideal world they should pick the best institution they can get into,” rather than the cheapest, Callender said.

Points like these drove much of the political opposition to top-up fees. Already facing intense criticism of his decision to go to war in Iraq, Prime Minister Tony Blair postponed the vote from early December until January, concerned he didn't have the votes to pass the idea and mindful that, if he lost, he faced the prospect of a full-scale vote of no confidence. When the roll call ended in January and the smoke cleared, many of his own party members had bolted, but Blair still won by the razor-thin margin of 316 to 311.

An alternative measure that would have increased income taxes on the highest-earning Britons also was proposed, but raising taxes to pay for universities was considered politically unpalatable in a country where people hold mixed feelings toward higher education. “There's no doubt about it that in Britain, higher education is not a popular thing,” said Ian Gibson, a Labour MP who opposed Blair. “Most people haven't been in it, and they think it's for the snotty kids. People are more concerned about transport, hospitals and other things. We don't talk about class in this country, but this is about class.”

Even though it was difficult to push through, raising students' share of university costs was less politically risky. Only 39 percent of students voted in the last election, a far smaller proportion than in the population at large (a good thing for Blair, considering that support among students for his Labour Party has dropped to a four-year low). Still, Blair is widely expected by political observers to face a backlash from middle-class parents after the new tuition system takes effect.

On the university side, the lobbying was dominated by the so-called Russell Group of universities, the elite schools including Oxford and Cambridge that had the most to gain from allowing tuition to be set at different levels.

Still, the outcome of the decision was in question until the vote. Seventy-two of his fellow Labour Party ministers voted against Blair, one of the biggest political revolts by members of a prime minister's own party in more than 50 years. As for the intensity of the debate, “I guess it's because people have always had higher education for free in this country,” said Gibson.

The comparison with the American system was a prominent part of the discussion. The *Guardian* newspaper asked critically: “Crudely put, are English universities to go down the American path or not?” Opponents imported Robert Reich, Bill Clinton's labor secretary and now a professor of social and economic policy at Brandeis University, to say that market forces had “corrupted” U.S. higher education and widened social divisions.

Yet by April, when opponents including Gibson offered an amendment that would have allowed universities to increase their tuition to a slightly lower \$4,600 a year, and not to vary it, Blair's margin had widened. That proposal was defeated, 316 to 288, and Gibson was derided publicly as “a bad loser” by fellow Labourite Barry Sheerman.

Gibson's own anger still simmers. In the end, he said, “supporters had to be mollified and mollified and mollified as the proposal seemed headed to defeat. When you look at the money coming in (to the universities), it's hardly anything. Tony Blair made the variable fee thing his job, or else.”

This leads to the next controversy: Now that the precedent has been set, will universities try to raise their tuition beyond the new \$5,520 limit? As another of its concessions to win votes, the government at the last minute promised that the universities would not be allowed to raise their prices without parliamentary approval. Skepticism runs rampant. “It's definitely a helpful gesture by the government, but this is a government that said it wasn't going to introduce top-up fees in the first place,” pointed out Gillian Slater, vice chancellor of Bournemouth University in the south of England, one of a small number of university officials who broke ranks and publicly raised objections to elements of the top-up fee plan.

Slater thinks top universities will soon begin to charge some \$18,400 to \$27,600 a year, making it possible for only the very rich to attend—or the very poor on full scholarships. “Once we concede the principal of variable fees, then the pressure to raise that cap will be very strong indeed,” she said.

Bournemouth, whose tidy campus sits at the edge of a quiet seaside retirement community, expects to charge the full \$5,520 when the new fees take effect. That will add between \$9.2 million and \$11 million to a budget of about \$120 million—a not a particularly substantial increase. And, said Slater, “It is certainly going to cost quite a lot in the administering.”

About 1,300 of Bournemouth's 15,000 students are foreign, a proportion Slater said adds an important measure of diversity in an era of globalization. But non-EU foreign students also pay much higher tuition, something UK universities are already eyeing as they look for more ways to make up their persistent budget shortfalls. About 130 foreign students produce as much revenue as more than 1,300 UK and EU students.

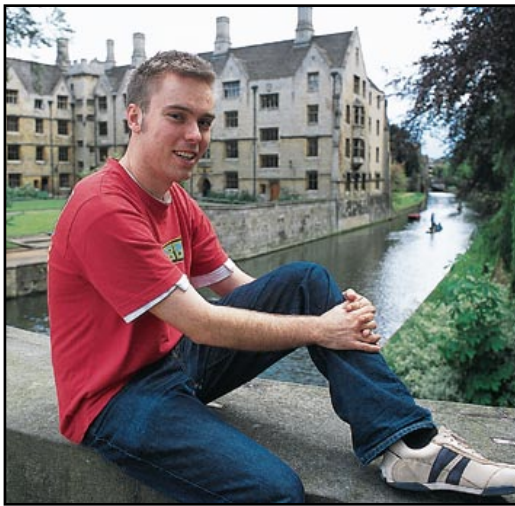
“I'm always wary when vice chancellors start speaking of trying to become global institutions when they're talking about student numbers,” said Ben Brinded, the student president at Cambridge, which has 3,500 foreign students. “It's important that we attract a foreign student population, but what I would be very wary of is a quota.”

Of course, it sounded like a quota when Oxford, in a memo that was leaked to a newspaper, instructed its admissions officers to cut the number of British students accepted by one percent a year over the next five years so it could increase the number of higher-paying foreign students. The number of non-EU students at British universities overall has already grown by nearly 50 percent over the last six years, compared to

British universities will be allowed for the first time to charge different tuitions depending on the perceived value of their programs.



Gillian Slater, vice chancellor of Bournemouth University, fears the new policy will lead to the very rich attending “top universities.”



Ben Brinded, president of the Cambridge University student union, thinks “the universities will still be underfunded” when the new tuition policy takes effect.

a 15 percent increase in the number of British undergraduates.

Like foreign student tuition, the tuition paid by graduate students is also not regulated by the government. Oxford plans to increase its graduate student enrollment by two percent a year, which means that graduate students would outnumber undergraduates there by 2016. University College London has announced that it will increase the proportion of graduate students from 37 percent

to 50 percent and increase the proportion of students from outside the EU from 21 percent to 25 percent. Graduate students already outnumber undergraduates at the London School of Economics by nearly two to one.

The government’s plan to keep an eye on the economic and racial diversity of students is called the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), also known as the regulator. But its role remains vague, drawing still more criticism. After the vote, it was revealed that OFFA would have to share the Bristol headquarters of another higher education organization and borrow its staff. “My reading of the situation is that the universities don’t want it to have power,” said Brinded. “For any regulator to have power, it needs to have teeth.” And as one parliamentary critic of the regulator said, OFFA has “fewer teeth than a Glasgow granny.”

Nor can middle-income families count on help from OFFA, said Slater, the vice chancellor at Bournemouth, where a third of the students come from the middle classes. “I don’t think we’re going to know what that office is going to do. I can’t see it keeping an eye on the children of middle England,” she said with an arched brow. “That’s not fashionable, is it?”

Universities are readying themselves to compete in an open market. Most say they will likely charge the full \$5,520, resisting the impulse to attract students based on price. Some say their alumni, regarding it as a referendum on the value of their degrees, have pressured them to charge the full amount.

Most schools will compete not on the basis of price, but by dangling financial aid and other perks before the most desirable students. One has considered offering free laptop computers and sports club memberships. Others are taking a more subtle approach. “We do have to compete for students now, but we regard the fact that our graduates go out to employment with good salaries as probably the selling point when they’re assessing the value of what they’re getting for their investment,” said Slater.

Now fresh concern is arising that the value of university

degrees may not justify the increased cost to students. Political economists Phillip Brown of Cardiff University and Anthony Hesketh of Lancaster University raised the prospect of a “graduate glut,” contending that the government, in its drive to increase university participation, has overestimated the demand for university-educated workers.

Brown and Hesketh reported that starting salaries for UK university graduates have actually fallen. One newspaper pointed out with irony that millionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson and soccer star David Beckham never went to college—and that, in Britain, plumbers earn more than many university graduates.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and the Council for Industry and Higher Education have already scrambled to publish the first brochure designed to convince students that a university education is worth the money. Called “The Value of Higher Education,” it promises its young readers that going to college will bring personal as well as financial rewards. That is part of a wider philosophical conversation provoked by the ongoing transformation of British higher education.

Behind a black door a few feet down the street from Brinded’s student union office is Cambridge’s Department of Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic, a program that enrolls just 24 students. “What happens to courses like that?” Brinded asks. The top-up fees plan “further the perception that attending university is a financial investment. It is for some people, but not for everyone. A lot of people go to Cambridge and go and work as bankers in the city. But a lot of people go and work for charities. Universities have other roles: They make societies more tolerant, more successful. One of the problems with this bill is it doesn’t recognize that. There’s a debate that has to happen about the merits of the universities and what they’re here for, and we haven’t had that debate.”

Callender, too, resents what she calls the “totally utilitarian approach. Does that mean we should only have departments that teach knowledge that’s useful? It’s deeply sad if that happens, if the only thing I’m doing when I’m sitting here teaching is preparing my students for the labor market.”

She is convinced that, after 2010, the \$5,520 cap will be lifted, opening the way for university tuition to go higher still. “Some universities will go to the wall, and there will be a more differentiated higher education system along class and ethnic lines. Elitism will be reinforced. Both social class and disadvantage will be reinforced by these divisions between institutions and between students.” Slater, too, thinks a small group of universities will begin to charge American-level tuitions, while “a significant number” of other universities will be in trouble. The government has gone on notice that unpopular universities and subjects cannot count on being bailed out by taxpayers.

What will happen now, said MP Ian Gibson, is that “the rich kids will go to the richer universities. It will be like Harvard and Yale. What it’s going to do is bring in a market—like you have in the States.” ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Less than one percent of the gross domestic product goes to higher education in the UK, compared to 2.7 percent in the United States.

Austerity Measures

Students protest as a cash-strapped government lets British universities triple their fees

By Jon Marcus

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

THE MASSIVE TOWN HALL in Albert Square is a shrine to this proud onetime manufacturing city's past industrial and scientific reach.

Built in 1877 of 14 million bricks, the massive Gothic-style structure commemorates a legacy of empire that dates back to the Romans. A statue of the general Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who consolidated Roman rule in Britain, looks down from atop the entrance. Above him still reign Henry III and Elizabeth I. Busts of the physicist James Joule and the chemist John Dalton, a pioneer in the field of atomic theory, flank the lobby. The panels of the vaulted ceiling in the Great Hall represent the principal towns and cities all over the world with which Manchester traded in the 19th century. Over the face of the clock in the 280-foot tower is the inscription: "Teach us to number our days."

Today, however, the ornate Great Hall is a cacophonous stew of shouting, jeering, catcalls, and hand-lettered banners made from old sheets. The anteroom is so crowded with police in neon-colored vests, it's hard to make out the mosaic design of bees on the floor that are the symbol of Manchester industry. Struggling to be heard above the protesters, the Manchester City Council is trying to discuss its annual budget, which will cut \$175 million in spending and 2,000 jobs, scaling back children's services, highway work and garbage collection, and shuttering libraries, leisure centers, even public toilets.

"Liars!" shout the protesters. "Cowards!" "Hypocrites!" "You are ruining lives!"

The drastic measures come in the second year of an austerity campaign meant to reduce a record UK peacetime budget deficit that will hit \$235 billion this year, an amount equivalent to 11 percent of the gross domestic product. That will compound a debt of nearly \$1.5 trillion. By

2016, Britain's debt is expected to surpass \$2 trillion.

An unlikely governing coalition of the Liberal Democratic and Conservative parties has responded by making the deepest cuts in public expenditures since just after World War II, slashing about \$40 billion a year from the budget, freezing pay for public employees earning more than \$34,000 a year, hiking

sales and capital-gains taxes, and increasing the retirement age to bring down an estimated \$1 trillion pension obligation.

They have also moved to shift much more of the burden of the cost of higher education off the cash-strapped government and onto students, letting British universities as much as triple their fees to a maximum of £9,000, or \$14,490, starting in 2012. The financing structure is increasingly similar to the American one (with all the associated

problems, including expected declines in diversity), though in England students will not have to pay the cost until after they graduate, in increments based on their incomes.

If a camel is a horse designed by a committee, the same principle appears to apply to a budget drafted by a coalition. This one has succeeded in angering everyone and pleasing almost no one—including the people who proposed it, who turn out to have little control over whether universities honor provisions meant to help low-income students pay. What's happening in Manchester is only the latest local vestige of the tempest.

These dramatic changes, combined with the other public-service cuts, amount to class warfare, say newly radicalized students, who have taken to the streets by the tens of thousands to demonstrate against the government. They swarmed Conservative Party headquarters, breaking windows and hurling a fire extinguisher from the seventh floor onto police below. (No one was seriously hurt.) They famously surrounded a Rolls-Royce limousine heading to the theater with Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, the resulting photos of whose panicked faces were immediately flashed around the world.

A major university town, Manchester has been a particular hotbed of this dissent, and students are well represented among the chanting demonstrators at the city budget hearing in the Great Hall. They'll go anywhere to make their voices heard against the tripling of fees, in a movement that is as stubborn and persistent as it appears futile.



At the University of Manchester's Roscoe Hall, student protesters from all over the north of England have been rallying in opposition to an increase in university fees.

John Matherson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

An unlikely governing coalition of the Liberal Democratic and Conservative parties has made the deepest cuts in public expenditures since just after World War II.



Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, and now deputy prime minister, says the precarious state of the country's finances forced his party to break its pledge to oppose a university fee increase.

"Please can you be quiet!" the chairman thunders at them, with no apparent effect.

The students will be only slightly affected by the draconian city budget. Their presence here is easier to understand when a council member starts to speak who is from the Liberal Democratic Party, which pledged before the last elections to oppose a university fee increase but broke its word after joining the Conservatives in the governing coalition. Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, and now deputy prime minister, has been beaten by students

in effigy and had to have a cordon of security around him at his own party's spring conference. (Clegg has said his party's reversal was forced by the precarious state of the country's finances, and that the only alternative to raising university fees would have been to increase the already high income tax, which Conservatives staunchly oppose, or cut spending on science and other programs.)

The Liberal Democrats are working to get more money for Manchester, the speaker at the city council meeting insists, but there's only so much they can do.

"It's lucky you're in the government, then, isn't it?" a student in the audience shoots back sarcastically, giving voice to the sense of betrayal that has motivated him and others like him to break windows, throw fire extinguishers, and attack the royals.

What's happening in England is a referendum on the hottest philosophical argument in international higher education, over whether it is a public good—profiting society at large by providing an informed, competent and competitive citizenry—or a private one, benefiting the students who receive it by increasing their potential earnings. Neighboring Ireland, which has kept its university registration fee comparatively low in spite of fiscal pressures arguably even worse than those in the UK, has so far come down on the "public good" side of the debate. American public universities, steadily raising tuition to offset their own budget

cuts, can't seem to decide. But England has, at least from students' point of view. And they're not happy about it.

Higher education, says David Willetts, the minister of education, "is clearly both" a public and a private good. "It's good for the economy as a whole, and it's of course good for social capital," he said. "But there is a very clear economic

gain for individuals in terms of extra lifetime earnings, and given that here is this direct financial benefit, it is reasonable to expect the graduate to pay back the cost of their higher education."

No it isn't, says Charlotte Palmer, a student at Manchester Metropolitan University, whose mother is a social worker likely to lose her job. "Education should be a right. But it's going back to being something only for the privileged," she said. "The money should be taken from bankers and from people who can afford it." Raising university fees, said Palmer, "is indefensible when the bankers are getting six-figure bonuses."

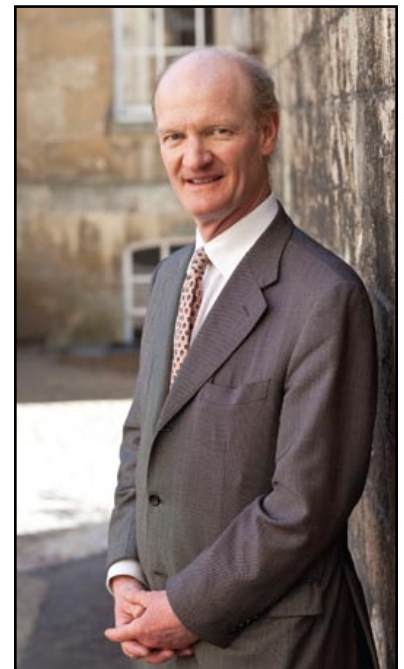
Pierced and tattooed, Palmer was speaking over a cigarette in front of Roscoe Hall at the University of Manchester. Two lecture halls inside the building—named for Sir Henry Roscoe, a 19th-century professor of chemistry who was instrumental in moving what was then called Queens College to this site, and who later served as chancellor of the University of London and a minister of parliament—have been occupied since February by small groups of students from all over the north of England in protest of the fee increase. The conversation was taking place outside because a security guard had thrown out a journalist at the direction of the university's press office, which also later barred a photographer.

"You Are Being Lied To!" blare the posters hanging from the building's walls, next to handwritten schedules and placards. Students man a table draped with more signs and piled high with pamphlets, under the gaze of the hyper-vigilant guards, whose disposition isn't helped by the fact that, as public employees, they have seen their pay frozen and overtime eliminated. (One guard, a student confided, brings them snacks.)

"It's really just a right-wing ideological attack," said Omid Kashan, a first-year Manchester student. "There's no other way to look at it. It's for the rich. It's just another way to keep the working people from getting an education.

There's an argument that you never see the money" until the bill comes after graduation. "But it's hanging over you."

Ideological or not, the imposition of tuition has occurred in England with breathtaking speed. Maximum charges of less than \$15,000 may not seem worth rioting over when U.S. private



David Levenson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

"It is reasonable to expect the graduate to pay back the cost of their higher education," says David Willetts, the minister of education.

An austerity campaign is meant to reduce a record UK peacetime budget deficit that will hit \$235 billion this year—11 percent of the gross domestic product.

universities' tuition, room, and board costs more than three times that much, but students until recently paid nothing at all to go to English universities. It was not until 1998 under Conservative Prime Minister John Major that they were charged a first-ever tuition fee of \$1,610.

In 2003, the Labour government under Tony Blair let universities set their own tuition up to \$4,830—after having promised in the preceding election not to do so—which would be repaid by students after graduation. Universities lobbied hard for this “top-up” fee, which was supposed to cover the amount of money they said they needed on top of their allocations from the government, and almost all of them immediately charged the maximum allowed and kept pushing to increase it again.

If any party is happy with the fees arrangement, it's the universities, for which the revenues will help make up for almost \$4.7 billion in government funding cuts under the austerity measures over the next few years (offset slightly by a one-time \$435 million infusion to make room for 14,000 more students in science, technology, engineering and math in September).

“We know these are difficult decisions, but in an era of public funding cuts, we have to look fairly and squarely at who pays for the cost of higher education,” said Steve Smith, president of the university association Universities UK. “The alternatives would mean universities having to reduce the number of student places or returning to a period of underfunding. Both of these would be hugely damaging to students, universities and the economy.” Less money from the government also means less vulnerability to political shifts, less bureaucratic interference, and more freedom for the public higher education sector, which has long been tightly regulated. “It's potentially quite good news for the universities,” said Bahram Bekhradnia, director of the independent Higher Education Policy Institute. “They're the winners in all of this.”

But the plan has quickly seemed to unravel. The government expected only a small number of the most elite universities to raise their tuition to the maximum \$14,490, but after a brief period of waiting each other out, one after another—Oxford, Cambridge, Exeter, Durham, Surrey, Imperial College London—announced that they would charge the full amount, just as they had done in 2003. When 150 academics at the University of Cambridge petitioned administrators to explain their decision in detail and guarantee financial aid, the appeal was rejected. “There has not been a really serious attempt to see how you might reduce costs in the interests of affordability for the student,” carped Malcolm Gillies, vice chancellor of London Metropolitan University, which, in a rare break in the ranks, became the first university to set tuition lower than the maximum.

Students, after all, keep coming. There are almost 400,000 more students in English universities now than there were before tuition started to be charged. The number of applicants rose nearly 12 percent last year and another 5.1 percent this year.

The government promised it would make sure universities provide enough financial aid to keep low-income students from being shut out, but that assurance seemed to ring hollow when its own watchdog agency, the Office for Fair Access,

reassured the universities that they would not face sanctions except for “serious and willful” violations—and that this did not include failing even to meet their own targets.

That is an important issue because the commission that proposed the higher fees, chaired by former BP chief executive Lord Browne of Madingley, conducted research (which it left out of its report) showing that students and their parents thought tuition over \$9,660 was unreasonable.

“Those from lower socioeconomic groups were more debt averse and concerned that the tuition-fee premium of a more expensive course was not necessarily worth the associated debt,” the survey found. “Some students and parents from across socioeconomic groups thought that variable fees might reinforce a perception that some universities and courses were only for those from higher-income households.” It said most students and their parents thought the government should pay at least half the cost of higher education, believing that the public benefits were equal to the private ones. (In a survey, 222 companies that do business in the UK predicted that higher tuition fees will result in a less qualified and diverse supply of graduates. Some, including KPMG, GlaxoSmithKline and Deloitte, say they will now hire new employees as trainees at 18, pay them a salary, and put them through school, or reimburse the workers' university fees.)

The universities' decisions won't just force students and their families to pay more than they want to spend. They might undo what the government had hoped to save.

The problem is that the government will have to cover the cost of students' tuition until they graduate, find a job, and reach a certain income threshold, after which they will repay the money just as if it were a loan. This has political advantages, since categorizing these payments as loans means they won't be counted toward the deficit, and the cost of any defaults will be the problem of some future government, not this one. But Gareth Thomas, the Labour Party's shadow minister for education, calls it “smoke and mirrors.”

That's because, with more universities than expected charging the maximum tuition, the plan will cost the



David Levenson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Less money from the government, with higher fees, is “potentially quite good news for the universities,” says Bahram Bekhradnia, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute. “They're the winners in all of this.”

What's happening in England is a referendum on the hottest philosophical argument in international higher education, over whether it is a public good or a private one.

government some \$1.3 billion more than anticipated to subsidize students while they are in school, according to the research arm of the House of Commons—almost half of what it hoped to save by cutting direct payments to the universities in the first place. (The Higher Education Policy Institute, which is based in Oxford, also calculates that the government's projections of income-based repayments are based on overly optimistic estimates of what students will earn when they graduate.)

“The one bit that will stay on the main public accounts is the estimate of what won't be repaid, and the estimates vary wildly around how much will be repaid and not repaid,” said Thomas. “As a result, the government are going to have to find extra money, because they're not going to find as many savings as they thought.” One result, he said, is that the cuts in direct appropriations to universities may have to be even deeper. So while students would be paying much, much more tuition, they'd be getting much, much less.

In fact, many universities have already merged or closed departments and reduced services and staffs. “I can't see the reasoning in cutting so much and then raising fees on top of that,” said Jasmine Dunning, who plans to begin at university next year but is already taking part in the Manchester sit-in. “They do need to make up their minds.”

Then there is the vexing issue of how to make European Union students who go to university in England repay their tuition after graduation. Under EU rules they have to be treated (and charged) the same as English students, but when they return home they will be out of UK jurisdiction. EU students already owe the British government \$269 million, up from \$68 million in 2008, even without the tripling in fees, and the number of EU students at English universities continues to rise significantly. “It seems obvious to me, but it seems difficult for the government to admit, that it will be much more difficult to get the loans repaid by students living in other

countries,” said HEPi's Bekhradnia. (Non-EU foreign students, many from the United States, pay tuition of as much as \$41,860, a huge source of income for the universities, which have been fighting a change in visa rules expected to significantly reduce it. Last year one out of every ten dollars earned by English higher-education institutions was paid in by non-EU students from abroad.)

In the end, Bekhradnia said, “if the sums were right, it could give rise to savings in public spending. The reality is that the sums are probably wrong, and the spending will be, if not as great as now, then not very much less. The taxpayer may be better off, but I suspect not, because the government will probably be

paying more than it bargained for.”

The government has warned that if too many universities charge the highest fees, it will retaliate by making deeper cuts in direct allocations, including for research. Settling so widely on the maximum tuition will be “extremely hard for institutions to defend,” Willetts said in a speech at the University of Nottingham. He said some were “rushing to £9,000 without thinking about the impact on students.”



David Levenson, Black Star, for CrossTalk

Gareth Thomas, the Labour Party's shadow minister for education, says the government's plan to recover tuition costs from students after they graduate is “smoke and mirrors.”

Willetts is also trying to foster competition by supporting private universities, including private, for-profits with U.S. ties such as BPP, owned by University of Phoenix parent the Apollo Group.

Even in the worst case, Willetts said, the math does add up. “If you replace £1,000 of teaching grants with £1,000 of fees and loans, of which you get back even £700, it makes sense all around,” compared to a current system under which the government recoups none of its investment in higher education. “And for the universities there's the same amount of resource coming in as there was before. I see it as a win-win.”

Besides, Willetts said, the change will bring a needed structural reform. Where now the government sets enrollment numbers, and funds universities based on them, “In future, the money will go with the students to the universities that the students choose. It is a liberalization,” he said. “We are trying to move toward a much more flexible system at the micro level. The competition will be first of all between existing universities, because we hope it will be easier for universities at the high end to expand their places. But there will indeed be alternative providers and a flexibility in the system to ensure that alternatives will come in. We've already got some, like BPP, but I suspect there will be more.”

Even here, Bekhradnia said, “The rhetoric is that the taxpayers shouldn't fund teaching directly. That suggests that the public benefit of higher education is close to zero. The private benefit is all there is, and the student should be forced to pay.”

Back in Manchester, the city council, to no one's surprise, passes its austerity budget, and the students return to their sit-in. Charlotte Palmer takes another drag on her cigarette. Wait until the higher charges take effect, she says. Then you'll see real protests. ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

At the University of Manchester two lecture halls have been occupied since February by small groups of students in protest of the fee increase.

The Celtic Tiger

Ireland invests heavily in higher education, and benefits mightily

Photos by Peter Matthews, Black Star, for CrossTalk

By Jon Marcus

DUBLIN

IT'S OPEN DAY at Trinity College, the day when the Irish equivalent of high school seniors come to look the place over. The historic quadrangle is swarming with 17- and 18-year-olds, some in their school uniforms—rumpled ties, tousled skirts—others in the logo-laden gear that is the uniform of teenagers worldwide.

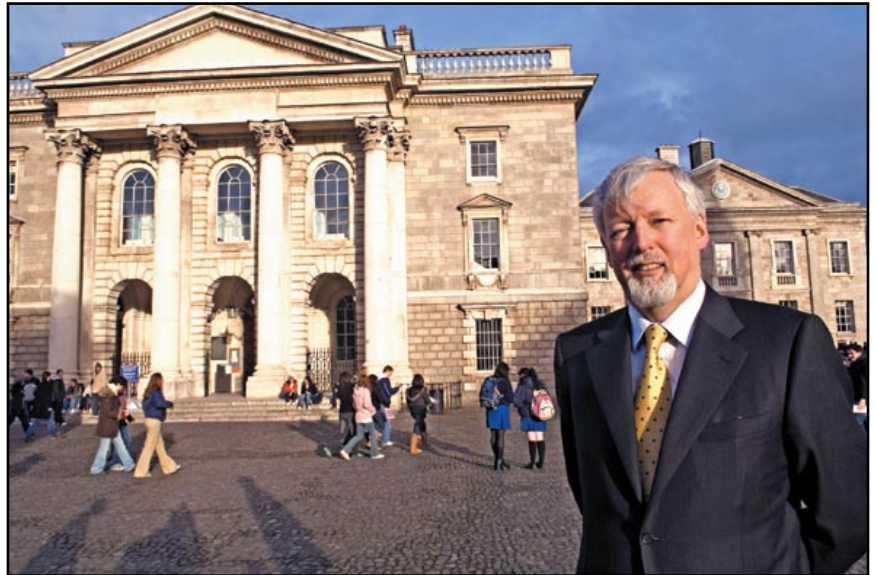
But these students are different from their international counterparts in one important respect: They don't appear nervous or uptight, worried about whether they will be admitted, can afford to pay tuition, or will have a job awaiting them on graduation. They have the calm, self-confident and optimistic look of young people who believe the world is at their feet.

And they're right. It is.

Ireland's extraordinary economic success means these students live in a society with one of the lowest jobless rates and highest growth rates in the world. Since the early 1990s, Ireland has gone from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the richest. Its gross domestic product grew by a dramatic 9.5 percent per year between 1995 and 2000—nearly 60 percent in real terms during that period, compared to less than 16 percent for the European Union as a whole. The transformation is evident everywhere, from the Aer Lingus flight to Shannon crowded with Irish families returning from shopping sprees in New York and Boston to the hours-long traffic jams in once-sleepy Dublin.

Even through the relative downturn of the last few years, Ireland's economy—dubbed the Celtic Tiger—has continued to outperform those of other Western nations. In 2004, for instance, Irish GDP grew by 5.5 percent, compared to 1.8 percent for the rest of Europe. Unemployment has fallen from 18 percent in the late 1980s to less than four percent today. The students in the Trinity quadrangle can look forward to almost certain employment. The jobless rate last year for graduates of the school was just 1.6 percent, compared to the United Kingdom, where graduate unemployment exceeds six percent. Since the onset of the Celtic Tiger, the Irish have enjoyed a two-and-a-half-fold improvement in average material living standards. Income has gone from 35 percent below the European Union average to 20 percent above it.

Higher education itself is credited, in part, with this impressive turnaround. In the absence of jobs, or for the training needed to find work overseas, Irish young people have been enrolling in universities in large numbers for decades. "People traditionally in Ireland placed a high priority on education," said John Hegarty, Trinity's provost. "They saw it as a passport to succeeding anywhere in the world." Tuition



John Hegarty, provost of Trinity College, in Dublin, believes colleges and universities have helped to fuel the Irish economic boom.

for undergraduates was eliminated in 1995, and the number of students ages 19 to 24 in college ballooned from 11 percent in the mid-1960s to the current high of 56 percent—projected to increase again to 65 percent by 2015—compared to a higher education participation rate in the United States of 24 percent.

Meanwhile, the combination of a low corporate tax rate, a low-wage English-speaking population, and membership in the European Union (and access to its markets) helped attract the likes of Dell, Intel, Microsoft, Wyeth, Boston Scientific, IBM, Bell Labs, Apple, HP, Abbott Laboratories, and Google to Ireland, where they set up production facilities to make everything from pharmaceuticals to software; by 2002, Ireland produced half of all consumer software sold in Europe. The country had a large supply of well-trained university graduates to fill management and other professional positions at these fast-arriving multinationals. Citing prominent economists, an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) review suggests the university education of its population has accounted for almost one percent per year of additional Irish national output.

But there are fears that things are slowing down. In October, the National Competitiveness Council of Ireland said there were signs the Celtic Tiger was losing its momentum. Forfás—a board that provides policy advice to the government on trade, technology and innovation—warns that Ireland's high-tech manufacturing business is particularly threatened

Since the early 1990s, Ireland has gone from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the richest.



Jim Browne, registrar and deputy president of the Irish national university's Galway campus, believes there should be more emphasis on research and graduate education.

by competition from Asia. After 15 years of economic expansion, “Ireland has reached a turning point,” reports the nation’s Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

Ireland’s success is part of its problem. Its rising standard of living has elevated the low wages that drew manufacturers in the first place. “One of the consequences has been a high-income society that needs to be even more competitive internationally if it is to continue to forge ahead in a period of slower economic growth,” the OECD said.

So policymakers are turning to the universities again in a unique experiment in tailoring a higher education system largely—and explicitly—to serve the needs of an economy. That system is to be a major part of moving Ireland from a nation that depends on technology-importing and low-cost production to one that is based on innovation. And it “requires that Irish (higher) education and research...become the new drivers of economic development,” the OECD said.

In the last 15 years, said Jim Browne, registrar and deputy president at National University of

Ireland, Galway, “education was important because it provided a skilled workforce. But what got us to where we are won’t keep us there.” The professionals with undergraduate degrees that the universities turned out before are skilled enough to manage, but they were not necessarily trained to innovate. “Now we need to invest in postgraduate education,” said Browne, who advocates churning out Ph.D.s and expanding research and development so that Ireland doesn’t only manufacture drugs and technology products, but also invents

them. “The conversion of knowledge into wealth is valued by universities here,” said Hegarty. “We do have to push this along.”

Trouble is, as successful as Ireland has been at furnishing undergraduate education, it is only now starting to do research or produce postgraduates in many disciplines, and in collective numbers smaller than some single-major research institutions in America and Europe. Universities are worried about attracting qualified students at all levels. The birth rate in largely Catholic Ireland, once a popular subject of derisive Monty Python skits, has plummeted from 23 per thousand in the 1970s (which was, in fact, twice the European average) to about 13 per thousand, meaning the number of students ready to enter college will have declined from 70,000 in 1990 to a predicted 53,000 by 2015. This at a time when two-thirds of new jobs Irish employers will create are expected to require a university education, compared with one-third in 2001. The estimated number of university graduates needed to meet demand is around 37,200 a year, while Irish universities are now producing only 32,500.

Computing and engineering programs are especially hard put to attract students. Increasing numbers of secondary school graduates don’t do well enough in math and science. Of the 51,000 who took the so-called leaving certificate exam last year, only 11,000 got honors in math, the prerequisite for most university engineering and technology courses. That was down eight percent from just the year before. More than 20 percent failed math altogether, 16 percent failed chemistry, 13 percent failed biology, and nine percent failed physics.

The Royal Irish Academy calls this a crisis threatening the very future of Ireland’s information-technology industry.

Ireland’s supply of Ph.D.s is also low compared to those in other European countries including Switzerland, Finland and the UK. In Ireland, among people ages 25 to 29, 1.8 percent are Ph.D. graduates —much lower than the European Union average of 2.9 percent. The total number of doctoral students in all of Ireland, while it has begun to climb, is only 4,500—again, not much more than at some major universities in other countries. Research has, until recently, been almost an afterthought.

As recently as 1997, the research budget in the Department of Education was zero. Ireland spends barely 1.4 percent of its gross domestic product on research and development, compared to 3.1 percent in Japan, 2.7 percent in the United States, and the European Union average of 1.9 percent. In another measure, only 70 of the 1,056 applications to the Irish patent office in 2004 came from higher education institutions. In all, Ireland submitted 86 patent applications to the European patent office per million population, half the European Union average and far fewer than Finland (338) or Germany (310).

Yet rather than collaborate, some Irish universities (there are seven, plus 13 institutes of technology) have been competing for faculty and are accused of duplicating costly research efforts. Government spending on higher education has remained constant at about 1.3 percent of gross domestic product, compared to 2.7 percent in the United States, 2.5 percent in Canada, and 1.7 percent in Finland.

And many faculty and students protest that administrators

Ireland’s extraordinary economic success means that its college students live in a society with one of the lowest jobless rates and highest growth rates in the world.

and the government are neglecting the humanities in favor of science and technology, and are converting universities into factories to fuel industrial growth—in Ireland, of all places, where the humanities have such historic cultural value. “Underlying these changes is an increasingly dominant view of the university system as a strategic component of the Irish economy and its development,” complained Gerald Mills, vice

As successful as Ireland has been at furnishing undergraduate education, it is only now starting to do research or produce postgraduates in many disciplines.

president of the Irish Federation of University Teachers.

“Ultimately, the question for all universities is simple,” proclaimed a report by the students’ union and graduate students’ union at Trinity—alma mater, after all, of Samuel Beckett, Edmund Burke, Jonathan Swift and Oscar Wilde.

“Does the university serve knowledge and education as an end in itself—in other words,

constitute an academic institution—or does the university perceive knowledge as a means to an end, in other words exist as a market-driven institution?”

Through the endless traffic and across the city, at University College Dublin, a degree-conferring ceremony is getting under way for mid-year graduates dressed in their academic robes and finery—saffron for Celtic studies, scarlet for health sciences, St. Patrick’s blue for science—in front of an audience of beaming relatives with flashing cameras. At the center of the stage stands Hugh Brady, an accomplished nephrologist who returned to the university from a ten-year stint at Harvard, and has since become its president.

It is the largest university in Ireland, with 22,000 students, but one that was widely seen as underachieving. Its own strategic plan, released in 2004, concluded that UCD had “significant unrealized potential.” A vast number of departments (90) and faculties (11), many of them tiny and often overlapping, led to an evident duplication of academic effort and discouraged interdisciplinary collaboration. Promotion procedures were archaic.

The sweeping changes Brady has already made at UCD symbolize the shift in Irish higher education—and the tensions it has been causing. He has adopted the American-style semester system, added a popular menu of electives, taken administrative responsibilities away from academic faculty, streamlined the route to promotion, begun a 15-year modernization of the bland 1960s- and 1970s-style campus, launched a branding and advertising campaign, and merged the 11 faculties into five colleges with new graduate divisions, and the 90 departments into 35 schools with five principals in place of the former academic chairmen.

In the future, a quarter of UCD’s students will be postgraduates, up from just under a fifth today. The university will be “research-led,” Brady has proclaimed, and will rank

among the top 30 universities in Europe—a huge ambition considering that UCD does not currently make it to the top 300 of the influential Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings of world universities or the top 200 of the Times Higher Education Supplement international league tables, where the only Irish institution that does appear is Trinity. Brady said he intends to make UCD Ireland’s premier graduate-level institution.

These changes may have gone over well with prospective students—the number who made UCD their first choice among Irish universities is up ten percent—but they have caused a drop in the morale of faculty, many of whom were stripped of administrative titles and power and merged into larger departments. There was no other choice, Brady said; within the kind of tiny enclaves that existed previously, “you develop bunkers and silos, and the more entrenched they become the harder it is to get people to talk to their neighbors. I think that’s true of universities in general.” Brady’s intention to make UCD into the top graduate university in Ireland didn’t do much to win the goodwill of other Irish university heads, either—especially when he started hiring star faculty away from National University of Ireland, Galway, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, and University College Cork.

The so-called “poaching” episode grew so heated it ended up embroiling the prime minister. Education minister Mary Hanafin scolded that poaching by the universities would jeopardize the nation’s economic plans. “Rather than competing on the small stage, we should be winning on the international stage,” she said. Brady finally signed on in September to an anti-poaching protocol that calls for open recruitment of faculty and contracts with senior researchers, including minimum periods of appointment.

Brady concedes that collaboration is fine, but still insists competition has its place. “You’ll never get rid of it, nor should you,” he said over coffee in a conference room after the conferral ceremony. “Institutions will still compete for the best academics. That does not obviate the development of trans-



Education minister Mary Hanafin occasionally must tamp down the competitive fires of Irish universities, especially in the bidding for new faculty members.

institutional research programs and research clusters,” an area in which UCD actually has been very active. “But if you try and force collaboration, it will fail. Some of the language (of Irish policymakers) suggests that collaboration is an end in its own right. The question is whether it adds value.”

The reason for the national government’s power over universities in cases like the poaching feud is simple: It accounts for 86 percent of their funding. And it is using money to steer policy. Spending on education in Ireland has soared from 1.74 billion euros a year in 1990 to six billion euros a year today, of which about 1.5 billion goes to the universities. (One euro was worth \$1.29 at press time.) And more money has begun to flow since higher education was put at the center of the national economic development strategy, much of it for research.

First there was the Program for Research in Third-Level Institutions, which from 1998 to 2002 committed 605 million euros to research infrastructure. Then came the Technology Foresight Fund of 711 million euros over seven years, mainly for information and communications technologies and biotechnology, which is administered by the Science Foundation Ireland, or SFI (modeled after the U.S. National Science Foundation). The SFI has already awarded more than 250 million euros for research and has invested 42 million euros in three new centers for science, engineering and technology to connect Irish universities with communications and biotechnology companies.

Other annual government funding for research has increased to 680 million euros, up from 334 million in 2000. Higher education’s share of that has helped the universities increase their research and development spending from 322 million euros a year to nearly half a billion, more than a 50 percent jump. In exchange, the government expects the number of doctoral students in science, engineering and technology to double by 2010.

In all, the government has earmarked 2.5 billion euros in the last five years for research, technology, innovation and development, a five-fold increase compared to the five years before that. In June, a 30 million euro fund was set up to improve technology transfer from universities to industry. “With our new strategy, what we’re saying is we want to take this idea of commercialization and translation of ideas and make that an equal part of the teaching and learning,” said Ned Costello, former assistant secretary of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (itself an indication of the tightening link between the economy and higher education), and the new head of the Irish Universities Association.

The best example of how money is being used to pull the universities into line with government economic policy is the new Strategic Innovation Fund, which will spend 300 million euros over five years to promote inter-institutional collaboration. In December, the government approved the first 14 projects under the fund, totaling 42 million euros.

Irish universities are not big enough to do the scale of



Sean Barrett, a senior lecturer in economics at Trinity College, is critical of the new emphasis on graduate education and research.

research that is needed, policymakers say. UCD’s ambitions notwithstanding, “None of us are big enough by ourselves,” said Browne, in Galway. Ireland can not afford seven universities if each of them tries to be world-class in every discipline, but it can create a network of collaboration, he said. “There are 105,000 students in the whole country. There are universities in other countries with that many students. If we all try to do everything, we won’t get anywhere.”

NUI-Galway, one of four constituent, but largely independent, universities of the National University of Ireland (the others are UCD, University College Cork, and NUI-Maynooth) has been making changes more quietly and with less turmoil than UCD and Trinity. “Galway and other Irish universities are relatively intimate. People already know each other,” Browne said in his office in the university’s quadrangle, a replica of Christ Church College at Oxford. “Change is always painful. But there’s more support for collaboration than people realize. If you talk about a public university, which is supported by the taxpayer, it has an obligation to society, to its stakeholders. It won’t be neat, but I believe there’s an imperative for change here.”

That change requires each university to specialize in a selected area, with the others as its partners, Browne said. “We could lead biomedical engineering, and others could be involved. Trinity could lead genetics, and we could be

Many faculty and students protest that administrators and the government are neglecting the humanities in favor of science and technology.

involved, and so on.” Given its location on the North Atlantic, Galway has already staked its claim to marine research. It also has made a priority of biotechnology, considering the large numbers of medical and biomedical companies—Medtronic, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Boston Scientific—in and around Galway, the fastest-growing city in Ireland. “We’ve been very strategic in the areas we’ve chosen,” Browne said. Research income has shot from eight million euros in 2000 to 42 million this year.

Outside the old quadrangle, the gleaming marine science building, built in 1991 along the River Corrib, already has a new wing under construction. The nearby National Center for Biomedical Engineering, built in 2000, is linked with the information technology department and other of the university’s divisions through bridges—physical manifestations of the interdisciplinary work Browne is talking about. In the sparkling lobby are artists’ conceptions of 20 more planned projects, including a 50 million euro engineering and human biology building and an expansion of the Clinical Sciences Institute, all part of a 400 million euro “campus of the future” unveiled in December.

The government strategy for forcing universities to focus on their research strengths has had an extraordinarily quick impact. “The strongly individualistic streak in the Irish psyche perhaps makes us not as good at collaboration as other countries, but the fact is that this is a small country with fewer resources than some others, making collaboration a necessity,” said Costello, who, before he left the government to take over as head of the Irish Universities Association, authored a policy-shaping plan to increase research by 2013.

“Competitive funding is going to start to bring about a natural clustering,” Costello said. “That’s going to give universities an idea of where their main strengths are. In pure Darwinian terms, that’s going to start to happen.” Added Trinity’s Hegarty: “The fundamental principle of how we move forward is to draw disciplines and institutions together. We’re searching for a model for collaboration. I guess we’re inventing one: inter-institutional collaboration, which gives you scale.”

UCD’s Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research, for example, which Brady was instrumental in establishing on his return from Harvard, has made the university an authority in these areas. Housed in a gleaming new building, the institute is a model of interdisciplinary cooperation. “As people started to think of how the building would work, they almost demanded that they be co-located with their collaborators,” said Brady. Wyeth Research has since agreed to locate a new 13 million euro discovery research group there.

The Center for Synthesis and Chemical Biology is a 26 million euro, UCD-led collaboration in the chemical sciences that also involves Trinity, and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and has attracted 17 million euros in funding for medical research projects. In all, research projects at UCD last year totaled 80 million euros, and the university filed 11 patent applications. Its most successful spinoff was for a mad cow disease test that has earned almost two million euros in royalty income.

The university also is developing a 30 acre “innovation

park” adjacent to the campus, where incubation space is already occupied by 23 startup companies, and where the new National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (funded by the government to the tune of 90 million euros over seven years) will conduct pharmaceutical research in conjunction with Trinity and the Institute of Technology, Sligo. Ireland’s pharmaceuticals industry employs 20,000 people and accounts for nearly 30 billion euros a year in exports.

Trinity College has claimed genetics, immunology and neuroscience as its priority for research, declaring that it will become a world leader in the field. It has collaborations with Galway in the humanities and bioengineering, with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in medicine, with University College Cork in science and technology, and with seven other Irish higher education institutions and Bell Labs in telecommunications.

Research income at Trinity rose from 57 million euros in 2004 to 64 million in 2005, the most recent year for which the figures are available. A 372 million euro strategic plan announced in October, aimed at making it one of the 50 best universities in the world, calls for emphasizing research, boosting the number of postgraduate students by 25 percent to 5,000, and recruiting 225 new faculty.

This has only worsened opposition from among the current faculty and students. Provost Hegarty, the school’s former dean of research and the head of physics who also studied, worked and taught in the United States, has already pushed through a restructuring program similar to UCD’s, despite resistance, including a new management system that allows for more interdisciplinary work while also tying the allocation of resources to the capacity of departments to generate funding.

“Trinity College is not an institute of technology, we are a university,” groused the report by the Trinity students’ union and graduate students’ union. “The Industrial Development Agency, Enterprise Ireland, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are responsible for creating economic development, not Trinity College.”

Change is difficult in any organization, Hegarty responded, but harder in universities, which “are about ideas, and ownership of ideas, and can be supremely competitive. But this university has survived revolutions, uprisings, changing of regimes. The question is, how has it survived all of those things if universities are so monolithic? Everybody accepts that you have to prioritize research. There is a recognition that we have to change as society changes.”

Trinity senior lecturer in economics Sean Barrett is not convinced of this. One of the harshest critics of the changes at Irish universities, he believes they could actually increase costs and lower standards—not to mention shortchange graduates, given that salaries in areas like research and development and computing, careers into which the government is trying to push more students, are relatively low in Ireland. “There is no evidence from earnings data that increasing the budgets of physics and engineering departments will enhance either

Spending on education in Ireland has soared from 1.74 billion euros a year in 1990 to six billion euros a year today.

national economic growth or the earnings of graduates,” Barrett concluded in an article in *Administration*, the quarterly journal of Ireland’s Institute of Public Administration.

What really angers Barrett is the comparison of such things as Irish patent applications and research and development spending with those of countries like Finland. Despite the fact that Finland greatly outpaces Ireland in both categories, he points out, it has a 9.1 percent unemployment rate compared to Ireland’s 3.9 percent, and Irish annual growth rates over a decade were three and a half times those of Finland.

“Other countries should adopt Irish economic policy rather than Ireland adopt other countries’ R&D policies,” Barrett fumed in shotgun bursts. “This is an incredible success story except in the minds of the heads of universities. I don’t know what crisis these guys are dealing with other than the

one they’ve contrived. Did we get here by being stupid? We were doing extremely well; there’s no need to start dismantling the university system.”

At Trinity, the dismantling that Barrett speaks of has included merging his department with education, law, social sciences, philosophy, social work and psychology into a new Faculty of Social and Human Sciences. But he is not alone in decrying the apparent emphasis on science over the humanities.

“It’s a bit like the Unionist Party that used to run Northern Ireland: minority rule. The bulk of resources goes to the smallest cadre of students who are in science and technology instead of the humanities,” Barrett said. Because

secondary school graduates have lower leaving certificate scores in math and science than in the humanities, Barrett reasons, pushing them into science and technology courses will bring down the average quality of university students. “University students in Ireland are university students in the purest sense, to get an education, not just to get a job,” Barrett said. University administrators and government officials who he sees as tailoring Irish education to feed the needs of the economy “are old-style mercantilist philistines,” he said.

Not true, say the officials. “Our humanities scholars point out, and they’re right, that all of our Nobel prizes have been

in the humanities,” said Brady at UCD, whose graduates have included James Joyce. “One could form the impression from the public debate of late that the economic dimension is the principal preoccupation of our society,” Hegarty admitted in an opening address to the Irish Universities Association Conference on the

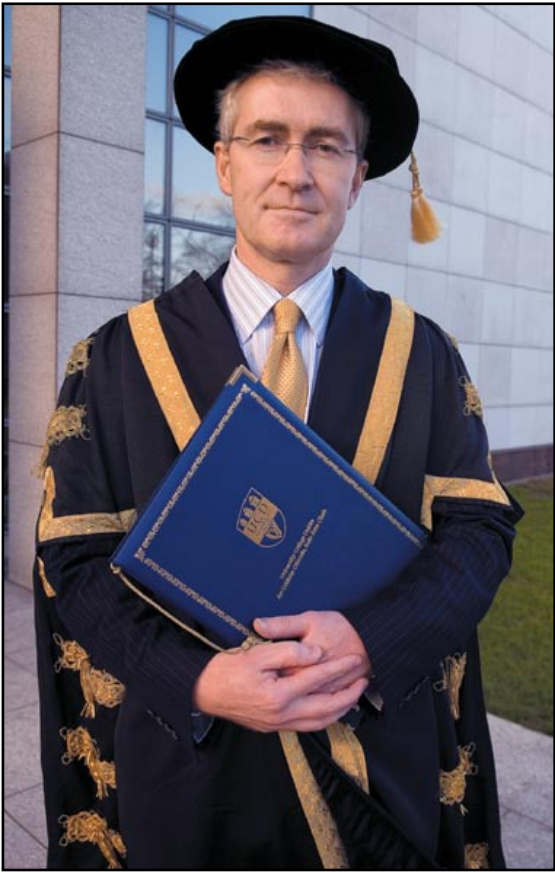
Humanities and Social Sciences on his campus in October. But he added that, especially at a time when great changes are transforming Irish society, “there is now a pressing need to rearticulate the critical importance of the arts, humanities and social sciences.”

In the high-ceilinged office of the 1760 provost’s house, hung with oil paintings of Edmund Burke and John Pentland Mahaffy (an earlier Trinity provost who was also Oscar Wilde’s tutor), Hegarty said the humanities are important to Ireland’s economy, too. “Foreign investment involves people, and companies are looking at the quality of the society they’re coming to,” he said. (“He may be saying he values the humanities,” Barrett countered, “but he’s been doing everything he can to undermine them.”)

Hanafin, the education secretary, repeated this idea. “Our universities are more critical than ever in helping us to make sense of these changes,” she said. “It is absolutely fundamental that we preserve a balance between the humanities and science. Failure to do so would be to ignore the essential responsibility of our institutions of higher learning in a civilized society.” ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

The government strategy for forcing universities to focus on their research strengths has had an extraordinarily quick impact.



By concentrating on research and graduate studies, President Hugh Brady of University College Dublin hopes to build his campus into one of the top 300 universities in Europe.

Reversal of Fortune

Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" economic miracle is followed by an epic downturn

Photos by Peter Matthews, Black Star, for CrossTalk

"Th' whole worl's in a terrible state o' chassis."
—Sean O'Casey, "Juno and the Paycock"

By Jon Marcus
DUBLIN, IRELAND

THE TOPIC of the Ph.D. seminar in a sunlit classroom at University College Dublin is of more than academic interest to the doctoral candidates who fill every seat. It's called "Politics in Crisis," and it's about how Ireland has managed to find itself in the depths of an epic downturn so soon after the peak of its "Celtic Tiger" economic miracle—a time of incomparably high growth and low jobless rates, when these same students, most then undergraduates, had the world at their feet.

Charts and graphs in PowerPoint chronicle the huge decline in such measures as gross domestic product since then, and a spike in unemployment to some of its highest levels since records began to be kept. Some 266,000 jobs have been lost in this nation of 4.5 million, helping drive the biggest emigration since the 1980s, with 70,000 people leaving last year and another 50,000 likely to follow them this year. Property values in Dublin have plunged 42 percent. The Irish Stock Exchange hit a 14-year low. Struggling with a \$32 billion revenue shortfall, and pushed by a European Union that grudgingly provided a multibillion-euro bailout, the government slashed \$8.5 billion from its annual budget, with plans for another \$13 billion in cuts in the next three years. Public employee salaries were cut, pensions and healthcare

Irish students are seeing big percentage increases in their contributions to their educations at exactly the time their families have seen declines in their incomes.

threatened. The government itself fell.

Among other things, these events have clearly conspired to create what academics like to call a teachable moment. Later on this same day, in the same building on the same campus, is scheduled another, unrelated program, "Education in Crisis," part of a weekly series that

has included discussions about the labor market in crisis, democracy in crisis, migration in crisis, policing in crisis, healthcare in crisis, even Catholicism in crisis.

"There are crises upon crises upon crises," quips James Farrell, a professor of politics at UCD and head of its School of Politics and International Relations.

In addition to Farrell, the speakers at this morning's

seminar include recently retired high-level civil servants, and before each one shares his candid and depressing take on how Ireland's current sad state of economic affairs came to pass, he checks that Chatham House Rules apply, meaning that he won't be identified by name outside the classroom.

"I want my pension to arrive next week," the former official remarks wryly.

"Your reduced pension," an academic in the audience shoots back, to laughter.

It's with this singularly Irish sense of witty fatalism that many in the country seem to be reacting to their reversal of fortune.

"There's resignation across the board, because we know

there's no money anymore, and there are few choices," Daniel Hayden, one of the Ph.D. candidates who have come to listen, says during a break in the discussion.

But just beneath the surface are also deep divisions that anticipate those beginning to be felt in higher education in particular, and society in general, almost everywhere. Not only are the causes of the problems familiar—an inflated real-estate market, misdeeds by the banking sector, all but unmanageable public debt. So, increasingly, are the results.

A frustrated public looking for someone to blame is angry at public university faculty, whom they consider lavishly overcompensated. Academics, toiling under increased workloads, are irate at their administrators, whom they say have mismanaged universities and squandered popular support. Administrators bristle at what they consider interference from uninformed and unfairly critical government officials. And government officials want to hold the universities and their faculties more accountable for outcomes.

"There's a very, very profound sense of demoralization



"We know there's no money anymore, and there are few choices," says Daniel Hayden, a Ph.D. candidate at University College Dublin. "There's resignation across the board."

and quite a significant sense of anger,” said Mike Jennings, general secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers. “There’s a very strong sense that the public has decided to tar the entire sector with the same brush, and we’re all regarded as overpaid and pampered.”

And yet, despite this, Ireland has made some unusual strategic decisions that have kept the situation at its universities from becoming even more grave. The budget cuts for higher education, though significant, are not as deep as those that have been suffered elsewhere in the country’s public services, or at many public universities in the United States. A threatened “graduate tax” that would have forced students to repay most of the cost of their educations, like their counterparts in England, has been tabled. Even a proposed increase in the student registration fee has ended up far smaller than feared. Government spending on university research is up, thanks to a

stubborn conviction that new discoveries will help restore prosperity, and campuses have sprouted gleaming, freshly completed buildings that were begun at the peak of the Irish boom years—about \$490 million worth of new construction at UCD alone.

“We’re just holding our breath because we know how much worse it could be,” one top UCD administrator said. In higher education, “Surprisingly, we’ve actually got kind of a good situation in Ireland,” compared to other countries, said

Hayden, who was previously president of the UCD student union. “It could be so much worse,” agreed Megan O’Riordan, head of the student union at Dublin City University across town, whose mother was laid off as an accountant when the roofing company she worked for went under. “It could be better, but it could have been much worse. People are negative about how we got here, but they’re positive about how we’re going to move forward.”

And the plan for moving forward relies in great part on the universities. That’s a major reason Science Foundation Ireland, or SFI—this



“We were really set up to be at that industry-academic intersection,” says Brian MacCraith, president of Dublin City University. “It’s amazing how financial encouragement can change behavior.”

country’s version of the U.S. National Science Foundation—was one of the few public agencies to see its budget rise, not fall, this year, by \$15 million, to \$225 million. In all, Ireland spends \$1.1 billion a year on research, two-thirds of it conducted at its universities and institutes of technology.

But there’s a catch. The nation wants results. “People know we’re in a deep hole. We know we have to keep investing in the kind of development that will help with our recovery,” said Sean Dorgan, chairman of the Centre for Research on Adaptive Nanostructures and Nanodevices, or CRANN, at Trinity College Dublin, which includes a brand-new advanced microscopy laboratory a few blocks from the famous Gothic-style Trinity quadrangle in a former warehouse next to a onetime flour mill. Researchers who work on its focused-ion-beam and electron microscopes in sealed clean rooms include representatives of 74 countries, from corporations such as Intel. “They’re very keen for us to have metrics and deliverables regarding commercialization,” said Joseph Carroll, the American-born associate director of the Biomedical Diagnostics Institute at DCU, which develops medical diagnostic products (a huge growth industry in Ireland, up 12 percent in revenues last year in spite of the economic downturn), in collaboration with corporate partners including Analog Devices, and which just got \$27 million from the government.

“That’s one of the main mandates now,” Carroll said. “Three years ago things were very different. It was just about the science. Now SFI wants us to be self-sustaining. That will be the code word for the next few years—sustainable.”

Some 266,000 jobs have been lost in Ireland, a nation of 4.5 million, helping drive the biggest emigration since the 1980s.



“Our work is increasingly necessary to justify on the policy level,” says Alan Smeaton, a senior researcher at CLARITY, an interdisciplinary research center. “We need to make the public aware.”

From its increased budget, SFI has quadrupled the number of grants it makes through its Technology Innovation Development Award program, meant to encourage commercially viable research. An otherwise widely panned two-year review of Irish higher education, called the Hunt Report, recommended more than doubling spending on such research, from about 1.4 percent of GDP to three

Ireland's budget cuts for higher education, though significant, are not as deep as those that have been suffered elsewhere in the country's public services.

percent. "It's amazing how financial encouragement can change behavior," said Brian MacCraith, the president of Dublin City University, who acknowledged that this has so far worked to the advantage of Irish higher education.

DCU, which was given university status only in 1989, is a hotbed of such applied research, with the entrepreneurial MacCraith—a physicist and internationally prominent researcher in

the field of optical sensing—as its enthusiastic cheerleader. He calls it a university of enterprise, and has assembled a board of advisors from among executives of Intel, Cisco, Merck, Accenture and other multinational corporations. "We were really set up to be at that industry-academic intersection," MacCraith said at a conference table covered with research reports in his office in the converted 19th-century agricultural training school that is the oldest building on the otherwise thoroughly modern campus.

At CLARITY, an interdisciplinary research center at DCU that develops all kinds of sensor technologies, academics are collaborating with the likes of Disney and its ESPN network to develop everything from maps and screens for theme parks and cruise ships to high-definition cameras that can follow athletes and generate reports about their play, or, for Irish sports leagues, vests that measure breathing and patches that detect the quantity of sodium in sweat. The projects are the subjects of slickly produced posters on the walls, just as the Biomedical Diagnostics Institute has a visitor center for the public. CRANN runs a competition called "Thesis in Three," in which Ph.D. candidates are challenged to describe their work to general audiences in local pubs, using three slides in three minutes.

"Our work is increasingly necessary to justify on the policy level," said Alan Smeaton, a professor of computing and a senior researcher at CLARITY. "This is where we are. We need to make the public aware." Added MacCraith: "When times are tight, you have to be very clear what you're about."

So far the payoff has been promising. Ireland has built a science infrastructure from a level equivalent to that of Bangladesh ten years ago to become ranked among the top 20 countries in the world in research.

Thomson Reuters' Essential Scientific Indicators rates it first in immunology. It is third in molecular genetics, sixth in nanoscience, and eighth in materials science. Since the beginning of a concerted technology transfer program that began around the time of the economic crash, Irish universities have more than doubled their number of inventions and quadrupled their number of startup spinoffs.

"It is remarkable what has been achieved in a relatively short period of time," said Dorgan. "We went at it with a lot of gusto. The case was made strongly. The issue for the last two or three years has been to sustain that level of investment. Practically everyone in this country has suffered a drop in real income and living standards in the past three years, so it's up to us to keep communicating the value of this. The universities know that they are beholden to the public for the money that keeps them going."

The danger, advocates universally concede, is in letting expectations get too high.

"There has been some over-promising, and it creates credibility problems for the whole sector," said MacCraith. "There is sometimes an expectation for almost instant results, and results that come directly from the investment in research," added Dorgan, who was previously chief executive of the Industrial Development Agency Ireland.

Nor is there consensus about the wisdom of this tactic, especially considering that the number of teaching faculty at Irish universities is simultaneously in decline. "There's no shortage of money to do anything as long as it's not the frontline mission of the university, which is to teach," said Jennings. "Politically the universities keep trying to justify their existence as if they were the R&D department of the government. Rather than talking about the pursuit of



Commercialization is "one of the main mandates now," says Joseph Carroll, of the Biomedical Diagnostics Institute at Dublin City University. "Three years ago things were very different. It was just about the science."

knowledge, they have concentrated an unwise degree on this idea of R&D that can deliver jobs. And in the current economic climate, when people want to hear that, they're saying it more and more. There is a frustration that the teaching part of what we do has been downgraded to second place behind the research part."

The government's austerity measures have forced universities to cut their faculties by six percent since 2008, and there is a freeze on hiring. This despite the fact that enrollment is up 20 percent from a decade ago, thanks largely to immigration. It's another familiar theme, but one that's new in Ireland, which had no real history of immigration until the Celtic Tiger years, when immigrants flocked here to fill low-paying service-sector jobs. Their children often attend poor urban secondary schools and don't speak English as their native language. Fifteen-year-olds in then-homogeneous Ireland ranked fifth in literacy as recently as 2000, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, well above the OECD average. Now, with immigrants comprising eight percent of the school-age population, Ireland has plummeted to 17th.

When they arrive at Irish universities, these underprepared students put even more pressure on a shrinking faculty, said Andreas Hess, a senior lecturer in sociology at UCD. "We're all happy to take on more students. Everybody would be happy for a better-educated workforce," Hess said. "But we're not given the means to teach them."

Other resources are also in decline. Disproportionately dependent on the government, Irish universities have 85 percent of their costs covered by public funding, compared to 73 percent in OECD countries on average, 65 percent in the UK, and 44 percent in the United States. That makes them particularly vulnerable in tough times. (Even in good times, Ireland ties for a distant 16th among developed countries in spending on higher education relative to per-capita GDP, and 17th in spending per student.) Given this, the only thing surprising about the budget cuts for universities is that they haven't been worse. Funding was slashed by seven percent, from \$1.7 billion last year to \$1.5 billion this year. As in America, some of that shortfall is being made up on the backs of students in the form of fees. Irish students pay a "registration fee," first imposed in the 1980s when the country chose to make higher education tuition free. Originally \$700 a year, that charge has gradually reached \$2,100 and will rise again next year to \$2,800.

Even though some 43 percent of students come from families whose low income excuses them from paying it, the additional revenue from registration fees reduced the



The politicians need to stop micromanaging, says Phillip Nolan, incoming president of NUI Maynooth. "If there was one thing we would ask for it's that the government would stop worrying about the details of how we do things."

cut to universities to 2.5 percent. Still, this comes at a time when, according to the Hunt Report, the equivalent of a 33 percent increase would be needed just to handle the rising enrollment.

These woes, and particularly rising student-faculty ratios, have already taken a rapid and quantifiable toll on the enormous progress made by Irish universities in the last ten years. When the first of what would become the highly regarded Shanghai Jiao Tong international university rankings came out in 2003, only Trinity and UCD among all Irish institutions were in the top 500, and those only barely. The best they did in the *Times Higher Education* magazine standings, when those were first released in 2005, was 111th and 221st respectively. But by 2009, Trinity had shot to 43rd and UCD to 89th, joined in the top 500 by DCU, University College Cork, National University of Ireland Galway, NUI Maynooth, and the University of Limerick. It took only one year for all of this to come undone, and for Trinity to fall back out of the top 50 with UCD gone from the top 100.

To stanch the bleeding, the presidents of all seven Irish universities, the Hunt Report and the Fine Gael political party all support a drastic change in higher-education funding under which university budgets would be bulked up not only by raising the registration fee even higher, but by making students pay substantially more of the cost of their educations retroactively after graduation, based on their courses of study and their incomes—a so-called graduate tax like the one in England. An arts graduate would have to repay \$11,200, an engineering student \$22,400, and a newly minted doctor \$75,600. But after elections in March, Fine Gael was forced to form a coalition government with Labour, which opposed even the first step of increasing the student registration fee beyond the current level. In a compromise, the graduate tax was tabled "for further study," and Labour agreed to raise the registration fee, though not as much as Fine Gael wanted.

Government spending on university research is up, thanks to a stubborn conviction that new discoveries will help restore prosperity.

Ireland has built a science infrastructure from a level equivalent to that of Bangladesh ten years ago to become ranked among the top 20 countries in the world in research.

There things stand, and that has managed to leave no one happy.

Though they get a better deal than their counterparts in many other countries, Irish students nonetheless are seeing big percentage increases in their contributions to their educations at exactly the time their families have seen declines in their

incomes. As part of the government's austerity measures, they also face a four percent decrease in the maintenance grants about a third of them receive toward their living expenses while in school. "People are just living on less now," DCU's Megan O'Riordan said with a shrug. "We're at the threshold now. Any more cuts and we're really going to feel it."

Students' short-term futures appear no less bleak. More than 90,000 people under 25 are unemployed, and more

than 59,000 of those are university graduates. More than half of last year's graduates still don't have jobs. Those who do are being forced to take lower-paid and lower-skilled work, according to the National Economic and Social Council. Offices all over Dublin advertise U.S. work visas or Australia or New Zealand travel for students who are choosing to join the ranks of those who plan to emigrate.

Still they keep on coming. The number of university applications for the fall is up another 14 percent, driven by the unemployed and by students from England, who under EU law pay the same as Irish students, and for whom Irish universities are now a bargain.

Nor does there appear to be much public sympathy for this generation, raised as it was in a time of plenty and disparaged in popular caricatures as spoiled and entitled. Today's students are known as the Broke and in College. "These are tough times for Irish students like Jamie," the Sunday magazine of the *Irish Independent* wrote sarcastically about an imagined typical student. "The old man is lying low these days, arguing on the phone with some lawyer guy about what he meant by personal guarantee... and Jamie lives at home and works in a convenience store to pay for Jägermeister at the weekend."

Facing new taxes and fewer services, two-thirds of Irish adults support charging students more for their educations, a poll by the *Irish Independent* found. Forty percent think universities should be paid for partly by the government and partly by higher student fees, and 25 percent support the graduate-tax idea. Fewer than a third think taxpayers should continue to bear most of the cost of higher education, as they do now.

Academics are even more unpopular. At a hearing, one member of the Dáil, or lower house of the Irish parliament, accused them of working only 15 hours a week—the amount of time they spend in lectures. "Most politicians have no clue what academics are actually doing. That's the biggest challenge, explaining to them that we're not sunbathing on some beach," said UCD's Hess. "There's a certain sense of, so many people have lost their jobs and there are rumors of how much money we make." Added Jennings: "We are working harder than we've ever worked, we've taken significant cuts in our salaries, and still the image is being allowed to get abroad that we have a luxurious existence."

The government has proposed a pay-for-performance system for faculty, and new provisions specifying workloads and teaching hours. Faculty are being required to teach for an extra hour per week, on top of their current annual workload of 560 hours, and face penalties if they fail to win satisfactory ratings under a proposed evaluation system based in part on certain learning outcomes. Faculty unions are fighting these plans, and most have refused to sign on to the Croke Park agreement (named for the Dublin sports complex where it was negotiated), under which other

"Politically the universities keep trying to justify their existence as if they were the R&D department of the government."

**—Mike Jennings,
Irish Federation of
University Teachers**



"We know we have to keep investing in the kind of development that will help with our recovery," says Sean Dorgan, chairman of CRANN, at Trinity College Dublin.

public-sector workers agreed to cooperate on money-saving reforms in exchange for a promise from the government to make no further pay cuts or forced layoffs. “I’m not a service provider,” Colin Coulter, a lecturer in sociology at NUI Maynooth and an outspoken critic of these ideas, fumed about them before a lunchtime discussion in a steeply banked DCU lecture hall packed largely with fellow academics. “I’m a lecturer. What the hell is a learning outcome? We teach social theory. One of the expected learning outcomes is to be confused.”

Faculty, in turn, direct their anger at administrators, whom they consider meddlesome and overpaid. It didn’t help when news broke that UCD gave nearly \$1.7 million in bonuses to top employees over ten years as a reward for landing a collective \$112 million a year in grants and other income. The government says the payments were illegal, and wants the money back. Trinity College also may be fined for slipping retroactive raises to 27 staff in spite of a moratorium on promotions. (The university says the promotions were made before the moratorium took effect.)

Nor did the university presidents’ knack for public relations serve them when they made no response at all to an appeal from the then-education minister that they take a voluntary pay cut. “What I hear constantly among

my members is, if you look back at the negative stories in the Irish media over the last five years over who has brought universities into disrepute, it’s the senior people who are paying themselves very high salaries,” said Jennings.

Administrators do bear some fault, said Philip Nolan, incoming president of NUI Maynooth. “The controversy surrounding that pay was damaging, there’s no doubt about that,” said Nolan, who is moving on from his job as registrar and deputy president at UCD. “At the moment the public sector in general are natural lightning rods for public anger. And in a crisis like this, people are going to look for somebody to blame.”

For an OECD conference called “Doing More with Less,” Nolan coauthored a paper laying out

four choices for Irish universities to rebound, without recommending any particular one: capping enrollment and cutting costs; increasing enrollment to generate more income; increasing student fees; or enrolling more students who pay higher fees—meaning, in this case, students from outside the EU. (In fact, the government has set a goal of increasing the number of international students at its universities by 50 percent over the next five years, bringing in nearly another \$1.3 billion a year.)

But he said that, in general, the politicians need to stop micromanaging.

“If there was one thing we would ask for it’s that the government would stop worrying about the details of how we do things,” Nolan said. “What the government needs to do is set goals for the sector, agree the outcomes, and then



“The teaching part of what we do has been downgraded to second place behind the research part,” says Mike Jennings, general secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers.

get off the pitch.”

That’s unlikely in a country so deep in crisis, and with so much at stake.

“To misquote Seamus Heaney,” Jennings said, after thinking the situation through for a moment: “Hope and history aren’t rhyming. In this case they’re clashing.” ♦

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Disproportionately dependent on the government, Irish universities have 85 percent of their costs covered by public funding. That makes them particularly vulnerable in tough times.

The Presidential Treatment

The Obama administration makes big advances, faces tough challenges, in higher education policy

By Jon Marcus

WASHINGTON, D.C.

YOU'LL HAVE TO forgive them if the community college students, faculty and presidents looked star struck, squinting in the glare of the bright lights of the television news crews as Marine guards crisply showed them to their seats.

Dressed in their best, these 122 hand-picked representatives of higher education's most maligned, least influential sector were, after all, being ushered to the White House East Room, guests of the wife of the vice president of the United States, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, three cabinet secretaries, one congressman, the billionaire who co-chairs the nation's wealthiest foundation—and the leader of the free world.

As they waited restively beneath the crystal chandeliers, surrounded by gold draperies, and scrutinized by Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington, they knew this was the most attention given to their colleges by any president since 1947, when a commission appointed by Harry Truman recommended so big an expansion that there would be a community college campus within easy driving distance of every American.

Barack Obama himself soon was telling them, after he bounded from a side door to the presidential podium, that they were "the unsung heroes of America's education system."

Heady stuff. But the community college leaders at this first-ever White House Summit on Community Colleges also knew that grand plans for \$12

billion to help them increase their abysmal graduation rates had been sacrificed for the sake of passing healthcare reform, even then being gleefully disparaged by Republican candidates in the midterm elections as "Obamacare." They knew that this raised questions about the president's goal—called the American Graduation Initiative—of boosting the nation from

tenth place in the world to first by 2020 in the proportion of young adults with university degrees. They knew that deep public and congressional antipathy toward federal government spending would certainly slow the momentum of impressive gains that had been made in postsecondary education (Obamacation?) during the administration's first two years. They knew that along with what billions had been approved for higher education were coming unrelenting calls for more accountability, that new rules meant to curb abuses in the fast-

growing for-profit higher education sector were threatening to backfire on traditional nonprofit colleges. And they knew that massive increases in federal financial aid were already being sucked up by spiraling tuition charged by universities still reeling from state budget cuts and endowment losses.

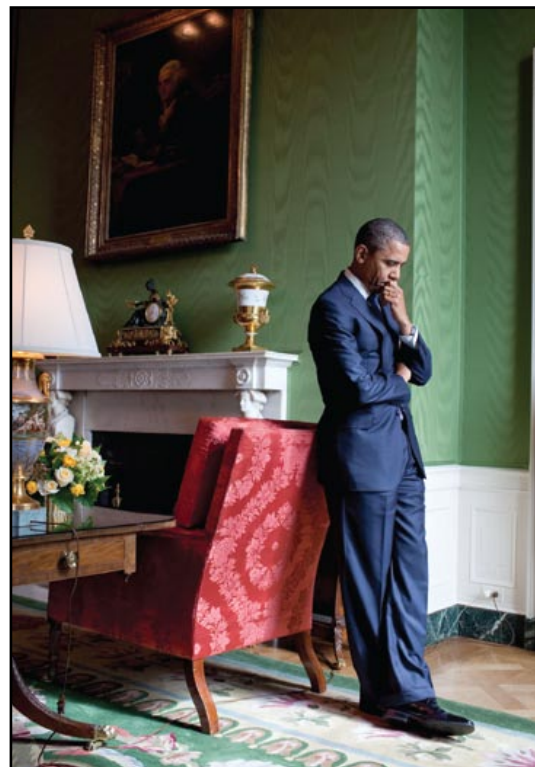
For all the value of the attention they were getting, for all they may have relished the unprecedented presidential praise, for all the glamour of a summit at the White House, everyone in the East Room knew that it was more or less a consolation prize.

"The administration came out of the gate strong with the 2020 goal, and then the wind went out of their sails when they traded the American Graduation Initiative for healthcare," said one Washington insider. "It feels like ever since then they've been grabbing on to whatever they can to show they're really serious about higher education."

The poorer prospects for progress in the next two years seem dimmer still because of the inevitable comparison with the enormous strides made so quickly in the previous two. Obama immediately elevated higher education to near the top of a crowded agenda—and spoke often and unusually personally about the value of his own further education and his wife's, which was less of a birthright than it had been for many of his predecessors. Huge amounts of money were appropriated for higher education, goals were set for raising graduation rates, and regulations were fine-tuned to protect students and encourage quality.

First came \$100 billion in stimulus money to states for education, \$23 billion of which went to higher education (\$16.5 billion for additional financial aid and \$6.6 billion to plug holes left by budget cuts).

The lower-than-low standing of the bonus-happy big financial institutions that helped force the need for that stimulus spending in the first place also helped the



President Barack Obama prepares to deliver remarks to community college leaders at the recent White House Summit on Community Colleges.

Pete Souza for the White House

Impressive gains have been made in postsecondary education during the Obama administration's first two years.



President Obama's goal—called the American Graduation Initiative—is to boost the nation from tenth place in the world to first by 2020 in the proportion of young adults with university degrees.

administration, in the middle of the healthcare frenzy, to accomplish what earlier administrations could not: eliminate billions of dollars in federal subsidies to banks for student loans in favor of lending the money directly. It was also crucial that—unlike the Clinton administration, which tried to do the same thing but invited opposition from higher education lobbyists and their friends in Congress by proposing

that the savings go toward balancing the budget—the Obama team promised that the money would be funneled to the Pell grant program, which provides university tuition grants to students who fall within given income requirements, and which will be beefed up by \$39 billion and indexed to inflation starting in 2013.

Obama made some other big advances too. He got a \$2,500 tuition tax credit passed, and oversaw the implementation of a new GI Bill, signed by his predecessor, with the most generous terms since World War II. He vastly simplified the bafflingly complex Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, eliminating roughly a quarter of the questions and attracting 33 percent more applicants in just two years. Historically black colleges and universities got a \$2.6 billion windfall from the savings freed up by the student-loan reform.

The president indisputably elevated the profile of those long-suffering community colleges, and announced his goal of raising graduation rates by 2020 to restore the nation's global primacy in the proportion of college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds. He secured a \$2 billion earmark for the Labor

Department to hand out over four years for career training by community colleges and other postsecondary institutions. And his Education Department started cracking down on practices such as incentive payments to student recruiters, with rules that were clearly aimed at for-profit colleges the General Accounting Office had caught misleading applicants.

Even these accomplishments provoke some critics. The stimulus funds for higher education kept the lights on and avoided layoffs. But, unlike the Race to the Top program (under which \$4 billion of federal stimulus money was awarded to primary and secondary schools in a competitive

process to reward reform), the stimulus funds came with comparatively few strings, other than that states had to use them to provide the same level of funding they had in 2006. "That's a big string," said Martha Kanter, U.S. undersecretary of

education for postsecondary, vocational and adult education, and federal student aid, and herself the former chancellor of a community college district.

One exasperated advocate for higher education reform argues that the stimulus grants effectively doubled, if only temporarily, federal spending on higher education, offering an unprecedented and likely not-to-be-repeated chance to push for greater productivity, curbs or downright caps on tuition, and operational efficiencies. "One place they had the money was the stimulus, and they didn't use it," he said. "Instead of using it to incentivize things, they just put the money out there and said, 'Spend it.'"

But others say that practical considerations made it all but impossible to create a stimulus-fueled Race to the Top in higher education—never mind that universities and colleges adamantly oppose the idea of any further federal involvement in their business. For one thing, said Ben Miller, a policy analyst at the Washington think tank Education Sector, there was great urgency. "In an ideal world you would have seen more strings attached" to the stimulus money, Miller said. "[But] there was such a need to get it done and out the door as quickly as possible that that would have been tough given the timeframe they were working with."

Nor does higher education track the sort of benchmarks readily available in the world of primary and secondary schools—whether K-12 students can read at grade level, for example, and how they do on tests—said Robert Zemsky, founding director of the University of Pennsylvania's Institute for Research on Higher Education. And without measures, it's impossible to set standards, something the people in Obama's Education Department were beginning to find out, to their frustration, as they worked on crafting new higher education regulations. Besides, Zemsky said, if you tie funding to results in higher education, universities can simply rig the



The Obama administration has "demonstrated a willingness to impose more federal control than I think is necessarily desirable," says Terry Hartle, of the American Council on Education.

Obama has placed higher education near the top of a crowded agenda. He has spoken often and unusually personally about the value of his own further education.

game in ways that public schools can't, by turning away at-risk applicants and lowering even legitimate barriers to graduation.

There was one more giant pot of money that the president could still divert to higher education: the massive subsidies, which the Congressional Budget Office projected to be worth some \$87 billion over ten years, that went to banks providing student loans. And in spite of dogged lobbying by private lenders, the Democratic-controlled Congress added an amendment to the healthcare bill eliminating subsidies for banks and switching to direct-to-student loans. It was a big fourth-down higher education score for the Obama camp. But there was little-noticed angst and intrigue even with this.

For one thing, although they didn't oppose it, the alphabet soup of higher-education associations that ring Washington's Dupont Circle, including the American Council on Education and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, did curiously little to help get student-loan reform across the goal line, even knowing that the billions in savings would be used for Pell grants—and even though such benefits as lower interest rates that lenders once offered university financial-aid officers to keep them on their side had long ago dried up. “If you look at the student-loan fight, you didn't see NAICU, you didn't see ACE heavily supporting something that was going to result in their members getting billions of additional dollars,” Miller said.

It was an important turning point. That's because the higher education associations, which had largely welcomed Obama, the Democratic Congress, their higher education platforms, and the huge amounts of money they were likely to receive, were starting to grow worried that the president envisioned a greater federal regulatory role, including by attaching exactly the kind of new conditions to the money generated by the student-loan reform that it hadn't required in exchange for the stimulus funding. “There were some concerns with some of the administration's policy proposals, in terms of expanding the state role in higher education, and that somewhat diminished our willingness to provide an open-ended endorsement,” said Terry Hartle, senior vice president for government and public affairs at ACE.

Another problem was that the projected return to the government from cutting subsidies turned out to have been vastly overestimated. Many universities had already voluntarily switched to direct lending, which meant their students' loans were no longer federally subsidized. That helped diminish the expected savings to \$46 billion over ten years instead of the predicted \$87 billion. Most of the total (\$39 billion) went, as promised, to the Pell grant program—allowing for an impressive doubling of the amount available to be divided among the growing number of income-eligible students, and enough to raise the individual maximum grants themselves by the inflation rate for four years beginning in 2013—but not immediately, or for ten years, as originally intended. That was partly because the projections had been so overly optimistic and partly because more than a third of the Pell grant money ended up going to cover previous years' shortfalls caused by burgeoning demand for aid from students and their families struggling to pay persistent hikes in college fees in the midst of the recession.

After taking 35 years to grow to \$13 billion in 2007,

when there were 12 million applicants and five million recipients, the cost of Pell grants will have mushroomed to an estimated \$35 billion by next year, when there will be an estimated 19 million applicants and nine million recipients. That's more money than the budgets of eight cabinet-level government agencies. The runaway upsurge in the cost of Pell grants has been propelled in part by those tuition increases—7.9 percent for public and 4.5 percent for private universities and colleges this year, according to the College Board, during a time when other consumer prices actually fell by one percent, and family income grew by only one percent. Only 24 states used any of their stimulus money to keep tuition down.

Obama also pledged to commit \$12 billion of the loan-subsidy savings over ten years to help community colleges meet his goal of boosting graduation rates with more online learning, business partnerships and worksite education, plus facility improvements. But that amount kept dropping, too, to \$10 billion in the House bill and \$2 billion in the final legislation. The balance went to offset some of the cost of the healthcare bill. The \$2 billion that was left for higher education would still be destined for community colleges, but not for the purpose of increasing access or completion rates. It would go to job training, especially for mid-career workers and workers whose jobs had been exported. And it would be spread out over four years, in a program run not by the Education Department, but by the Department of Labor.

It was at a community college in Michigan that Obama had announced his American Graduation Initiative to increase the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with associate's degrees or higher, from 38 percent to more than half, restoring the nation from ninth (or tenth, depending on the source of the statistics) to first in that measure by 2020. The number of jobs requiring at least an associate's degree is growing twice as fast as the number of jobs that don't, and the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University estimates that, if current trends continue, the United States will fall short of meeting



Dennis Brack, Black Star, for CrossTalk

“Taxpayers are entitled to ask legitimate questions about what they're getting for their money,” says Harris Miller, president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities.

The Obama administration accomplished what earlier administrations could not: They eliminated billions of dollars in federal subsidies to banks for student loans in favor of lending the money directly.



Education Secretary Arne Duncan has emphasized greater federal oversight, something that both for-profit and nonprofit institutions dislike about the Obama administration's higher education strategy.

the demand for college- and university-educated workers by at least three million as soon as 2018. Meeting the goal of the president's graduation initiative would require graduating an additional eight million students by the end of this decade, an increase of four percent, according to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Community colleges, where only one in four students now earns a degree within three years, are "the lynchpin" of this plan, Kanter told reporters in a conference call the night before the White

House summit. They would have to turn out an additional five million graduates by 2020. This at a time when, in addition to their chronic problems with completion, community colleges in 32 states were struggling just to get by on flat or lower budgets, and when their full-time enrollments had ballooned by 24 percent in the two years from fall 2007 to fall 2009. A survey of community colleges by the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama found that most were in no financial condition to meet the graduation goals.

Yet as crowded and cash-strapped as they are, the community colleges seemed as ambivalent about that lost \$12 billion as their university counterparts on Dupont Circle had been about the savings generated by the student-loan reforms, and on the same grounds: because the government, for the first time, wanted to attach significant conditions to the money.

To get it, they would have to set and meet graduation, job-placement, and other goals reviewed and approved by bureaucrats in Washington.

"We're not even that close to Dupont Circle, and you could hear the crying and screaming from here" as the reality of the tradeoffs sank in, said Harris Miller, president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, which represents the for-profit schools that have become community colleges' biggest competition.

Miller's members were beginning to feel their own pain.

Prodded by consumer advocates, high student-loan default rates, and allegations of fraud, the administration was proposing regulations clearly aimed at cracking down on for-profit universities in ways the previous administration had not. Among those doing the prodding: traditional nonprofit universities and their associations.

Private, for-profit schools, after all, now account for nearly a quarter of all Pell spending, or \$4.3 billion last year alone—and

students who attend them borrow billions more per year to pay for tuition. But two years into repayment, nearly 12 percent of those students have defaulted on their loans, three times the rate at nonprofit private institutions, and double the proportion at public universities and colleges. (The for-profits argue that their default rate is disproportionately high because they serve a lower-income market already struggling to make ends meet. According to Harris Miller, three-quarters of their students are financially independent of their parents, and nearly half of them have children.)

Undercover investigators from the General Accounting Office, posing as prospective applicants to 15 for-profit colleges, found that all 15 gave them deceptive information, and four encouraged downright fraud to help the applicant qualify for federal financial aid. Some of the purported students, the investigators say, were urged to falsify financial information. Others got exaggerated estimates of what they could expect to earn after they had graduated, or misleading information about the cost of courses, and were pressured into signing contracts. An investigator who inquired about a certificate program in massage therapy was told the \$14,000 fee was a good value when, in fact, a nearby community college charged only \$520.

The Florida Attorney General's Office also has announced that it is looking into alleged misrepresentation by for-profit universities. Previous investigations found that some for-profit institutions were enrolling grossly unqualified students for the sake of getting access to their federal financial aid.

Long experienced in Washington politics as a senator's aide, a House committee staffer, and a candidate for Congress from Virginia, Miller deftly seized on Obama's graduation plan and positioned the for-profit universities as part of the solution. With ten percent of total enrollment, or 2.3 million students, the for-profits said, they were there to help. "The president is very much singing our song," Miller said. "We are in violent agreement that there is this huge population of underserved students and that they need a higher education, in terms of their personal growth and fulfillment, and for our country's sake to be globally competitive."

The administration wasn't biting. Education Department officials started work early in Obama's term on 14 regulations to control abuses. Several were clearly aimed at the for-profits. One, the "gainful-employment" rule, proposed to measure the loan debt of students in vocationally oriented programs as a proportion of their estimated annual income. Programs with a debt-to-income rate that is too high would lose their eligibility for federal financial aid, effectively shutting them down. Another regulation prohibits bonuses or other incentives for student recruiters or admissions officers based on how many students they sign up or how much financial aid they bring in. The Education Department gave itself more clout to ban deceptive marketing and advertising, and institutions will have to disclose their graduation and job-placement rates and students' median debt.

The for-profit sector fired back with guns blazing. Although they were also forcefully opposed to the incentive-compensation regulation, their principal target was the gainful-employment rule. They said it would require huge amounts of paperwork and would discourage institutions from starting new programs. They said that was counterproductive at a time

The president elevated the profile of the community colleges, and announced his goal of raising graduation rates by 2020 to restore the nation's global primacy in college education.

when unemployment is so high and so many Americans need more, and not less, vocational and career training. They said the Education Department couldn't possibly review the estimated 53,000 programs nationwide that would be affected. Besides, they and others said, the cutoffs seem arbitrary: What's a fair ratio of debt to income, and who gets to decide?

Education Department rule-makers responded by proposing a complicated formula under which the debt would not be allowed to exceed eight percent of expected earnings, based on a ten-year repayment schedule. Five percent of programs were projected to fail that test. Another suggestion is that a university or college might be required to prove that there is a "reasonable relationship" between the cost of a program and the added amount a graduate can expect to earn with a relevant degree or certificate.

The for-profits promise a court battle on due-process grounds if the gainful-employment regulation is approved, and have spent \$3 million since the beginning of the year alone on lobbying to help make sure it isn't, according to the independent, nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. (Federal lobbying on education overall rose to a record \$106 million in 2008 and topped \$100 million last year. From January through October of 2010, NAICU spent \$223,000 on federal lobbying, ACE \$150,639, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities \$250,000; but the Apollo Group alone, parent of the University of Phoenix, spent \$337,000, Career Education Corporation \$460,000, and the Washington Post Company, owner of Kaplan, spent \$420,000.)

Some 91,000 comments on the gainful-employment measure were submitted to the *Federal Register*, by far a record response to any Education Department proposal. On the other side, a coalition of 30 consumer, student and civil-rights groups lined up to say the gainful-employment guidelines don't go far enough. Shares of for-profit education companies have slumped since the Apollo Group, citing "regulatory and other scrutiny," forecast a decline in new enrollment at the University of Phoenix. Overwhelmed, the Education Department postponed a decision on the gainful-employment rule, though all the other regulations moved forward and will take effect July 1, 2011.

"We'll continue to do battle with the administration on this," said Harris Miller. "The divergence comes in terms of how one determines what is or is not a quality institution, and whether Washington or the consumer should make that decision."

The runaway upsurge in the cost of Pell grants has been propelled in part by tuition increases—7.9 percent for public universities and colleges this year.

Even Margaret Spellings, education secretary for George W. Bush, weighed in. "At a time when the administration should be focused on job creation and strategies to prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs, it is targeting private-sector higher education providers that serve about three million students a year," Spellings wrote

By the Numbers

Higher education in Obama's first two years

Amount of stimulus money that went to higher education: \$23 billion

Projected ten-year savings from eliminating student-loan subsidies: \$87 billion

Actual savings: \$46 billion

Amount of this that was supposed to go to community colleges: \$12 billion

Amount that actually did: \$2 billion

Amount that went to Pell grants: \$39 billion

Number of applicants for Pell grants in 2007: 12 million

Number of recipients: 5 million

Amount dispensed: \$13 billion

Expected number of applicants next year: 19 million

Expected number of recipients: 9 million

Estimated amount to be dispensed: \$35 billion

Increase this year in public-university tuition: 7.9 percent

Increase this year in private-university tuition: 4.5 percent

Inflation rate: -.4 percent

Current proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with a postsecondary degree: 38 percent

Obama's goal: 60 percent by 2020

Number of states whose community college budgets were down or flat this year: 32

Two-year increase in community college enrollment: 24 percent

Private, for-profit share of total postsecondary enrollment: 10 percent

Share of Pell grants that now go to students at private, for-profit schools: 24 percent

Questions eliminated from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): 22 (more than 20 percent)

Increase in FAFSA applications filed since then: 33 percent

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, American Association of Community Colleges, Congressional Budget Office

in a *Washington Post* op-ed. "The result could be more jobs lost and fewer Americans getting the education they need to secure good jobs."

Spellings lauded Obama's graduation initiative, his support for community colleges, and the increase in Pell grants, which Bush raised, too. But she blasted the end of federally subsidized private lending, saying it robbed consumers of choice, and said the crackdown on for-profit schools would disproportionately hurt low-income and minority students. The president's good start had "quickly faltered," Spellings wrote. "The Obama administration's tendency to spend more money and support aggressive government solutions began to get the better of it" (Spellings, who now runs her own political consulting firm, declined to be interviewed.)

Meanwhile, a funny thing had happened on the way to the rule-making process. Conventional nonprofit universities, among the for-profits' most consistent critics, realized the regulations would affect them, too. It turned out that 40,000 of the 53,000 programs that fell under the gainful-employment proposal, for example, were at traditional nonprofits, and while most of those were likely not endangered, all would now be under closer federal control. Among other quandaries this presented, if a student started at a for-profit institution and transferred to a nonprofit university, the total of his or her loans



“Jobs in today’s economy require more than just vocational training,” says Debra Humphreys, vice president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which advocates for the liberal arts.

would count against the nonprofit’s debt-to-income ratio. The nonprofit universities and colleges were so worried about this that they got rule-makers to revise the measure in order to avoid it.

“Be careful what you ask for,” Harris Miller joked. “You might get it.”

Kanter defends the regulations as consumer protections. “We’ve made great strides on the access side, but we have a lot more to accomplish to ensure that students are earning that first-class education that is a hallmark of America,” she said. “Higher education will always be suspicious of anything the federal government does, and certainly there are legitimate concerns. But we’ve got to measure progress.”

What nonprofits and for-profits dislike equally about Obama’s higher education strategy is its

shift toward greater federal oversight of what they do. That’s at the heart of tension that has wilted the initial enthusiasm for the new president from the same university associations that worked to stifle calls for more accountability in higher education, including a national student database, by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, known as the Spellings Commission, during Bush’s term. While they welcome the boost in Pell grant funding and other strategies of the new administration, said Hartle, “That doesn’t mean we automatically love everything they do. They also have demonstrated a willingness to impose more federal control than I think is necessarily desirable.”

Harris Miller is less nuanced about the way he thinks nonprofit universities have grown to regard Obama: “While Bush was in the White House and Spellings was in the White House, they thought, ‘Jeez, if we can just wait these people out and hold on until the Democrats get back in, all this pressure will disappear,’” said Miller, whose own sector was—justifiably, as it turned out—under no such illusion. “But, no, Barack Obama shows up, and (Education Secretary) Arne Duncan shows up, and they’re of the same mindset, and the governors are of the same mindset,” that American higher education, as the global stakes increase, should be held accountable for its results.

In this regard, the universities aren’t up against only the president. Legislators, governors, and tuition-paying students and their parents, too, want more accountability, in a growing movement unlikely to be discouraged by endless stalling. “That pressure’s not going away,” said Alisa Federico Cunningham, vice president of research and programs at the Institute for Higher Education Policy. “Higher education has not yet totally adjusted to the fact that the country—the taxpayers, the parents, everybody—has decided that a little bit of luster has faded from the higher education system,” said Harris Miller. “The way to regain that luster and credibility is not to pound

the table and say, ‘We’ve been around for 800 years and we know best,’ but to accept the idea that, because you do have so much money involved, that taxpayers are entitled to ask legitimate questions about what they’re getting for their money.”

A few universities and university associations are already voluntarily publishing some outcomes information to avoid being forced to do it. “They’re trying to head off any federal intrusion in this area by self-policing,” said Donald Heller, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University. “They’re going to fight tooth and nail to avoid the federal government telling them what information they have to make available. It’s a 350-year tradition of autonomy they don’t want to give up. The public institutions say they’re already heavily controlled and regulated by their states, and that it’s in the best interest of their students for them to make those decisions, not for the federal government to do it.”

But the Obama administration already is doing it, with new rules covering the definition of a credit hour that puts the government not only on the campus, but in the classroom. It’s another Bush initiative the universities had hoped would go away, and another example of a rule aimed at for-profit universities that has spilled over into the nonprofit sector. And it follows yet more bad press, this time about the accreditation of a for-profit online school called American InterContinental University, by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, in spite of questions about the value of an unusually large number of credits awarded for unusually short courses. That prompted House Education Committee Chairman George Miller to demand a standard definition of a credit hour to ensure that students and taxpayers get their money’s worth. The Education Department has since responded by proposing that one credit hour should be equal to at least one hour of instruction plus two hours of preparation per week, though institutions would be left to determine what “reasonably approximates” that measure.

“They’re almost starting to take the next step—that the government tells the educators how to educate,” said William Zumeta, a professor of public affairs and education at the University of Washington and president of the Association for the Study of Higher



“We’ve got our work cut out for us,” says Martha Kanter, U.S. undersecretary of education. “Like everyone in this country, we have to do more with less.”

Education. “It rubs against the traditional grain of institutional autonomy,” Hartle said. ACE members’ objection to the credit definition “is simply that when it comes to postsecondary education, one size doesn’t fit all, and the federal government has no choice but to impose fairly generalized regulations on all institutions, whether it’s a welding school or a research university. The issue is not that the federal government shouldn’t make sure its money is well spent and impose appropriate regulations. When any industry is getting nearly \$150 billion a year in federal support, some reasonable federal regulation and oversight has to be expected. The challenge is to find the right balance and not insist on a uniform set of outcome measures for all institutions.”

Balanced or not—and whether or not universities expected it from the Obama camp—more regulation is all but certain, most observers say. “The role the federal government has to play in all of this is always tenuous,” said Education Sector’s Ben Miller. “You don’t want them to be getting heavily involved in curriculum matters. But you do want them to create an incentive for colleges and states to keep their tuition affordable and make sure students are graduating with credible degrees. As it stands now, the federal government is the rich uncle who hands out the money for financial aid, but after you get the money you do whatever you want with it.” As for the continuing resistance from universities and colleges to greater regulation, Miller said: “Any time you’ve been operating for a long period of time without much oversight, there’s going to be a great deal of pushback. They don’t really want people to take a closer look.”

And higher education has been pushing back, opposing provisions of Obama’s proposal for a \$2.5 billion Race to the Top-like College Access and Completion Fund, which would have been awarded to states that promised to improve their graduation rates. Private, nonprofit universities in particular chafed at the idea of outsiders setting goals for them to meet. In the end, the plan was dropped in favor of a \$750 million boost to the existing College Access Challenge Grants, designed to increase the number of university-enrolled low-income students. Universities didn’t like the president’s idea of diverting federal Perkins loans to schools that held down their tuition. That failed, too. And they helped thwart a plan to lower the charitable tax deduction for the rich, which would have raised \$318 billion over ten years but also might have cost them contributions.

As unemployment has become Obama’s single most persistent political problem, universities have also grown uncomfortable with what they say is his administration’s narrowing focus on higher education as a means of training Americans for work. In October, with the midterm election looming, the president announced a public-private partnership linking community colleges with companies including McDonald’s and the Gap to improve job training. And while he and other high-ranking government officials refer to the colleges’ educational missions, too, it is often second to the idea that they should help match classroom skills more closely to workplace needs.

“Getting Americans back to work is America’s great challenge,” Jill Biden, a community college instructor and the wife of Vice President Joe Biden, told community college

leaders at the White House summit. “And community colleges are critically important to preparing graduates for those jobs.” Community colleges, the president chimed in, “aren’t just the key to the future of their students. They’re also one of the keys to the future of our country.”

But higher education isn’t solely about job training, said Debra Humphreys, vice president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which advocates for the liberal arts. “Even if you stay on the economic front, if you’re talking only about the role that higher education is playing to

prepare more and more students for a changing workplace, there’s a lack of understanding of how jobs in today’s economy require more than just vocational training. People have in their minds a very 20th-century idea of the economy. What I think is emerging in the 21st-century economy is that students actually need a broader set of skills and abilities that are provided not just by narrow training but by the broader college learning that America has traditionally excelled at.”

What Obama could do better, Humphreys said, “is to help the public see the difference between narrow training and real college. We have to create ladders of opportunity so students, no matter where they start, have a base of learning that will allow them to come back into the system and continue to build their portfolios of skills. And at the moment it’s a bit too muddled about what the Obama administration is trying to advance. Without these distinctions being clear, too much emphasis could go toward training programs that won’t really prepare students for long-term success.”

With prospects bleak for much new funding in the next two years, speaking out may be the most effective thing Obama can do now to keep his higher education strategy on track, according to Washington observers. “Not everything takes money,” said Zumeta. “Talk does help.”

“We’ve got our work cut out for us,” Kanter conceded. “Like everyone in this country, we have to do more with less,” she said, adding that the president has “painted a picture of a call to action. We have helped bring to the forefront the need for Americans to go to college and complete college. We have a lot of challenges in the funding of that, and a lot of starts and stops, but the country understands we have a lot of reforms under way.”

Obama and his team now have an opportunity to use their



Robert Zemsky, of the University of Pennsylvania’s Institute for Research on Higher Education, says that if funding is tied to results in higher education, universities can simply rig the game by lowering barriers to graduation.

Meeting the goal of the president’s American Graduation Initiative would require graduating an additional eight million students by the end of the decade.



"College leaders are recognizing the need for significant change," says Jamie Merisotis, president of the Lumina Foundation for Education.

bully pulpit to make increased graduation rates a truly national agenda, instead of a federal one, by reaching out to states, according to a Beltway insider.

That's already happening. Many states have started to set goals for graduation rates, and tied some public university funding to outcomes rather than enrollment. The Southern Regional Education Board has called for 16 southern states to raise the proportion of their populations with postsecondary credentials to 60 percent by 2025.

But without the money the administration hoped to put behind it, Obama's goal of restoring the nation to first in

the world in 25- to 34-year-olds with postsecondary degrees will be difficult to achieve. "It just won't happen on a national level," Ben Miller said. "All the exciting stuff about best online practices and trying to get states to set up actual plans to improve completion—all the money for that really disappeared. Had things worked out the way they wanted, it would have gotten more than just attention. They could have been more game changers with higher education than they've been."

Nor is there likely any money left to come. "Given the growing concern about the federal budget deficit, the likelihood is that there will be enormous pressures on federal spending," Hartle said. "We are entering a period when budget will define policy." Even some of the gains of the president's first two years are at risk, many fear. They worry that the \$2,500 tuition tax credit will be allowed to lapse by a belt-tightening Congress, that the Republicans who control the House will balk at any additional spending, and that Pell grants will be frozen even as tuition continues to go up. (Said Hartle: "Anybody who looks at the Pell grants has to think, if Congress does decide to cut the budget deficit, they will look at this program and say, 'Why has it expanded so quickly, and what can we do about it?'")

Zemsky, who served on the Spellings Commission, thinks the money pouring into Pell grants is misplaced anyway. "Right amount, wrong target," he said. He thinks those billions should be diverted to middle schools, helping higher education by improving the preparation of its applicants. "Spending more and more on Pell grants does two things: It just increases the flow of funds higher education is extraordinarily successful in soaking up by increasing tuition, and it encourages people who aren't ready for college to go anyway," Zemsky said. He also proposes that Obama organize a U.S. version of the multi-stage Bologna Process, which standardized academic degrees in Europe, helping smooth the credit-transfer process that so often frustrates students into abandoning their educations. "These are the kinds of places where the battle is being lost, and I don't see anything in the graduation initiative that even begins to address them," Zemsky said.

Foundations have, though. They've stepped into the funding breach more forcefully than during previous

administrations, pushing higher education to change by wielding tens of millions of dollars in competitive grants. "The amount of money those groups are going to be able to provide is way less than what the federal government could, but it's not chump change either," Ben Miller said. The model was the influence during the healthcare debates of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and others, said Jamie Merisotis, president of the Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation for Education, which focuses on increasing postsecondary enrollment and completion. "Because what a lot of us do is so closely aligned with what the president chose to identify as the administration's higher education goals, it turns out there's a lot of opportunity for collaboration," Merisotis said.

Melinda Gates, co-chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which is also working on improving postsecondary completion, said, "We see ourselves as a tiny piece of the pie. We're here to be catalysts to help that change. That's how we view our work." After all, as Merisotis put it, "Philanthropy has the capacity to do what government historically did, which is more of the analytic work, more of the support for innovation."

That innovation might be happening more slowly than the president would like. "College leaders are recognizing the need for significant change, although I don't see the evidence yet that they've figured out how to get from there to here," Merisotis said. "I think that the hunker-down-and-wait-it-out mentality, which we even saw at the beginning of this economic crisis, is transforming into a commitment to think the unthinkable. There's a recognition that change needs to happen. But there's also clearly a gulf between thinking the unthinkable and taking the action to do it."

Obama is as serious as ever, he insisted to his audience in the East Room.

In the 19th century, Obama said, America bankrolled public schools and land-grant colleges; in the 20th, the country invested in the GI Bill and math and science education. "But in recent years, we've failed to live up to this legacy, especially in higher education," he added.

"That not only represents a huge waste of potential; in the global marketplace it represents a threat to our position as the world's leading economy. To use an expression familiar to those of you from the midwest: You don't eat your seed corn. We can't accept less investment in our young people if our country is going to move forward." ♦

Private, for-profit schools now account for nearly a quarter of all Pell grant spending, or \$4.3 billion last year alone—and students borrow billions more per year to pay their tuition.

Jon Marcus is a writer based in Boston who covers higher education in the U.S. for the (UK) *Times Higher Education* magazine.

Perspectives



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NATIONAL CROSS TALK

Published by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Killing Academic Freedom Softly The muzzling of professors who do not enjoy the

By David L. Kirp

NOT SINCE THE 1950s have we seen such a resurgence of the Black Panther Party, the days of Joe McCarthy, and the days of the Red Scare. Larry Summers, Ward Churchill, and the children of Hamilton Hooper's call. But almost no one has taken up the mantle of academic freedom: the muzzling of professors who do not enjoy the quiet self-silencing of those who hold no promise of tenure.

For the Rip Van Winkles who have been through the recent goings-on, here's a recap. Last winter featured a foray into gender and genetics. When President Larry Summers' ill-considered remarks were made public, there was a call for the Left for Summers' head in confidence: "vote by the Harvard." "Let the man speak," the Right demanded. Soon thereafter, Ward Churchill

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NATIONAL CROSS TALK

Published by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Application Madness For many parents, the college admissions process leads to panic

By Anne C. Roark

I KNEW WE WERE IN TROUBLE when I started rearranging the furniture in our family room.

At first, the changes were inconsequential—a couch pushed aside, a library table installed in front of the television. But then things grew more complicated. I dragged in a round table from the garden, and chairs from the kitchen, and scavenged a bunker-sized bulletin board from my office. We needed a place to post deadlines, keep track of names, and record other intelligence gathered.

The mail had already begun to pile up, sending me on a frantic search for storage files. I improvised with a set of large wooden crates, which my friend Gracie had left in my care after her fiancé found out they were a gift from one of her old boyfriends.

Then came the most drastic step of all: I began emptying book shelves (fiction

wiped out altogether) to make room for our new collection of 600- and 700-page guidebooks. They were mostly filled with propaganda, but some offered strategy options and collected data that might be useful, and even practice drills.

All this may sound like someone on a compulsive reorganization rampage. But I was dealing with a much more serious problem: Our first-born child, Kate, now a senior in high school, was preparing to apply to college.

Our first-born child was preparing to apply to college, and our family room was about to become command central for an uncertain campaign that lay ahead.



Prospective college students are deluged with booklets, brochures and guidebooks; some run to 600 pages or more.

ply to college. Our family room was about to become command central for an uncertain campaign that lay ahead.

My husband Marshall and I had always assumed our children would go to college, but we had no particular place in mind. He graduated from a college everyone in the

lege almost no one had even heard of. Yet we both ended up in pretty much the same place: living in a crazy city, making less money than we wanted (but more than we needed), doing work we loved to hate and hated to love, and raising children we idolized but who felt about us much the way

AN INTERVIEW: Clark Kerr

Clark Kerr served as chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, from 1952 to 1958, and president of the University of California from 1958 to 1967. He presided over the launching of three new UC campuses—Irvine, San Diego and Santa Cruz—and is generally regarded as the principal architect of the California Master Plan for Higher Education. The interviewer is Patrick M. Callan, president of National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Patrick Callan: As you think about the situation the state of California faced in 1960 and what we're looking at in the 1990s, what seem to be some of the differences and some of the similarities?

Clark Kerr: I think one of the biggest differences is that in 1960 we were a very prosperous economy nationwide and particularly in California. In the 1990s, we've had this prolonged nationwide recession, and California is in considerably worse shape than the rest of the country. I'd say that's really the biggest difference.

In terms of similarities, we are facing another tidal wave of students about as large or maybe even larger than the 1960s.

I think there's an obligation to the polity, to the political society, to give people some chance to move up in society, which these days really means getting something more than a high school education.

Proportionately, it's not nearly as large, but there's another tidal wave coming. Now, in the 1960s we also had the problem of the tidal wave of students, but we didn't have the problem of lack of resources. In the 1990s, and looking ahead, we will have both the tidal wave and a problem of resources, so it's much more difficult.

PC: As you look at the financial resources versus

the student tidal wave that's coming, do you see this as a short-term, recession-related issue that we'll naturally pull ourselves out of, or as a long-term problem?

CK: I see it as a long-term or at least a medium-range set of problems, at least to the year 2010. The big question mark is going to be, how much will productivity recover? In the 1960s we were increasing productivity nationally at the rate of three percent per year, which is an enormous rate. It doubled productivity every 25 years. Then we went down to two percent, then one percent, and some years we went down

to zero.

Now, if the economy could pull back to increasing productivity by two percent a year—not the three percent of the 1960s, that was unusual, but around two percent—then I think we would have the resources to take care of what we envisioned in the Master Plan for Higher Education.

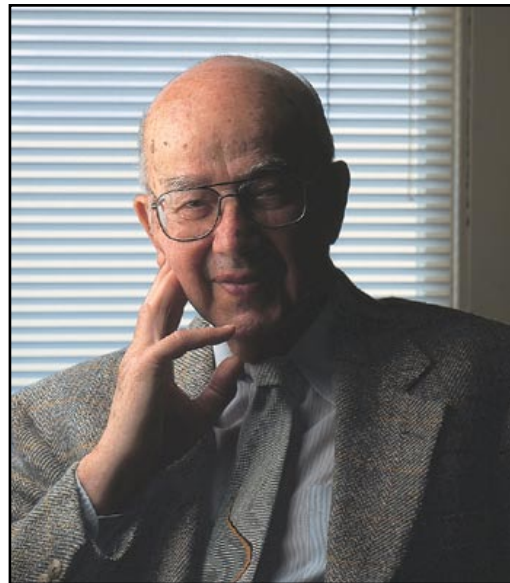
However, there are now more competitors for these additional resources than there were then. We have an aging population, we have a whole generation of young people, and we need to take care of them, and lots of other things coming in, too. But with a two percent annual productivity increase, I think it's a do-able situation. At the one percent growth rate of the 1980s, it might not be do-able. At three percent, we'd be in clover.

PC: Turning to the Master Plan, what do you think was essential about it? If we have difficult times in the 1990s and the first decade of the next century, what should we try most to preserve?

CK: The big thing of the Master Plan was to agree on some reasonably clear-cut differentiation of function. That was intended to make possible universal access for high school graduates and people who were otherwise qualified, to greatly increase the supply of people in the essential occupations of business managers and engineers and teachers and so forth. And, at the same time, to carry on professional-level training of the highest quality and research of the highest quality.

Through this differentiation of function, the community colleges had a reasonably clear assignment, and the state colleges had a clearer assignment than they chose to effectuate.

The state colleges were really assigned to take care of the polytechnic needs of modern industrial society—the need for production engineers, production managers, and so forth. The demand for these people has been expanding faster than the need for universal access or the



With the University of California, Caltech, Stanford and USC, we were offering as high a quality of basic research and professional training as any part of the world.

need for high-level research or professional training. Rather than follow that assignment, however, the state colleges and universities chose to pursue the Holy Grail of the Ph.D. I think they would have been much better off if they'd accepted their polytechnic assignment at that time than going in the direction they did.

I think there will be a need and a demand for higher education and higher levels of education across the board, for political and economic interests both.

Anyway, the effect was to provide more opportunity in an increasingly egalitarian society, to have more polytechnic training in a society that is more and more a polytechnic society, and then, third, to have basic research and professional training, all done well by having different segments concentrate on different parts of it.

And I might say that, for a while at least, California was offering more equality of opportunity than any place else in the world. I think we could argue that with the University of California, Caltech, Stanford and USC, we were offering as high a quality of basic research and professional training as any part of the world, too. The one place where we fell down somewhat, and where the Japanese and Germans were moving ahead fast, was in the polytechnic area.

PC: How important is the accessibility of the system? Some suggest that the way to deal with the financial pressures is for California higher education simply to serve a smaller percentage of the population than it has in the past.

CK: I think that would be a mistake in the long run. I think there's an obligation to the polity, to the political society, to give people, whether they want to take advantage of it or not, some chance to move up in society, which these days really means getting something more than a high school education.

Now, if that doesn't pay people economically, they won't necessarily do it. But I think we have to provide this sense that there's an opportunity to go to college if you want to and if you think it's going to pay for you. Also, to operate as a citizen and as a consumer in the modern society takes a lot more skill than it once did. People are advantaged in the conduct of their lives by having education beyond high school, and not just in terms of getting jobs.

The expanding part of the labor force has been in the areas of technical training, administrative positions, professional positions, scientific positions. That's been going up all over the world. In countries like the United States, Sweden and Germany, 30 percent of the employed population is in these high-level skilled areas. And that's going to go up, not down.

I think there will be a need and a demand for higher education and higher levels of education across the board, for political and economic interests both. So I don't think we should shut down opportunity. I think it's much more important to make good use of our resources and not just say we're going to add more of what we're already doing and

make it a problem about money alone. I think it's a question of some more money, but also much better use of the resources we have.

At the present time we have so many inefficiencies. The senior year in high school is a goof-off year, a year out of your life. We have an awful lot of duplication among our institutions of higher education in what they supply. We allow people to drag on their undergraduate careers five and six years. Ph.D.s six, eight, twelve or more years. I also think inefficiency is caused by the flight from teaching. I don't think the flight from teaching has done very much to increase the quality of research in the United States, but it certainly has reduced the use of faculty talent on the training side.

So I would say, keep the doors open. If people don't think it's going to pay them to walk through those doors, they won't do it. We should say we are going to keep those doors open, particularly with new minorities coming along, and we aren't going to finance this entirely with new funds, we're going to finance it very substantially by better use of our existing resources.

PC: So it sounds like you are saying we have a lot of self-searching to do before we start turning away students.

CK: But more before we start saying, "If you don't give us more resources, we won't take any more students." Before we say that, I think we have to explore very thoroughly whether we're making the best use of the resources we have, and I do not think we can prove that.

PC: So the reduction of opportunity is the last resort.

CK: Right. I'm not saying everybody is going to use that opportunity.

PC: No, and that's never happened in the past either.

CK: It's never happened in the past. But I just think it's very important for domestic tranquility for us to keep the doors open. I just think it would be disastrous, particularly at this stage of demographic change in California and the nation, to say, all of a sudden, we're going to close doors to opportunities which were open for the population as it was composed in times past, but they're not open to the new population.

PC: It also sounded like you were saying that at least a substantial portion of the resources to meet these new needs are already in the system, and we have to find them and use them better.

CK: Yes, I must say as a broad generalization that we ought to be able to find within higher education at least a third of the necessary additional resources

The expanding part of the labor force has been in the areas of technical training, administrative positions, professional positions, scientific positions.

by better utilization over the next several years. Now, that's a broad generalization, but I think one could give some reasons why it's not an impossible figure.

PC: Someone said it was a set of civic values in the state at large and inside the higher education community—a shared concern about the future—that was the necessary condition that made the Master Plan possible.

CK: Yes.

PC: How do you assess the health of those values today?

CK: Well, at that time I think we had more concern about the future than we do now. We were looking further ahead. At the present time, I think there's too much of a tendency to look at it year by year. In the Master Plan, we

It would be disastrous, particularly at this stage of demographic change in California and the nation, to say, all of a sudden, we're going to close doors to opportunities.

were planning ahead to the year 2000.

And we weren't that far off in estimating what was necessary and what we had to accomplish to make it possible.

I think then we were looking on a longer-term basis.

The state and the nation and higher education were less fractionalized than they are today; there

was more of a sense of common concern. American society has become so much more fractionalized in all parts of it in the intervening years. Not only right and left, but by gender and by ethnic and racial status and so forth. We were looking longer term, we were looking more broadly at the overall public welfare, and we were a more united people.

It was a period, also, of a certain amount of optimism, and that optimism was a kind of grease to the wheel. We thought things were getting better, they were going to keep on getting better. What we were doing we could accomplish it together. It was not a zero-sum game, it was a game where all of us were going to benefit.

Now I have more of a sense of pessimism about the future. Can we accomplish what we'd like to accomplish? Really, in the '60s, it was much more a feeling that if we want to do it, then we can do it. And now there's more doubt. And that's disabling.

PC: So the longer-term perspective, the sense of the common good, and some sense of optimism—those are the preconditions that allowed us to carve out that solution in the 1960s. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but are you suggesting that those are probably some of the preconditions we'll need to rediscover?

CK: If we can, yes. If we can. When you grew up and matured in the United States during the period I did, you saw that we overcame a great depression, the worst depression in American history. We met the challenge of Hitler in World

War II. We went through a period of the greatest prosperity the United States has ever known. We did for 45 years stand off the challenge of Communism, not only on our behalf but on behalf of all the free world.

So out of that background there was a feeling of, well, if you make up your mind to do it, you can do it. And that encourages you to go ahead and take your chances and do your thinking. But for generations that haven't had the same experience of success with the American system, it becomes a little tougher for them to grasp it. It doesn't mean it's less necessary, it just becomes a little tougher. ♦



The Senior Slump

Making the most of high school preparation

By Michael W. Kirst

THE SENIOR YEAR in high school has substantial but underutilized potential for improving student preparation to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Because admissions processes begin early in the senior year, preparation primarily occurs between grades eight and 11. Failure to use the senior year to enhance preparation for success at the postsecondary education level reflects the deep disjuncture between postsecondary and K–12 education, and the consequent lack of incentives for students to work hard academically and prepare for postsecondary education.

Neither K–12 nor postsecondary education claims the academic content of the senior year as a basis for further education. As a result, the senior high school curriculum is not linked clearly to the first two years of study at a university, or to a continuous vision of liberal education. Policy-making for the two education levels takes place in separate orbits that rarely interact, and the policy focus for K–16 has been more concerned with access to postsecondary education than with completion of degrees or programs.

Many students who express interest in college mistakenly assume that meeting their high school graduation requirements means they are prepared for college. All types of students, including the highest performing, talk about the second semester of the senior year as being a time they have “earned” to relax and have fun.

Even though about 70 percent of seniors will go from high school to postsecondary education in 2000, the weak academic focus in the senior year is one reason why the percentage that complete a baccalaureate degree is not much greater than it was in 1950.

Why is the senior year not effective?

Admissions and placement policies are prime examples of the problems for students at all levels of the high school achievement spectrum. For instance, community colleges have open admission, so students rarely are aware of placement exams or requirements for community college. Yet placement exams determine whether community college students can do credit-level work.

Many selective public universities admit by December 1 of the senior year, and rarely even look at senior-year grades. Consequently, students cut back on academic courses and work long hours in jobs or internships. Rarely do universities or colleges withdraw admission if grades fall off drastically during the senior year.

Because of the substantial increase in early admissions at our most selective universities, students know early in their senior year where they will attend university. Many of these students took Advanced Placement courses in their junior

year in order to gain admittance to a highly selective school, and drop difficult senior-year courses after receiving early admission. These high achieving students have scant need or motivation to use the senior year for more academic preparation.

Indeed, many seniors regress in terms of academic preparation, as is evidenced by high failure rates on mathematics placement tests. More than 60 percent of the students admitted to the California State University must take at least one remedial course. And many high achievers take the most advanced math courses during their junior year in high school and then have no math options in their senior year. A typical pattern for many students attending less selective four-year institutions or community colleges is not to take any math in the senior year.

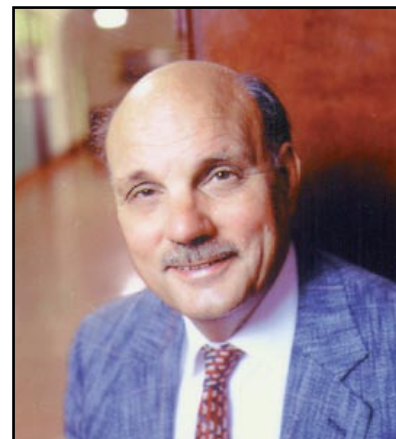
When these same students are confronted with a math placement exam in the summer after graduation, they discover that they have forgotten the math needed to avoid remedial courses at the outset of their postsecondary career.

Students do not realize how important advanced academic classes taken in the senior year of high school can be for university graduation, and community colleges send weak signals about how such courses could improve academic preparation. Very few states have any assessment system for the 12th grade (SAT and ACT are not designed to assess most senior-year learning), so the current state standards movement is not designed with the “senior slump” in mind.

Evolution of disjuncture between higher education and K–12 education

The chasm between higher education and lower education is in many ways a uniquely American problem. In England, for example, the final year of secondary education is crucial in determining admission to universities, and to specific departments within universities. Exams taken at the end of the last year of secondary education are crucial admissions criteria.

The U.S. postsecondary system used to play a more important role in high schools. In 1900 the U.S. K–16 system was linked somewhat because the College Board set uniform standards for each academic subject, and issued a syllabus to help students get ready for subject-matter examinations. Prior to that, students had to



Many students mistakenly assume that meeting their high school graduation requirements means they are prepared for college.

prepare for different entry requirements at different colleges.

The University of California accredited high schools in the early 20th century to make sure the curriculum was adequate for university preparation. But this K–16 academic standards connection frayed and then broke open, and the only remaining major linkage is usually teacher preparation in an education school. Aptitude tests like the SAT replaced subject-matter standards, and secondary school curriculum electives including vocational education and life skills proliferated in

many directions beyond postsecondary preparation.

Unlike the early 20th century, today faculty members in discipline-based professional organizations across K–16 levels interact rarely, and policymakers even less. Higher education coordinating boards rarely extend their “coordination” to K–12.

The only nationally aligned K–16 standards effort is the Advanced Placement program, utilizing a common content syllabus and exam.

A passing score on an AP exam is one indicator of college preparation. But because 33 percent of all AP students do not take the AP exam, many AP students may not be benefiting much from AP’s close link to postsecondary standards.

There is no plan in the U.S. to relate the content and experience of the last two years in high school to the first two years of college so that the student experiences a continuous process conceived as a whole. Consequently, confusion reigns, with some contending that general education is supposed to prepare students for a specialized major, while others believe general education is an antidote to specialization, vocationalism and majors.

It is very difficult with available evidence to ascertain the current status of general education. The role of the senior year in providing general education rarely is discussed, even though many seniors go directly to specialized university departments such as business.

In 1992, Clifford Adelman analyzed student transcripts from the National Longitudinal Study. He emphasized that students did very little course work that could be considered part of general education. Less than one-third of college credits came from courses that focused upon cultural knowledge, including Western and non-Western culture, ethnic or gender studies. Adelman also found that 26 percent of bachelor’s degree recipients never earned a single college credit in history; 40 percent earned no credits in English or American literature; and 58 percent earned no credits in foreign languages.

The standards movement and K–16 disjuncture

Education standards have swept across the country, engulfing almost every state. Forty-six states have created K–12 content standards in most academic subjects, and all but Iowa and Nebraska have statewide K–12 student achievement tests. At the state level, there is progress toward focusing on, and clarifying what students must know and be able to do in the K–12 grades, and how to align standards,

assessments, textbook selection and accountability measures at the K–12 level.

A gaping hole in this reform strategy, however, is the lack of coherence in content and assessment standards between K–12 systems and higher education institutions and systems. Unless we close this standards gap and align K–16 policies, students and secondary schools will continue to receive a confusing array of signals and will not be able to prepare adequately for higher education. The current scene is a “Babel of standards,” rather than a coherent strategy.

U.S. higher education relies on the SAT and ACT to provide some national assessment uniformity, but neither of these assessments is completely aligned with the recent upsurge in K–12 standards. Moreover, the situation is even more disjointed concerning higher education placement tests. In the southeast United States, for example, in 1995 there were 125 combinations of 75 different placement tests devised by universities with scant regard to secondary school standards. As a result, K–12 and university entrance and placement assessments usually utilize different formats, emphasize different content, and take different amounts of time to complete.

Universities hope that the SAT and ACT will make adjustments to accommodate these new K–12 standards, and feel most comfortable with these two assessments that they know and can influence. Many universities are wary of being subjected to a higher education version of K–12 state-accountability systems, and seek to avoid the political quagmire surrounding high-stakes testing.

Given the volume of applications, the selective universities are getting the students they want, so they see no need to implement an alternative to junior-year SAT/ACT assessment. In some states, the governor’s office is the most logical place to put these fractured standards systems together, but higher education leaders (especially from private universities) want to guard their political independence from gubernatorial and legislative specification of admissions criteria.

Because each state has a distinctive K–12 standards and assessment system, it is not clear what can be done nationally. For example, President Clinton’s advocacy of a national voluntary test died after protests concerning states’ rights.

Aligning and improving standards and assessments

Postsecondary education needs to send consistent and clearer signals (accompanied by appropriate incentives) to seniors concerning academic preparation. The concepts of content and standards alignment are promising, but also have deleterious effects if not done properly. For example, K–16 alignment focused upon low-level or inappropriate content would make matters worse. Some K–12 state assessments are at such a basic level that they are inappropriate for use in postsecondary education.

Two recent analyses of K–16 assessments exposed the similarities and differences among K–16 visions of what high school students need to know and to be able to do. A 1999 report of the Education Trust demonstrated the range in mathematics. The high school tests rarely extended beyond algebra and geometry, with content coverage similar to SAT I. But the placement exams had considerable emphasis

Neither K–12 nor postsecondary education claims the academic content of the senior year as a basis for further education.

on algebra 2 and trigonometry. Students are admitted to postsecondary education based on one conception of appropriate math, but their placement is based on a different conception.

The need for students to take algebra 2 and trigonometry in their senior year is not communicated clearly by higher education, because students are focusing upon access and admission, and not on what they need to know to complete their postsecondary programs.

The Stanford Bridge Project six-state assessment analysis highlights the differences in K–16 writing standards. SAT I and ACT assess writing through multiple choice formats, while many states use writing samples. It is ironic that many of the nation's universities do not include actual writing in their admission standards. Consequently, SAT/ACT preparation courses emphasize finding errors quickly in sentence and paragraph structure.

The senior year of high school should include intensive writing preparation for postsecondary success, but there are few signals or incentives to do this.

In short, K–16 assessments are all over the map, and send confusing signals to students and parents. Students are confused as to why SAT I is so different from the content and skills on their state K–12 assessments.

Policy improvements that encompass the senior year

Several policy directions would improve senior-year preparation for postsecondary education:

- Permit students to submit subject-matter-based state external exams as a significant factor for admissions and freshman placement. Study the university success of these students.

The crucial difference between external exams and the SAT/ACT is that a curriculum-based exam is organized by discipline and keyed to the content of specific course

sequences. This focuses responsibility for preparing the student for particular exams on one teacher or a small group of teachers. These exams define achievement relative to an external standard, not relative to other students in the classroom or school.

- Substitute SAT II (or College Board Pacesetters, when it is developed) for SAT I in order to link admissions and placement standards closer to external

discipline-based standards outlined above. Higher costs of SAT II should be borne by the public and not by the student. Since some SAT II exams have not been changed since they were originated, many of them need to be strengthened and updated.

- Align freshman placement exams with other state standards, and publicize placement exam content, standards and consequences to students in high school. The quality of

these exams must be high, or else alignment will lead to lower and inappropriate standards.

- Report and publicize freshman placement results for each high school. Allow students to take placement exams in 11th or 12th grade, and substitute K–12 assessments for university-devised placement exams. Since some states have different placement exams for each university or tier of university, there needs to be a study of content differences and whether a common exam is feasible.

- Require a writing sample for all admissions decisions. Neither the SAT I nor ACT assess writing samples, but some statewide K–12 assessments have a writing sample that could be incorporated into the regular admissions/placement process.

- Standardize high school procedures for computing high school class rank (HCR) and grade point average. Universities should specify academic courses that count in computing HCR, and accord appropriate weight for honors and AP courses. Senior-year academic courses should be an important component of HCR calculations.

- Explore the feasibility of using student portfolios for admissions in lieu of current policies. For example, Oregon PASS provides a writing score to colleges and universities that is based on a portfolio of high school written work.

- Align merit financial aid policies with the changes recommended above. For example, base merit aid on external subject-matter exams like the New York Regents and North Carolina end-of-course tests.

- Review on a periodic basis state, local K–16 and university content and performance standards. Study the signals and incentives that students receive concerning admissions standards. Universities know what signals they are trying to send, but not what signals students receive.

Specific initiatives to improve the academic quality and impact of the senior year

The following list is targeted at the senior year, but will be more effective if accompanied by the changes recommended in the prior section.

- For 70 percent of students now participating in postsecondary education, the senior year should be re-conceptualized to stress preparation for postsecondary success, credit level placement, and a start upon continuous general or liberal arts education. Access to higher education is only the starting point of senior year, not the sole goal.

- Expand substantially successful dual-enrollment K–12 postsecondary programs that include all levels of students, not just highest achieving students.

- Undergraduate general education requirements need to be sequenced so appropriate senior-year courses are linked. Senior-year courses can be a gateway to general education requirements in the first year of college or university.

- Set explicit standards for senior-year performance in all courses, and withdraw admission if they are not met. Require a minimum number of academic credits for the last semester of the senior year. Stress postsecondary placement exam standards in this last semester for students who plan to proceed to postsecondary education.

- Make the implications of freshman placement exams

Some K–12 state assessments are at such a basic level that they are inappropriate for use in postsecondary education.

There is no plan in the U.S. to relate the content and experience of the last two years in high school to the first two years of college.

clearer to students. They should understand that taking senior-year math and writing courses enhances placement scores, and results in less costly remediation.

- If a university has a math requirement for graduation from its campus, then require a linked high school senior-year math course with a certain minimum standard. Many states require only two years of college-prep math.

- University reports about remediation and freshman performance of students from specific high schools should be publicized widely in mass media, and considered by local school boards for policy implications.

- Encourage high school accreditation by state governments and private groups to focus upon the academic rigor of the senior year. Accreditation should focus more directly on postsecondary preparation.

- Review high school policies granting course credit for

work experience that has no strong academic components. Much of the senior year for many students is spent working with no academic link.

Conclusion

All of these policy mechanisms and recommendations to improve the senior year require leadership and motivation. It is unclear how this will evolve, given the long U.S. tradition of K–16 disjuncture. Perhaps the stimulus will come from rising public concern about postsecondary remediation. But the senior slump has been around so long that it has become part of American high school culture.

The senior-year issue must receive more public attention and concern before K–16 policy communities will be mobilized to act. Given the huge gap in postsecondary attainment between high- and low-income students (particularly for Hispanics and African Americans), this is an urgent issue of equity as well as quality education. ♦

Michael W. Kirst is a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University.

Not Ready for College

States must have a systemic, comprehensive agenda for college preparation

By David Spence

THIS SUMMER, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) published “Beyond the Rhetoric: Improving College Readiness Through Coherent State Policy,” a report describing how states can improve their efforts to improve high school students’ college readiness. It outlines the magnitude and nature of the college-readiness problem and suggests a more systemic and comprehensive set of steps that states can use to address this challenge more urgently and effectively.

The extent of the readiness problem

“Beyond the Rhetoric” asserts that high school students’ lack of academic readiness for college is much more severe than many policymakers understand or than has been widely reported. Identifying the size of the readiness problem is difficult because in most states postsecondary education does not share common college-readiness standards that are applied through common assessments and qualifying scores for all entering freshmen.

And even in the few states where postsecondary education uses the same readiness assessment for entering freshmen, the performance levels expected of students are too low to predict their chances for success in college accurately. So, based on these varying standards, college-placement tests and low scores, many state policymakers and education leaders estimate that only about 25 to 35 percent of students entering public four-year institutions, and about 60 percent of those

About 68 percent of the 50,000 entering freshmen at Cal State campuses require remediation in language arts or math, or both.

in community colleges, need remedial education.

The problem is far greater than that.

Research and several states’ experiences now strongly suggest that these rates would be much higher if states had higher, more uniform college-readiness standards to help them predict high school students’ chances for success in college—like

the new Common Core State Standards adopted by many states across the nation in the past year. Two examples in which such readiness standards are applied to large numbers of students clearly show the magnitude of the readiness problem:

- ACT, Inc. has established college-readiness benchmarks in reading and mathematics that correlate with students’

success in first-year college courses. While the benchmark scores of 21 in reading and 23 in math are modest, these scores (if applied by all colleges in determining students’ college readiness) would result in two-thirds of all ACT test takers who enroll in college requiring remedial education in English, math or both.

- A similar conclusion has emerged in the massive California State University system, which for many years has applied substantial placement or readiness standards in reading, writing and math linked to first-year college coursework. All first-time students at all 23 Cal State campuses must meet these standards, principally through performance on common statewide placement exams given in high school. Despite a systemwide admissions policy that requires students to have taken a college-preparatory curriculum and earn a B average or higher, about 68 percent of the 50,000 entering freshmen at Cal State campuses require remediation in language arts or math, or both. Most states likely would have similar remediation rates if they employed similar college-readiness standards and placement tests across all of their public community colleges and less selective public universities.

So, why are the rates of students who need remedial education in college underestimated by 20 or 30 percentage points, or more? One reason is the continuing misunderstanding between college *admissions* and college *readiness* (or placement). Students are admitted to college using varying kinds and levels of criteria, including their grades, courses taken, and SAT and ACT scores. Admissions criteria are high at selective public universities, lower at most regional universities, and virtually non-existent at community colleges. More than 80 percent of freshmen who enter public institutions attend these less-selective or open-door universities and community colleges.

Once admitted, students’ reading, writing and math-related skills are assessed. The high admissions criteria in selective universities normally means that students who qualify for those institutions already have the skills they need to succeed in first-year courses. However, lower, or fewer, admissions criteria—or the absence of them—at most public regional universities and community colleges requires that admitted students are tested on their reading, writing and math-related readiness skills, because college admissions in these institutions does not guarantee college readiness.

There also are technical reasons behind the low estimates



of remediation rates: Individual institutions or systems within states use different tests to determine students' readiness levels, and set their own qualifying scores. Also, required qualifying scores are often too low to predict students' success in first-year college courses. Importantly, it is common that most college-readiness tests do not address the kinds and levels of reading skills needed for college. Many current placement tests do not require students to comprehend appropriately complex texts and write about them accurately. In other

States need to address the college-readiness challenge with a clearer understanding that the problem is much greater than is commonly recognized.

words, current testing for college readiness often downplays the most important skill students need in order to succeed in college courses.

Moreover, through our college-readiness work with states at SREB, we have found two other conditions that suppress statewide efforts to determine the scope of the readiness problem: The first is the practice in most states of not relating readiness-test performance to actual student-performance outcomes in the first year of college. Setting accurate readiness test scores should be an empirical and validated process.

Second, some officials and educators are concerned that setting more accurate, predictive and higher scores will force remediation rates to spike. Indeed, remediation rates may rise in the near term. But phasing in more accurate measures of students' readiness levels is a far better option than allowing the college-readiness problem to continue unrecognized—and largely unabated.

Rather than continue to allow too many students who begin postsecondary education to enroll and never finish any type of degree or certificate, states and their college systems are better off setting valid rates now and using the senior year of high school to address students' lack of college readiness. Moreover, where relevant, states need to put on hold plans to remove remedial education from senior colleges. Remediation will remain with us for awhile, as states begin to acknowledge the real size and nature of the college-readiness challenge and finally begin to address it.

The nature of the readiness problem

The most telling characteristic of the readiness problem traces to the high percentages of students who pass a college-preparatory curriculum in high school but do not have the key foundational learning skills in reading, writing and math they will need for college. Most students entering four-year, less-selective public institutions have completed a college-prep curriculum—but appropriate college-readiness standards would show that more than 60 percent of those students would need remedial education. Clearly, at this point, taking the right courses is not sufficient.

A college-prep curriculum does not ensure the development of the critical thinking and learning skills associated with reading, writing and math that are the fundamental, cross-cutting skills needed for college success in all subjects. And they are skills that college placement or readiness tests expose as insufficiently mastered by most

entering students.

In their defense, high schools are hampered by a lack of clear signals from all postsecondary education about the skills students need for college. Postsecondary education has been clear that students need the right courses in high school, but has not clearly outlined the *kinds* and *levels* of reading, writing and math-related skills that students need. High schools cannot help students develop those skills if postsecondary education has not identified them.

Building a systemic, comprehensive agenda for college readiness

Strengthening students' college-readiness skills requires a *systemic* embedding of high reading, writing and math standards in high school—as part of a comprehensive statewide policy agenda that can help states address the problem on a number of fronts.

The statewide agenda should be based on building consensus between K–12 and postsecondary education on the higher, deeper and more specific reading, writing and math standards that high school students should be expected to meet. The new Common Core State Standards adopted recently by many states for K–12 schools can provide the basis for this step. State assessments in high school can help to further define and apply these standards statewide.

However, for the standards to lead to higher student achievement, states must take additional action to make the college-readiness standards central to high school coursework, teachers' development and evaluation, and school accountability. Moreover, all postsecondary institutions need to embrace and apply the readiness standards uniformly. In short, the higher readiness standards will help to improve college readiness only if they are applied systemically, as part of a comprehensive state policy agenda, which should include the following steps:

- *Common readiness standards.* States need to have all schools and colleges statewide adopt common college-readiness standards in reading, writing and math, that should be highlighted components of the official state academic standards for K–12 schools and that are used by all colleges in determining students' readiness for credit-bearing courses. The content of the standards needs to be expressed in performance terms through the development of assessments and curricular frameworks, model assignments and common grading practices. These performance standards must predict *true* college readiness, even though the standards will require students to show higher levels of skill than for minimum diploma requirements—and higher than existing college-readiness or college-placement standards now in use by postsecondary education. States need to validate these standards by correlating them to actual performance in introductory college courses. The new Common Core State Standards provide a sound basis for such readiness standards.

- *High school tests tied to the readiness standards.* States need to assess students' progress in meeting the readiness standards no later than the junior year of high school, which in many states could require new or amended state assessments. The assessments under development by the assessment consortia associated with the Common Core

State Standards will be a promising source of these college-readiness focused tests. In the meantime, a number of states are moving to end-of-course assessments in high schools that can be tailored to measure student performance on the readiness standards, especially in English 3 and algebra 2.

These readiness assessments are critical because their results can be used to modify high school instruction and/or curriculum to focus on the standards and to direct students into courses that can help them sharpen key skills—so that more high school students will be ready for college.

- *Common application of the standards by postsecondary education.* For the readiness standards to have the greatest impact statewide, all community colleges and regional universities should agree on and use a uniform assessment and qualifying scores based on the common readiness standards. Systemic reform will happen only if high schools and colleges apply the same standards.

- *Emphasis of the readiness standards in high school courses.* While the adoption of the statewide readiness standards and development of associated assessments are fundamental steps, building the standards deeply into high school coursework and teaching will determine ultimately whether more students meet the standards. Accordingly, the school curriculum should be modified, starting in the middle grades or earlier, to focus explicitly in each course on the development of skills that will enable students to learn at the college level. Recognizing that it will take some time to implement these standards fully in all grades and courses, SREB calls for the development of supplemental 12th grade courses to help students who are not on track to be college-ready, based on 11th grade assessments. These courses should focus explicitly on the reading, writing and math readiness skills that students need.

- *Teaching of the readiness standards.* The most critical part of the readiness agenda is K–12 teachers’ effectiveness

in helping more students develop the skills they need. Teachers can help students reach these higher levels of skill, if they are supported by clear, unified, common statewide readiness standards; the application of these standards in school assessments and school-accountability systems; and,

curriculum frameworks and pre-service and in-service preparation focused on the standards.

Teacher development, both pre-service for prospective teachers and in-service for practicing teachers, should focus more precisely on the clearer standards and helping students meet them, along with course content, assignments and grading practices.

- *State accountability systems also should emphasize college readiness.* Despite all the emphasis on accountability in K–12

and postsecondary education, most states do not hold either sector accountable for improving students’ college readiness. States should require high schools and local K–12 systems to increase the percentages of high school graduates who are college-ready annually. In addition, to push postsecondary education and K–12 schools to improve students’ readiness jointly, states should hold postsecondary education accountable for increasing the proportion of remedial students who transition into college courses, and the proportion of these students who complete college degrees and certificates. Postsecondary education must be held accountable for its roles in improving college readiness and degree-completion rates—while maintaining access.

In summary, states need to address the college-readiness challenge with a clearer understanding that the problem is much greater than is commonly recognized. What’s more, strengthening students’ college readiness not only involves better standards and assessments, but also curriculum, teacher development and accountability.

States need to address the college-readiness challenge with urgency—and systemically and comprehensively. States simply cannot afford to wait until new high school assessments can be developed. Best practices in states such as California, Texas, Florida, Kentucky and others provide enough guidance for states to move quickly to improve students’ college readiness—and to use higher standards in school curriculum and teaching. Now is not a moment too soon. ♦

David Spence is president of the Southern Regional Education Board.

Higher readiness standards will help to improve college readiness only if they are applied systemically, as part of a comprehensive state policy agenda.

Current testing for college readiness often downplays the most important skill students need in order to succeed in college courses.



Recessions Past and Present

Higher education struggles with state cuts, rising tuitions and a climate of uncertainty

By David W. Breneman

THERE IS A TENDENCY, when discussing the impact of recessions on higher education, to treat recessions as largely similar in kind, and thus not to pay much attention to factors that may differentiate among them. What we are seeing, however, in the financial crisis and decline of 2007–09 is a very different sort of event than, for example, the recession of the early 1980s. Few have asked whether different types of recession affect higher education differentially, but this is a topic that the current downturn renders worth considering.

Differences in Recessions

Since the early 1970s, the United States has experienced five recessions: 1973–75, 1980–82, 1990–91, 2001–03, and 2007 to the present. Today, given the severity of the current situation, the word “Depression” has crept back into the conversation, as certain similarities to the dire experience of the 1930s are evident. A brief commentary on economic thinking about depressions and recessions is a good place to start.

The great intellectual advance coming out of the 1930s was the work of John Maynard Keynes, who in his classic 1936 book, “The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,” established the framework that guided macroeconomic thinking for several decades. The Great Depression witnessed hundreds of bank failures, a severe contraction of the money supply, and the collapse of aggregate demand in the economy.

The current recession is significantly different from those that have preceded it, and in that sense, parallels to the depression of the 1930s are apt.

Keynes focused his efforts on rejuvenating demand, and with consumers and investors on the sidelines, he saw government as the sole remaining source of new demand, which through the multiplier effect of subsequent rounds of spending could restart the economy. At a time when monetary policy was ineffective (people and businesses were hoarding cash for liquidity purposes), Keynes emphasized the necessity of aggressive fiscal policy. In fact, it took World War II to generate the demand necessary to pull the U.S. economy out of depression.

Keynesian economics held sway into the early 1970s, when

the comment “We are all Keynesians now” was attributed to Richard Nixon. But the 1973 oil shock and the subsequent years of slow economic growth and accelerating inflation, known as stagflation, began to undercut the logic of the Keynesian system, focusing increased attention onto monetary policy, as inflation is a monetary phenomenon.

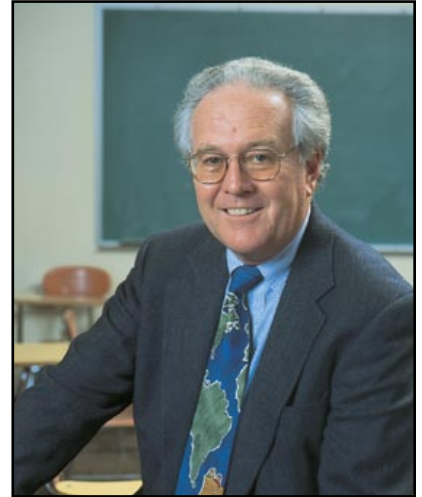
Paul Volcker, in his role as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, broke the back of inflation in the early 1980s by sharply raising interest rates, and thereby squeezing out private investment demand. The result was the recession of 1980–82.

The success of this effort, in wringing high inflation out of the economy, enshrined monetary policy as the key instrument for guiding the economy, overshadowing fiscal policy as a tool. But the economic cost was high, with the unemployment rate reaching 10.8 percent.

The 1980s also saw the rise of “supply-side economics,” so called to differentiate it from Keynesian “demand-side economics.” This new focus lionized the market, entrepreneurship, innovation, and incentives for private production and demand, primarily in the form of tax cuts. Keynesian policies and the productive role of government were dismissed as stodgy and old-fashioned, brushed aside by the drive and vigor of the “supply-side actors,” the entrepreneurs and producers. The recession of the early 1990s was brought on as these new actors confronted global competitors, such as the Japanese and the other Asian “tigers,” who were outstripping the U.S. in manufacturing productivity and cost efficiency.

Inflation also surged again in the late 1980s, and tight monetary policy had its effect in slowing the economy. In order to regain some measure of competitiveness, the early 1990s featured downsizing, re-engineering, and restructuring of the work force, with sizable reductions in the middle-management sector of the white-collar labor force. Bill Clinton won the White House in 1992 in the sluggish aftermath of recession by never forgetting that “It’s the economy, stupid.”

The recession of 2001–03 was triggered by the collapse of the high-tech, Internet boom of the late 1990s, as this disruptive new technology burst on the scene and promised to redo the way we conduct business. Speculation on virtually any new “dot-com” company drove the stock market to new highs, and when the bubble burst, much of the economy went with it. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks added to



the fear and uncertainty, and contributed to the stock market plunge. This recession turned out, however, to be relatively short and shallow, as monetary policy was dramatically loosened so that interest rates hit historic lows and stayed low, and vast sums of liquidity were pumped into the system. Unfortunately, loose monetary policy, coupled with new financial instruments such as derivatives, collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps and other arcana, set the stage for the financial collapse through which we are currently living.

The conditions that provide access and opportunity to complete various forms of postsecondary education and training are languishing in this country.

Highlights of this brief summary are that the causes of recession are many and varied, and that the cause matters in determining both the cure and the likely duration of the problem. Until recently, consumer demand tended to remain strong even when other economic indicators were not, and thus could be counted on to help pull the economy back to capacity. Monetary policy was broadly effective in stimulating investment, and often helped the economy to rebound in a V-shaped way, rather than the slower U-shaped pattern.

But the current recession is significantly different from those that have preceded it, and in that sense, parallels to the depression of the 1930s are apt. The current problem has its roots in the financial sector—banks are failing, credit has been much reduced, monetary policy is ineffective, consumers are not spending as freely as before, retail businesses are closing, investment projects are put on hold, and demand for liquidity is so strong that in recent weeks short-term Treasury bills, presumably the most secure financial asset, were actually paying a negative interest rate as people clamored for safety, regardless of return.

The Keynesian model is highly relevant again, as we confront sharply declining aggregate demand from consumers, investors, and from abroad for our exports. Government is once more the force being called upon to get the economy moving, and hence the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), enacted in the waning days of the Bush administration, and the new fiscal stimulus package of the Obama administration. As this essay is being written, the future of the economy is strikingly uncertain, for we have not experienced conditions like this in the recessions of the '70s, '80s, '90s or early 2000s.

Few think that the economy will rebound rapidly, as consumers and investors are nervous and cautious, and the fiscal stimulus will be slow in working. Unfortunately, the recession that began in the U.S. has spread throughout the globe, and no other major country seems poised to pull the rest of us out of the swamp. Some argue that much of the “wealth” created in the last decade was little more than paper wealth floated on a sea of new and unfathomable financial instruments; thus, the air going out of this bubble is just that—air—not substance.

Perhaps the greatest source of optimism is that we have experienced the Great Depression before and have learned from it, and thus will not repeat the policy mistakes of that

era, such as initial timidity in stimulating demand, that made the problem worse. But one does have the sense that the psychology of debt—of buying on credit and overextending, whether as a household or as a company—may be changing in ways that will mark this time as one of national, even international, cultural change.

Significance for Higher Education

A review of the past four recessions prior to the current one reveals that, on balance, higher education in the United States weathered each of these economic storms reasonably well (the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 10, 2008). But most observers agree that the current recession, officially announced as having begun in December 2007, is a different breed of recession, with disconcerting similarities to the Great Depression of the 1930s, as noted above. After years of neglect, Keynesian economic policy is being reintroduced in the form of aggressive fiscal actions designed to increase aggregate demand in the economy. While it seems unlikely that the world will slump into prolonged depression, the economic outlook is cloudy at best, with conditions likely to be more severe, and depressed longer, than in other post World War II recessions. What might this situation mean for higher education in the United States?

We have no definitive evidence yet, but early warning signs abound. Most state governments are experiencing a sharp drop in tax receipts, and because states have to operate with balanced budgets, expenditure cuts are being reported daily. In recent days, for example, the states of Washington, Nevada, Texas, Oregon, Idaho, California and South Carolina have announced cuts in state appropriations to public colleges and universities, ranging from ten to 36 percent. And few states, if any, will avoid such cuts.

While it is true that state support for public higher education has been declining as a share of institutional revenues for more than two decades, the severity of the current cuts might push public institution leaders to reduce enrollments, something they are normally reluctant to do. For example, the California State University and University of California systems have announced plans to reduce the number of entering undergraduates by several thousands of students. The new round of state cuts will also prompt yet higher public tuitions, further dampening demand.

It has been common in past recessions for enrollments to actually jump, as the opportunity cost of forgone earnings for the newly unemployed declines. While not yet definite, there are early signs that such an enrollment surge might not be happening this time around, in part because institutions are reluctant to keep expanding when revenues drop, but also because of the rising student charges and general uncertainty about the economy. The United States has been on a borrowing binge fueled by low interest rates for several years, and much of what is happening now is an unwinding of unsustainable debt levels, both in families and in businesses. Higher education has become increasingly dependent on student and family debt to cover student bills, but not only is the credit market harder to tap now, but increasing numbers of would-be students may be reluctant to borrow more for higher education.

This phenomenon may be particularly true for potential graduate and professional students, including those who might otherwise embark on Ph.D. programs. One effect of both the drop in state support and falling endowment levels has been a sharp reduction in the number of new tenure-track positions being filled this year. Adding to the costs of college and university budgets will also be a likely reduction in retirements, as many academics have experienced a 40 percent drop or more in the value of their defined contribution retirement plans. Rather than retire and open up positions for new Ph.D.s at lower salary costs, many relatively highly paid academics will now stay on into their 70s.

Both public and private universities have emphasized private fundraising and the building of sizable endowments in recent years as a way to diversify revenues. Numerous universities have reported endowment losses of 25 percent or more in 2008, as virtually all asset classes have fallen in value. The logic of limiting spending from endowments to roughly five percent annually means that drawing from this source must decline, or spending will increase to unsustainable long-term levels. It is also unclear whether major donors will be able or willing to continue to provide substantial new gifts at previous rates in the current climate.

Much depends on what happens in 2009, and whether the fiscal stimulus developed by the Obama administration will recharge the economy. It may also be the case, however, that a prolonged recession and slow recovery will provide the context in which institutions will re-examine their policies and practices and bring an end to some of the extravagances that critics of higher education have railed against for years. Many outlays have been driven by competition for status and prestige, as well as to provide students with accommodations, services and facilities approaching a luxury level in some schools. If families are forced to scale back in their spending and expectations (or do so of their own volition), this pressure

Numerous universities have reported endowment losses of 25 percent or more in 2008, as virtually all asset classes have fallen in value.

will surely be brought to bear on the colleges and universities where their children enroll. Just as cultural change is bringing pressure to bear for “green” campuses and worksites, so might pressure for a leaner, more austere academic experience, at a lesser charge to students, come to pass.

Institutional leaders, board

members and government educational officials face the following challenge: There is no evidence that the needs for a highly skilled and well-educated work force are going to diminish, given the technologically driven, competitive global economy, whatever course the economy takes toward recovery. At the same time, the conditions that provide access and opportunity to complete various forms of postsecondary education and training are languishing in this country, with

performance over the past quarter century in improving degree output per capita essentially flat.

Furthermore, other developed countries are surpassing the United States now in the percentage of the younger population with degrees and certificates, so the benefits of our first-mover status toward mass higher education have been eroded. Finding the will and the way to use the educational resources we have most effectively is now both a moral and an economic obligation. ♦

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An Assessment of Academic Freedom

How anti-terrorism measures have impacted the higher education community

By Robert M. O'Neil

AFTER A HALF CENTURY of secrecy, the U.S. Senate Government Operations Committee released, in May 2003, sealed transcripts of interviews with people who had been targeted as potential witnesses before Senator Joseph McCarthy's subversive activities panel, but none of whom was ever publicly interrogated. The toll on such putative victims of Senate red-baiting was incalculable; at least one prospective witness took his own life before learning of his eventual reprieve. When the transcripts were finally unveiled, a year and a half after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Congressional reactions were predictably mixed.

Michigan Senator Carl Levin, the first committee member to comment, insisted that a recurrence of such excesses was inconceivable in the 21st century. "There's a greater awareness," he reflected, "of McCarthyism and what tactics can be used by people who are trying to quiet dissenters." And, he added on a hopeful note, "there's greater resistance against those who would try to still voices that they disagree with." Next to speak (and in a quite different vein) was Wisconsin's Russ Feingold, who had cast the only Senate vote against the USA PATRIOT Act. "What I'm hearing from constituents," he cautioned, "what I'm hearing from Muslim Americans, Arab Americans and others suggests a climate of fear toward our government that is unprecedented, at least in my memory."

Each of these usually like-minded liberal lawmakers knew whereof he spoke. Levin had been an undergraduate in Ann

During the immediate post-9/11 period, when one would have anticipated that outspoken professors would be vilified as unpatriotic or worse, the actual response was surprisingly mild.

Arbor at the very time the University of Michigan callously purged three senior professors for refusing to identify colleagues as suspected subversives. Feingold, meanwhile, placed his warning in context by reminding his listeners that he too had some appreciation for the legacy of McCarthyism: "Don't forget that I am today the junior senator from Wisconsin."

Several years later, as we mark the sixth anniversary of the terrorist attacks, the jury is still very much out on which appraisal—Levin's rather sanguine view or Feingold's more ominous insight—is closer to the truth.

When it comes to specific issues of academic freedom, a similar paradox prevails. During the immediate post-9/11

period, when one would have anticipated that outspoken professors would be vilified as unpatriotic or worse, the actual response was surprisingly mild. The New Mexico historian who told his freshman class, on the afternoon of the very day of the attacks, "anyone who can blow up the Pentagon gets my vote," received only a reprimand after a lengthy investigation. The Columbia anthropologist who later called for "a million Mogadishus" at a teach-in also received only a mild rebuke. Most recently, in the summer of 2006, a Wisconsin political scientist and a New Hampshire psychologist were fully protected from any formal sanction after they joined other "revisionists" in suggesting that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been essentially an "inside job," orchestrated by, or in collusion with, the Bush administration. So far, so good, a close observer of academic freedom might have observed as recently as a year ago.

As memories of the horrors of that dreadful day in September 2001 blur and fade, the actual impact upon the academic world of the hijackings and of the War Against Terrorism also becomes increasingly elusive. Three recent observations illustrate the complexity of the current landscape:

- Although the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has formally censured eleven institutions since the summer of 2001, none of the cited transgressions related in any way to the events of September 11. (Four derived from the way New Orleans institutions handled the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, while the others were equally remote from current political tensions.)
- Equally elliptical is the revelation from surveys conducted in the spring of 2007 that the trauma of September 11 may have had a curiously positive impact upon the curricula of many colleges and universities—not only in the growth of student interest in Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic language and literature, but more broadly through heightened interest in religious studies, international relations and foreign policy, and even on the expansion of liberal arts and general education requirements.
- Finally, the number of foreign graduate students headed for U.S. campuses has steadily increased for the past three years, though it has not yet quite regained the international levels of the last year unaffected by anti-terrorism.

Given such trends and crosscurrents, a broader assessment of the condition of academic freedom seems most appropriate.

The state of faculty personnel matters—previously one of the bright spots on this mixed canvas—has become a bit cloudier, and for reasons that may curiously reflect our steadily



Two long-running faculty personnel cases have taken new and tortuous turns, making it more difficult for academic freedom champions to declare victory.

receding memories of the Twin Towers ablaze. Although two prominent September 11 “revisionists” safely dodged the bullet in Wisconsin and New Hampshire, a colleague in Utah fared less well. Brigham Young physicist Steven Jones, a long-tenured senior professor, was placed on leave pending a formal review of his recent scholarship when his university became aware of his controversial published views about the causes of the attacks and possible Bush administration complicity. The official announcement declared BYU’s concern that “Dr.

Jones’ work has not been published in scientific venues”—a desideratum not normally imposed on scholars’ extracurricular writings.

The matter became moot in late fall 2006, when professor Jones opted for early retirement, partly to enable him to pursue without institutional constraint his unorthodox theories about the terrorist attacks. But Jones’ departure from the faculty left unresolved a host of intriguing and difficult issues; other “Patriots Question 911” members within the academic community (such as University of Massachusetts, Amherst geoscientist Lynn Margulies, a longtime member of the National Academy of Sciences) could be deterred by Professor Jones’ plight, even though the ranks of such skeptics and revisionists continues to grow as doubts about Iraq and Afghanistan as

well as the 2001 attacks remain unresolved.

Also within the past year, two long-running faculty personnel cases have taken new and tortuous turns, making it more difficult for academic freedom champions to declare victory. University of Colorado Ethnic Studies professor Ward Churchill has been the most visibly controversial member of a burgeoning group of outspoken faculty. His troubles began early in 2005 with the discovery of a long dormant essay on an obscure website, in which he excused the September 11 hijackers because they “manifested the courage of their convictions,” and charged that some victims of the World Trade Center attacks were “little Eichmanns” who deserved their fate. The Colorado Board of Regents met a few days later and, after promptly rejecting gubernatorial demands for harsher action (including dismissal), directed the administration to undertake a careful inquiry. Because the chosen standard for that investigation was the scope of a public employee’s First Amendment freedom of speech, Boulder campus officials concluded that Churchill’s deeply offensive outburst was nonetheless constitutionally protected expression for which he could not be punished.

The saga did not end there, however. In mid summer 2007 The Colorado Regents accepted a recommendation from University President (and former U.S. Senator) Hank Brown to dismiss Churchill from his long-tenured faculty post—not because of his politically volatile statements (more than just the “little Eichmanns” reference), but because of a proven record of persistent and grave research misconduct. That issue soon became the focus of a completely separate inquiry by a faculty committee that played no part in reviewing the free-speech issues, but grew out of a pre-existing concern about Churchill’s published scholarship.

Yet Churchill and some of his supporters claimed that his research record would have escaped such intense scrutiny but for the “little Eichmanns” furor. Thus, ran the argument, Churchill had been punished through the back door for his political outbursts, even though the front door had been barred by academic freedom and free-speech principles. An analogy to the criminal law doctrine of “fruit of the poisonous tree” did not elude Churchillian defenders. The cogent response of the administration and the regents was that even a suspect path to the unmasking of egregious research abuses should not blind the institution to their gravity, nor should it bar the university from enforcing standards of academic integrity. Since Churchill’s lawyers immediately vowed to take the regents to court, final resolution seems unlikely in the near future.

The other long-running faculty personnel matter that turned sour in 2007 involved professor Sami al-Arian, a Palestinian born computer scientist at the University of South Florida who had organized and led a highly controversial Islamic group. When he admitted on Fox News, just days after September 11, 2001, that he had urged (in Arabic) “Death to Israel” and had raised funds for radical Muslim causes, al-Arian was at first suspended from teaching and barred from campus. His dismissal from a tenured faculty position some months later reflected his indictment by a federal grand jury on charges of aiding terrorist activities. The jury eventually acquitted al-Arian on several of the most serious charges, but deadlocked on others. After spending three years in solitary confinement, with no convictions, he pleaded guilty to a relatively minor charge in return for the government’s promise that he would soon be freed and deported.

Yet, as the summer of 2007 progressed, the deportation did not materialize. Al-Arian remained inexplicably in a Virginia jail on civil contempt charges, while his wife and children (having abandoned any hope for early redemption) prepared to move to Egypt. Al-Arian’s faculty status at South Florida, which had been the focus of an internal campus appeal which the federal indictment aborted, remains unresolved nearly six years after the first adverse personnel action.

Here it should be noted that, while the AAUP’s recent censure list includes no politically volatile cases, the same cannot be said of its formal investigations. An extensive inquiry was undertaken at the University of South Florida soon after al-Arian’s initial suspension, and the resulting report was published, though any prospect of censure or even condemnation of the administration was rendered moot by the criminal charges and incarceration. The beleaguered professor’s deportation would only confirm the mootness of one of the few genuinely troubling personnel actions of the post-9/11 period. (AAUP also investigated the case of an instructor at York College of the City University of New York, whose professional collaboration with an attorney for accused terrorists placed his continuing appointment in jeopardy.)

Thus the record on the vital academic freedom dimension of faculty personnel matters remains, on the whole, fairly benign, if increasingly mixed—still closer to Senator Levin’s sanguine view than to Senator Feingold’s skepticism. Most professors who have evoked official wrath by speaking out on Middle East or other foreign policy issues have incurred only

mild sanctions, if any. In that sense, to this day there has not been a recurrence of McCarthyism—no witch-hunting or red-baiting designed to expose or humiliate unpopular political or social organizations. Indeed, a plea for tolerance of professorial outbursts has come from a wholly unexpected quarter. On three widely separate occasions, no less improbable a champion than Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly has defended academic freedom principles in dealing with such matters. Days after Columbia anthropologist Nicholas De Genova issued his call for “a million Mogadishus,” O’Reilly told his heavily conservative audience: “If I were [Columbia’s president], I wouldn’t fire this guy... because you’ve got to tolerate this kind of speech.”

Several years later, lest his earlier comment seem an aberration, O’Reilly reaffirmed his position. Though he could easily have avoided the issue of Ward Churchill’s faculty status during a segment on the “little Eichmanns” essay and its aftermath, the Fox News host relished an opportunity to declare his position: “I don’t think he should be fired. That would send the wrong message to the rest of the world. America’s a strong enough country to put up with the likes of professor Churchill. Punishing him further would just make him a martyr.”

Finally, to remove any lingering doubt, Bill O’Reilly early in 2006 insisted on protecting Northwestern’s Holocaust-denying engineering professor Arthur Butz, after Butz had praised the virulently anti-Israel statements of Iran’s new president. When a renowned Holocaust scholar on his program suggested that maybe “the guy (Butz) shouldn’t be allowed in the classroom and... shouldn’t be near the students,” O’Reilly challenged her: “Wouldn’t that be a violation of some kind of academic freedom?” When his guest demurred, O’Reilly pressed on to remind her that “you teach at a university and you know what the university is—that it’s a place where all views, even abhorrent views, are tolerated for the sake of expression. You don’t want to inhibit anybody.”

A skeptic or cynic might point out that all three of these controversial professors who evoked O’Reilly’s sympathy had spoken out on one side of the Middle East and U.S. policy debate; the critical test would be whether he would have been equally forceful in defense of an extreme Holocaust affirmer or ardent defender of Israel. Yet for the moment, lacking such a counterweight, so persistent a defense of academic freedom from an unlikely quarter is notable.

Thus, while the picture on campus remains somewhat mixed—the Joneses, al-Arians and a few others have fared less well than they and their supporters would have wished—the current state of public opinion differs dramatically from that which in the late 1940s and early ’50s served to energize and even legitimize vicious attacks on liberal academics by Senator McCarthy and his allies. If one contrasts the recent O’Reilly statements with those of Walter Winchell, Westbrook Pegler and Dorothy Kilgallen (among other pundits of red-baiting days), the preference for Senator Levin’s benign view gains further credibility. The current situation is certainly not all good, but it could be far worse.

The experience of politically controversial foreign scholars seeking to enter the U.S. has, however, been substantially more troubling. Some academic invitees have been barred

altogether on inescapably ideological grounds; others have encountered protracted delays and bureaucratic hurdles that have effectively denied them admission; while a few prospective visitors have waited patiently and have eventually prevailed. The latter path brought about the belated issuance, in July 2007, of a long-sought visa to professor Waskar Ari, an internationally acclaimed Bolivian scholar who for more than two years found himself unable to accept a faculty position at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln because he was apparently persona non grata to the Department of Homeland Security.

Despite intense pressure from U.S. academic groups, and the university’s lawsuit against the federal government, Homeland Security persistently refused to reveal its objections to Ari’s entry, though continuing to order the State Department to deny him a visa. Eventually, though again without an explanation, federal officials relented, making it possible for Nebraska students finally to benefit from Ari’s wisdom in fall 2007. The protracted delay has never been explained, nor has there been any redress or even apology for the heavy burden imposed on the University of Nebraska. And the ultimately favorable outcome does not reassure scholars who might be bound for campuses less aggressive than were the Cornhuskers in going to court to vindicate the rights of valued foreign visitors.

The case of Tariq Ramadan exemplifies the darker side of the access issue. Perhaps Europe’s best-known scholar of Islam, Ramadan eagerly accepted a position as Henry Luce Professor in the University of Notre Dame’s Joan Kroc Institute—hardly a place where, as a *Chicago Tribune* editorial quipped, one would expect to find a dangerous radical. Yet Ramadan’s grandfather had founded an organization some considered “terrorist,” and he had published some thoughtful anti-American and anti-Israeli views.

At the eleventh hour, with his furniture already in South Bend and his children enrolled in local public schools, Ramadan learned he would not receive the promised visa, even though he had lectured frequently and without incident on many U.S. campuses. Despite persistent pleas from Notre Dame’s administration and many others, neither State nor Homeland Security would offer even a hint of the reason why Ramadan was deemed a person who “endorses or espouses terrorist activity”—the basis for the visa denial. Several U.S. academic groups supported Ramadan in federal court, seeking either access or an explanation.

In response to an impatient federal judge’s order, at the end of 2006 the State Department offered—on the very last day for such a filing—the barely credible rationale that Ramadan had contributed roughly \$800 to two European nonprofit groups that provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians. The irony of Ramadan’s treatment was highlighted by the scathing rebuke of an incredulous federal judge: “While the United States has not granted Ramadan a visa to enter the country, Great Britain, its one staunch ally in the battle against terrorism, has not only admitted him into England so that he may teach at

Most professors who have evoked official wrath by speaking out on Middle East or other foreign policy issues have incurred only mild sanctions, if any.

Oxford, but has enlisted him in the fight against terrorism.” (That reference bears elaboration. The government of outgoing Prime Minister Tony Blair had officially sought Ramadan’s counsel by appointing him to a high-level committee established to root out extremism in the United Kingdom. His continued exclusion from the United States has thus become all the more perplexing by stark contrast.)

Official lack of hospitality toward visiting scholars in the U.S. seems, if anything, to have stiffened during the past couple of years. In the spring of 2006, all 55 Cuban scholars who were registered at a Latin American studies conference in Puerto Rico were denied the visas they had informally been assured, without any official explanation. In June of that year a noted Greek scholar, John Milios, who had already received a visa to attend an academic conference in the U.S., was detained at Kennedy airport on his arrival and sent back to Greece—apparently because he belonged to what was described as “a pro-reform communist party.”

Similar treatment was inflicted a few months later on South African scholar Adam Habib, who was detained upon arrival in the U.S. for visits at Columbia and City College of New York, as well as for meetings with NIH and CDC government officials. Informed that his visa had been summarily revoked, he was sent back to South Africa. And in April 2007 Riyadh Lafta, a prominent Iraqi academic physician, was barred from attending a conference at the University of Washington, apparently because he had co-authored an article in a British journal which estimated that some 650,000 of his countrymen had died as a result of the U.S.-led invasion.

When it comes to foreign graduate students seeking U.S. programs, however, the climate seems to have improved markedly. The responsible federal agencies have sought to expedite the processing of visa applications from such

students, and have relaxed requirements that academic visitors must return to their home countries during U.S. study. These more benign policies, reinforced by more vigorous university recruitment programs abroad and expanded joint degree programs with foreign institutions, have brought about a steady recovery in the enrollment of international students, which had so precipitously declined right after September 11, 2001. A survey of graduate schools in 2007 reported a healthy eight percent gain in the most recent year, following a twelve percent increase the previous year—positive signs of steady improvement, though still below levels in the last year unaffected by anti-terrorism pressures.

Meanwhile, outbound American scholars have encountered surprising barriers to academic travel. A group of more than 400 Latin American experts brought suit in 2006

to challenge the constitutionality of a Treasury Department ruling that had markedly tightened already cumbersome restrictions on U.S. participation in academic programs offered in Cuba by U.S. universities. In August 2007 a federal judge in Miami upheld the restrictions, despite the conceded absence

of any compelling or critical national security interest in barring such travel. There need exist only, ruled the judge, “an important or substantial government interest.” In this case it sufficed that the government sought, by banning all scholarly exchanges, to “deny the Castro government hard currency” and to “hasten Cuba’s transition to a free and open society.”

The judgment also rejected the scholars’ academic freedom claims, since the challenged restrictions were, in the view of the court, “content-neutral” and constrained only the location of classes, not the subject matter of study. A few months earlier a state court had sustained, against a comparable challenge, a Florida law that barred students, professors and researchers at public universities from using state or federal funds—or even private foundation grants administered by the institution—for travel to Cuba or any of the several other “embargoed” nations, however meritorious (or even valuable to national security) the planned research might be.

At least one other state has entered an arena that has been primarily the focus of federal legislation. In the spring of 2006 the Ohio General Assembly enacted its own Patriot Act, which imposed (among other unfamiliar burdens) a unique requirement that every applicant for public employment—including new faculty and even graduate teaching assistants at the state’s public universities—must satisfactorily answer six questions the likes of which had not been seen since the McCarthy era. Applicants must declare that they have never “solicited any individual for membership in an organization on the U.S. Department of State Terrorist Exclusion List (citing some 53 groups, many of which lack any Middle Eastern connection);” that they have not “used any position of prominence...to persuade others to support” such an organization; and that they have never “committed an act that [they] knew, or should have known, affords material support or resources to any such organization.”

Given the undefined nature of most of the law’s key terms, and uncertainty about the consequence of a conscientious refusal to respond, the wonder is that more potential Ohio college teachers have not been deterred by this apparently unique exaction. (California lawmakers considered, but have not adopted, a strikingly similar law, also evocative of McCarthy days.)

In at least one important respect the past couple of years seem to have brought about a more hopeful prospect for U.S. scholars and their universities. Although legislation that would mandate “balance” in curricula and faculty hiring, and would target political “bias” in the classroom, has been introduced in nearly twenty states, no such proposal has actually become law. Indeed, legislative hearings that addressed such proposals have typically highlighted the frailty of the case offered in support of these extreme measures.

Pennsylvania, probing more deeply than other states, created a special legislative committee on “Academic Freedom in Higher Education,” designed to determine whether students on public campuses were subject to unacceptable bias or imbalance in courses or curricula. After extensive hearings around the state, the committee concluded late in 2006 that few such problems existed, that most institutions had well publicized channels through which students could raise

The record on the vital academic freedom dimension of faculty personnel matters remains, on the whole, fairly benign. There has not been a recurrence of McCarthyism.

Some politically controversial foreign scholars seeking to enter the U.S. have been barred on inescapably ideological grounds. Others have encountered protracted delays and bureaucratic hurdles that have effectively denied them admission.

concerns, and that no legislative response was warranted. This conclusion was a stunning defeat for David Horowitz and other proponents of such intervention, and undoubtedly explains the much slower pace of such initiatives in the latter half of 2007. The conservative “Academic Bill of Rights” may not be dead as an issue, but it has surely been muted since its heyday several years ago.

Finally, brief note should be taken of the effect of changing national policy on academic research after September 11, 2001. Specific provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act and laws regulating such sensitive matters as the laboratory handling of biohazardous materials have hampered or complicated the research process, though perhaps less than might have been feared in the fall of 2001. Expanded use of the elusive label of “sensitive but unclassified” has undoubtedly complicated the grants and government-funded research of many laboratory scientists, but such problems were not previously unknown. Indeed, there have been two rather striking victories in the ongoing struggle between protecting national security and protecting the academic research agenda. Under threat of litigation, the Treasury Department substantially modified regulations of the Office of Foreign Assets Control which at one point virtually barred either publication by a U.S. journal of an article by a scientist from any of the five trade-embargoed nations, or collaboration leading to publication between a U.S. researcher and a colleague from any of those suspect countries.

Equally heartening was the scrapping by federal officials of the dreaded “deemed export” plan, which would have forced research institutions to obtain export licenses before foreign graduate students and visiting scholars could work on certain sensitive laboratory projects in the U.S. The license requirement would have been tied not to a scholar’s place of residence, but rather to the place of birth, and would have greatly expanded the scope of potentially regulable technologies and programs. In response to a chorus of protests from the U.S. academic community, by spring 2006 federal officials conceded that vital security interests could be protected through less intrusive measures, and they effectively abandoned the now-vilified proposal.

For once, a unified protest from the affected academic and research communities had found receptive ears in Washington. Given such partial (and admittedly occasional) victories, the impact of the anti-terrorism campaign on the nation’s academic research community has been undeniably

substantial, though far less onerous than many observers initially feared.

That assessment invites three concluding observations: First, it is easy to blame all intrusive security-related measures on the terrorist attacks of 2001, when in fact many sources of concern have far earlier and deeper roots. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, for example, dates back to the 1970s. The principal “aiding and abetting terrorism” laws were adopted in the mid 1990s, along with the Clipper Chip, bans on export of encryption software, and other unwelcome measures which, like the 11 AAUP censure actions since 2001 that bear no tie to terrorism or the Middle East, remind us that not everything that troubles us—or imperils academic freedom—can be blamed on Osama bin Laden.

Second, it is also easy to overreact, even to laws and regulations that are concededly burdensome but might not be quite as bad as they seem. One recalls the major national professional organization which advised its members that, should they receive a demand for sensitive files under the PATRIOT Act’s Business Records provision, they not only could not inform the target of the inquiry (which is correct) but that they were also barred from contacting an attorney (which is clearly incorrect and reflects an understandable overreaction).

Finally, to complete this sobering assessment, it is important to note that in the event of another terrorist attack on U.S. soil, all bets are off. Senator Levin would presumably be the first to recognize how much his benign assessment of current conditions depends on at least a stable level of national security, and the absence of any further domestic trauma. Another September 11—perish the thought—and life would surely be very different. ♦

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AN INTERVIEW: Derek Bok

Derek Bok served as president of Harvard University from July 1971 through June 1991. His most recent book is "The Commercialization of Higher Education," published in 2003 by Princeton University Press. This interview took place in Bok's office on the Harvard campus, and was conducted by Kathy Witkowsky, a frequent contributor to National CrossTalk.

Kathy Witkowsky: In your book, you argue that increasing commercialization threatens to erode the values that are at the heart of higher education. But you also point out that profit-seeking isn't anything really new. What's different about today's educational landscape that has you so concerned?

Derek Bok: Well, I think two things are different since around 1980. One is that the amount of profit-making activity has increased greatly, in part because there are very pressing needs for funds and greater competition among universities that increase the demand. But the most important reason is that, as the society gets more complex, and there are greater needs for expert knowledge, new scientific discoveries, and mid-career education, which has boomed in the last 25 years, frankly, the opportunities to make money from the things that universities do have increased enormously. That's one change.

The other change is that profit-making activity has moved from the periphery of the university, in things like athletics or extension schools or correspondence schools, into the heart of what universities do: into scientific research, and now with the Internet and distance education, which can be established on a profit-making basis, into education as well.

KW: What do you think is at stake here?

DB: First of all, I'd like to make clear that this is not all bad. The opportunity to make money is sometimes a very useful incentive, not just in the private economy, but in higher education as well. The fact that universities since 1980 have been able to get patents on discoveries made with government funds has meant that universities have become far more active in trying to see opportunities, to translate the scientific advances that they make into useful products and processes. And that, after all, is why taxpayers have given us the money, and is certainly, therefore, in the public interest.

Nevertheless, it's very important how this process of profit-seeking goes on, because it can easily get out of hand and erode essential values of the university. The most vivid illustration, of course, is the form of commercialization that we've had the longest: athletics. You can see very clearly how big-time athletics has eroded the integrity of the admissions process, has affected the academic standards in the nature of courses, and sometimes even grading standards applied to athletes. What happens is those risks multiply when profit-making activities are not simply peripheral to the university but lie at the heart of what we do.

KW: Can you give me some examples, beyond athletics, of what turned on the warning lights for you about this commercialization?

DB: To begin with, it was the succession of get-rich schemes that came to me (as president of Harvard), and my recognition of how pervasive this problem was and how seductive a lot of these issues were.

For example, I mention in my book the proposal by a pharmaceutical company to give [Harvard] a million dollars a year, for the medical school to produce a series of programs on cardiology. We would control the content, but there would be commercial advertising. And the question is: Do you want to do that?

Well, it's very easy to make a case that that's easy money—take it. I mean, so there's advertising. There's advertising everywhere, including in the football programs at your own university. So what's the problem?

Well, the more you think about it, the more you see that turning education into a commercial product with advertising does have subtle costs connected to it that probably are best avoided. But at least to me, it wasn't immediately obvious that that was so. So I began to see: Gee, these are really tough problems. It's easy to make mistakes here.

KW: Do you distinguish between advertising on campus, or perhaps an exclusive contract with a company to sell its product on campus, and advertising or some sort of sponsorship, as you are speaking of, with these medical programs? Is there a difference there?

DB: No, I think they're all part of the same problem.

Advertising is helpful in many ways to companies, and I'm sure if they could advertise in classrooms and things of that kind we could get money for it. You have only to see what has happened in high schools.

Many people aren't aware of the degree to which the desire to advertise has gotten into high schools—not only to get exclusive concessions, which of course always have bonuses for increasing the consumption of soft drinks and fast foods, but getting into the curriculum. So that you begin to provide math curriculum based on how many chocolate chips there



Dana Smith, Black Star, for CrossTalk

This process of profit-seeking can easily get out of hand and erode essential values of the university.

are in a bag of somebody's cookies, chemistry experiments on whether one brand of spaghetti sauce is really thicker than another, environmental courses based on the life cycle of a well-known athletic shoe. These are curricula that are actually in use in high schools as we speak. So we should not minimize the threat that this poses or the ingenious guises in which it can come.

KW: So, left unchecked, how far do you think this trend toward commercialization in higher education could go?

DB: Oh, I fear it could go pretty far. Again, one can look to athletics as an example of the process that has gone on for many decades. And certainly the fact that compromises have been made with values that most people would say are very fundamental—your admissions standards; your grading; the nature of your curriculum; and the fact that academic officials have acquiesced with those compromises—makes you believe that there are dangers that we need to look out for, and that it would be rather foolish to assume that somehow because it's higher education and we have high motives and lofty purposes that we are not going to get into trouble if we don't watch ourselves.

KW: Is some of that compromising going on now?

DB: Yes, there's enough so that you can see the problems very easily. There are certainly cases of excessive secrecy. There are cases in which there have been corporate efforts to manipulate published academic research. There have certainly been instances of conflict of interest in which people had financial interest in the outcome of the research that they were carrying out.

We're at an earlier stage in education-for-profit via the Internet, but as you see universities partnering with venture capitalists who expect to make a large return from the money that they put into distance education via the Internet, one can

expect that decisions by some institutions for Internet education will be driven more by their moneymaking potential than by their capacity to enhance the learning of students. And those two are not the same. And profit-making efforts in education may in some circumstances produce high quality education, but there will be other circumstances in which it does not, and students will suffer as a result.

KW: How can you distinguish between the profit motive that is beneficial to education and the profit motive that is detrimental to education?

DB: That, of course, is the trick. And I don't think I can give you a single formula. I think there are a series of categories of behavior. You have to look at each one and try to draw some guidelines.

I do point out in the book that simply looking at each situation as it arises on an ad hoc basis is almost certain to get us into trouble, because the benefits are real and immediate, and the costs are much more intangible, long-run, not easily

attributable to any single decision. And so you're bound, bit by bit, to slip into the same sorts of problems that you have in athletics.

So you do need guidelines. But there isn't a single guideline that can be applied to all situations.

I think you have to be very careful about what your values are and then apply them to each category, such as secrecy, or conflict of interest in scientific research, or profit-making ventures in education, and then you try to draw some lines.

KW: Who should be ultimately responsible for ensuring the academic integrity of each educational institution?

DB: At present, the responsibility lies very heavily in the hands of the president or the top very few officials at the university. And I believe that that is unwise, because the president is under enormous pressure to raise money. He or she is often judged on how much money they raise. And as a result, without some greater support from other constituencies in upholding the essential values of the institution, I fear that this process of erosion is bound to take place—just as it has in athletics.

So I believe there is a role for the trustees to play, not just in paying attention to how much money we're raising, but by paying a lot of attention to how we're doing it: not by getting into the micromanaging details of each research contract, but by making sure that there's a careful review of corporate research to make sure that there are appropriate guidelines for secrecy and conflict of interest, and by doing their best to make sure that key officials, like the technology transfer officers, know that they will be rewarded as much for retaining values as they will for earning money.

I think, if anything, even more important is the engagement of the faculty. There's a very dangerous tendency at work now to say that the faculty is sort of an obstruction—that in today's fast-moving economy, universities cannot tolerate the delays and obfuscations of faculty, and that the creative administration has to be agile and move quickly and therefore needs more authority, and the faculty should be kept out of these things. I think that's fatal.

KW: As you point out, the president has a very important role here. As these financial pressures come to bear on universities, do you think that we are now entering an era in which we're hiring presidents more for their business savvy than for their understanding of academics?

DB: Absolutely. And I think to some extent it's inevitable: Universities are much bigger and more complicated institutions than they were, and therefore administrative skill is more important than it was.

Presidents are being hired for their fundraising abilities. And I understand why: The need to raise funds is very great. But I do think it represents a real danger, because presidents

Presidents are being hired for their fundraising abilities. And I understand why: The need to raise funds is very great.

The more you think about it, the more you see that turning education into a commercial product with advertising does have subtle costs connected to it that probably are best avoided.

are able to spend less and less time on the internal academic side of the institution. And in the end, they remain academic leaders. And I don't think we will have distinguished leadership by people who are disengaged from the process of teaching and learning and discovery and scholarship that is the heart of what we do.

KW: How big a role do you think government should and will play in the future of higher education's relationship with the marketplace?

DB: I very much hope that we can do a good enough job of policing ourselves so that the government doesn't have to come in and do it. And I don't say that as a sort of knee-jerk conservative reaction to government. I think that government is essential in many spheres of life.

But I don't think that [legislators] do as a good a job as really careful universities could do in drawing lines—in part because they don't know so much about education, in part because institutions are so different that trying to make uniform lines from Washington is almost bound to create really awkward and unworkable situations on some campuses. And of course, because the administration of government rules is very time-consuming, with lots of paperwork that inevitably results in mistakes that sometimes can be quite harmful.

KW: It seems like one thing government can do, as you suggest in your book, is provide stable financial support. How important is that?

DB: Stable institutional support is important because if there are sudden drastic declines in support, a campus will grow desperate. The cries of pain from students with lower scholarships, and professors whose programs are yanked out from under them, are sufficiently intense that people are simply not going to pass up any opportunity they can find to

Stable institutional support is important because if there are sudden drastic declines in support, a campus will grow desperate.

exploit new sources of funding. And it's when you act in that way, out of a sense that, "I'm doing this for survival," that talk of preserving essential values and so forth is going to go down the drain, because those values are intangible, they're

long-term, they simply can't stand up against an acute need for funding now in order to avoid inflicting real pain and damage to the institution.

KW: So what is the solution to this slide into commercialization?

DB: Like most things in life that matter, eternal vigilance. You have to be aware of the problem; you have to try to establish safeguards in the form of guidelines; you've got to try to create incentives and job descriptions that make it in people's interests to adhere to those guidelines and to respect

those academic values. And you need to engage the different constituencies of the university in some appropriate way, so that you don't simply look to one or two individuals who have extreme pressures on them to do the whole job.

And if you do that, you could probably do a pretty good job of resisting these problems. If you don't, I think it's pretty likely we're simply going to go the road we have in athletics.

KW: Are you optimistic that this trend can be halted or reversed? And how much has been sacrificed already?

DB: I think we're in an early enough stage that nothing is irreversible in the areas of education and research, which are the areas that really matter. I think the problem with athletics is largely irreversible. I think we can make some improvements, but I don't think we can ever overcome our problems completely. So that's a kind of warning lesson: Don't let it go on too long.

Fortunately, in education and research, the process is much younger, and I don't see anything being irreversible. So if we are aware of the dangers and begin to pay more attention to resisting them, although we can never achieve perfection, I think we can do a pretty tolerable job of keeping our difficulties within bounds. ♦



Killing Academic Freedom Softly

The muzzling of professors who do not enjoy the luxury of tenure

By David L. Kirp

NOT SINCE THE 1970 contretemps over Angela Davis, the onetime Black Panther fired by the California Regents, and maybe not since the days of Joe McCarthy, has academic freedom been so prominently in the news. Larry Summers, Ward Churchill—the media are drawn to these controversies like the children of Hamelin heeding the Pied Piper’s call. But almost no one is paying attention to a more pervasive assault on academic freedom: the muzzling (and consequent self-silencing) of those whose jobs hold no promise of tenure.

For the Rip Van Winkles who slept through the recent goings-on, here’s a quick recap. Last winter featured Harvard President Larry Summers’ ill-considered foray into gender and genetics. When the remarks were made public, there were calls from the Left for Summers’ head and a “no confidence” vote by the Harvard faculty. “Let the man speak,” the Right demanded.

Soon thereafter, Ward Churchill, a Native American professor at the University of Colorado, was lifted out of obscurity and into the hall of shame for having described the victims of the World Trade Center as “little Eichmanns.” Defenders of academic freedom bemoaned the fact that several colleges withdrew speaking invitations once these vituperative remarks came to light. Meanwhile conservative critics took time off from vigorously defending Summers to demand Churchill’s head; on Fox TV, Bill O’Reilly feasted on the hapless Native American for days on end. Then Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia, ventured a Solomonic resolution of a clash between pro-Israeli students and a Palestinian professor who had supposedly denigrated them. On Morningside Heights, both sides cried foul—and, of course, demanded Bollinger’s head.

These events prompted noisy debates over this vexed and vital matter: How should professors’ right to speak their minds be distinguished from professorial abusiveness, proselytizing and sheer quackery? “Tyranny of the enlightened” versus “the new McCarthyism”—from both sides of this ideological divide the insults flew.

There ought to be no debate about the proposition that college teachers can assign challenging readings, pose tough and controversial questions, set high standards and resist grade inflation. To tenured professors, these matters are as taken for granted as air. Yet in many institutions it’s risky business for anyone who is not on the tenure track to behave in this way.

The number of such instructors is substantial. In 2001, full-time non-tenure-track faculty accounted for a third of all full-time faculty, and those numbers are growing rapidly. Half of the newly minted Ph.D.s who go into full-time teaching hold jobs with no prospect of tenure—and this doesn’t count the

Ph.D.s who can only secure part-time teaching assignments. Many of these no-hopers, it appears, enjoy precious little academic freedom.

I say “appears” because there is no way to know how many instructors are in this parlous situation. Deans and department heads, schooled by campus lawyers in the litigious ways of the world, are rarely foolish enough to fire someone on the grounds that the instructor is too intellectually challenging—that would risk, if not a lawsuit, at least embarrassing publicity. Rather, as the British say, these teachers are made redundant, told that their courses will no longer be offered, or simply informed, with no reason given, that there’s no longer any need for their services.

Why might this happen? Perhaps a student with a heady sense of self-entitlement has complained about having been put upon in class; perhaps the instructor has gotten mixed reviews for being overly demanding; or perhaps a parent has complained that the topic of the day should be off limits for impressionable undergraduates. In an environment in which students are treated as customers and the customers know best, there are many reasons why an administrator might decide to show an adjunct the door. It’s easy enough to hand out pink slips, since these jobs come with no guarantees; and college teaching remains a buyers’ market, with unemployed Ph.D.s looking for piecework.

What’s more, fear of such treatment prompts instructors to censor themselves—to give inflated grades, make anodyne assignments, hand out reading lists composed of pabulum and keep those readings short. After all, why should a lecturer risk losing a teaching gig by saying something that might cause trouble? Speak truth to power is the mantra in academe, but these instructors are obliged to cower before power.

The American Association of University Professors, long-time guardians of academic freedom, can’t count these cases. And because of the long odds and fear of being blackballed, adjuncts rarely file lawsuits against a school that has issued a long goodbye. A few years back, a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article recounted a fistful of examples. There were tales of instructors who had lost their jobs after talking about pornography in an ethics class, using racist



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language in a communications class in order to make a point about offensive speech, or criticizing twelve-step programs as cultish.

All this was news to me. Ever since, I've been trying to guesstimate the seriousness of the problem by conducting my own, decidedly unscientific experiment. Whenever I lecture on a college campus, I find a way to raise the issue. From the audience there invariably come nods and murmurs of recognition, and after the talk a couple of those murmurers tell me their stories. The specifics vary but the themes are the same: the warnings from department chairs or kindly colleagues to be gentle interlocutors and charitable graders; above all not to wander into the dark forests of sex and politics, where the possibility of committing thought crimes is ever-present.

Whenever those tales are recounted, I recall the heresies I have uttered over the years—remarks that, if taken out of context, violate almost every cherished belief of both Right and Left. Those comments have all been in the service of getting students to think hard about complex questions of ethics and social justice: That's my vocation. Never once did I imagine the job might actually be at risk—but then again, I enjoy the luxury of tenure.

My unscientific experiment has another component. During these campus visits I tell the adjuncts' stories to tenured professors. They are "shocked, shocked," as Captain Renault famously says in "Casablanca." And then, invariably, they quickly change the subject.

Even professors who consider themselves champions of academic freedom—and that's almost all of us—seem to forget that while our freedom to speak our minds is important, it's equally essential that the freeway flyer who occupies a desk in the shared office down the hall be able to teach a challenging course. Ultimately we're all in the same boat, since the successful muzzling of any instructor, whatever his or her status, invites the institutional managers to adopt a cast of mind about contentious speech that potentially knows no limits.

Academic freedom is hardly the no-hopers' only problem. They are paid a pittance and receive no health benefits. They struggle along without job security, and so must keep hunting for new jobs as ceaselessly as birds hunt for food.

Peonage isn't the only way to treat these instructors. A number of universities—MIT and Duke among them—have recently established professors of practice, non-tenured multi-year contracts for talented teachers or practitioners who don't want the publish-or-perish life. Such arrangements give life to the rhetoric of an academic community.

As NYU President John Sexton told his trustees, "new forms of faculty ought to exist because they bring value to the academic enterprise." Such institutional respect and academic freedom go hand in hand: Professors of practice, with as much job security as almost anyone in the private sector, will likely feel freer to speak their minds. But such benign university behavior is still a rarity; and because it is relatively expensive,

the idea encounters resistance from the bean-counters.

Tenured professors are in a good position to speak out—to press university administrators to treat non-tenure-track faculty decently and to defend their classroom bravery. But these matters rarely receive attention from the professoriate, which by its behavior prefers the ignorance-is-bliss approach to the underside of academic life.

The chair of an economics department at a research university I visited recently put the point bluntly: "Anyone who isn't on the tenure track just isn't part of the real faculty." That's not exactly what the ideal of higher education as an intellectual commonwealth calls to mind. On the contrary, it's reminiscent of the deal that senior pilots at United Airlines struck with their bosses. Continue treating us like kings, those veteran aviators said to the bankrupt company, and we won't obligate you to give new pilots the same perks.

The United pilots actually come off looking better than the academic old guard. They did insist on decent treatment for the newcomers, and that's more than can be said of the professors. ♦

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College teaching remains a buyers' market, with unemployed Ph.D.s looking for piecework.

How should professors' right to speak their minds be distinguished from professorial abusiveness, proselytizing and sheer quackery?

AN INTERVIEW: John Sperling

John G. Sperling founded the Institute of Professional Development—in the burgeoning field of for-profit higher education—in 1973, while teaching at San Jose State. He later began what became the University of Phoenix, which was accredited in 1978 by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In five years ending last December, the University of Phoenix added 42 learning centers to 23 already in place. With more than 40,000 students, it is the largest accredited private university in the nation. This interview was conducted by National CrossTalk correspondent Carl Irving.

Carl Irving: Your new approaches to higher education have clearly appealed to older, working, more focused students. Does that mean you have exposed some fundamental flaws in traditional nonprofit colleges and universities?

John Sperling: We started this in 1972-73. I had to create a model to address needs in ways that simply were not traditional. This offended traditionalists, some of whom were bitterly opposed to what I had created. They did everything they could to say [my approach] was illegitimate.

To oppose a measure we had introduced to deal with this issue, they argued that if restrictions weren't maintained, diploma mills would come into California. By implication we were a diploma mill. Stories were planted in the newspapers to that regard.

That gives you some idea of the vehemence and fear these people saw in this new model. I had been an academic for 20 years and therefore could understand how they felt. It isn't that I sympathized with them, but I certainly could understand their feelings. It just boiled down to: Are you going to serve this population, is it a legitimate population to serve, and if it is, do you have to have a model that allows you to serve it?

CI: How do you define this population?

JS: Working adults who haven't finished their bachelor's degrees, or who want a master's degree. They're working full time and, as one of our students said, they've got kids, they've got dogs, they've got lives, and you've got to fit the education into these complex lives.

People commute to Silicon Valley all the way from Santa Cruz. They have a three-hour commute every day. They have to worry about all sorts of things. They are adults leading complicated—or if not complicated, certainly time-constrained—lives.

CI: Why didn't traditional institutions become aware of this?

JS: They might have become aware of this, but you've got to understand that institutions of higher education have been operated for the benefit of the faculty. The faculty, I suppose those at any college or university worthy of the name, thought

of themselves as creators of new knowledge, and to do that you had to do research and writing, teaching being secondary.

For instance, when I was at Berkeley as a graduate student, the professor came in and he gave three lectures a week and maybe a seminar. That was it, and all the teaching was by myself and this army of my fellow teaching assistants.

I knew something about the subject matter, but I didn't know a thing about teaching. But I'm not so sure the professor knew any more about teaching than I did, because that was not the way he defined his professional life.

So why should they bother about this other population? For instance, they would have to teach at night. Well, they want to go home to study and write and don't want to be bothered with students.

CI: Did you find this to be true later, when you were a professor at San Jose State?

JS: San Jose State College moved from a normal school to a state university, and everyone wanted to write, to be published, to be recognized in his or her profession.

CI: But aren't researchers the best teachers?

JS: Knowledge now is so universally available that you would have to be creating some very esoteric new knowledge to be in a position where the students would be the ones to be the primary beneficiaries.

CI: Could you say that your faculty are out there every day learning on the job and thus are more proficient in what they teach?

JS: Well I did have one professor at Berkeley who influenced me greatly. He was a history professor who defined history as the usable part of the past, and I define each of the subject matters that we deal with at the University of Phoenix in terms of what is the usable part of that particular body of knowledge. Our students are



Jeff Topping for CrossTalk

“Clearly, as is widely recognized by those familiar with it, we have the nation’s most sophisticated quality management system in higher education.”

busy. They are not here simply to expand their horizons; their horizons are pretty wide already.

They've formulated their basic philosophy in life. They've decided whether they're Democrats or Republicans. Their social sensitivities have been formed. To treat them like 17- or 18-year-olds was not only futile, it was demeaning. What they needed was the usable part of the bodies of knowledge that were included in any subject matter that was being dealt with.

CI: How do you define a BA? Granted, your students are more mature, but don't they also need some expansion of their minds?

JS: Remember, I'm talking about undergraduate study. It's only been in the last couple of years that we give lower-division courses. So all of our students had had their general education requirements before they came to us. Now that we've begun to deal with younger students, we have a dean of general education, who is responsible for the philosophy, the sociology, the English, the biology and the various other courses.

All of our upper-division courses are professional, so we are not trying to turn out sociologists or political scientists or historians. We're trying to turn out business administration majors, nurses, counselors, teachers.

CI: Don't upper-division majors also take political science or economics?

JS: Not very often. But obviously we have economics, although we aren't training economists. We're training managers, who have to have the knowledge of business and accounting. When you turn out a person whom you expect to be a competent manager, the two years of a full set of courses is just barely enough, in my opinion.

CI: How do you define a BA for a business major?

JS: If you look at the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or various higher ed "think tanks" or study centers, they have determined that there's no consistent definition of a BA. It simply doesn't exist. A BA is what any college or university says it is, when a student receives a degree.

CI: Couldn't one argue that there is some general consensus beyond anything written in stone?

JS: No. There is no general consensus.

CI: How do you maintain standards regarding faculty, students, grading?

How can you do this nationally, let alone overseas where you now intend to expand?

JS: We have a system that is scalable. It's replaceable. And it includes standardized curriculum, a method for hiring faculty, training faculty, including all of the skills we expect an instructor to have in a classroom, including judging skills and grading of student work.

Clearly, as is widely recognized by those familiar with it,



we have the nation's most sophisticated quality management system in higher education.

CI: How do you arrive at that conclusion?

JS: We measure everything, and we have won several national awards for doing so with precision. We measure faculty performance every five or six weeks. We measure student performance every five or six weeks. We measure at least every quarter, the performance of academic counselors, of financial aid counselors, of the various administrative officers at each of the campuses.

We took the concept of continuous improvement and we applied it to our particular industry, which is higher education. It's not the same as Motorola, where they manufacture cell phones and computer chips. But Motorola in what you would call its soft areas—its research, administration, human resources—still strives for what they call "six sigma," and that's one error out of every million processes.

CI: But aren't Motorola's operations much less complex than yours?

JS: I don't think so. Research, development, administration—those are just as humanly complex as higher education.

CI: How about the huge regional differences and demands in this nation? Can you respond to these with a single concept?

JS: I think that in the U.S. we have a common culture. We haven't found that the material we prepare for Los Angeles is any different from what we need to prepare for Detroit or Seattle.

CI: What about overseas?

JS: I'm not responsible for that. The president of the university [Jorge Klor de Alva, an old Sperling friend who left an endowed chair at Berkeley to take the post this past February] will be responsible for that, and I'm sure that there will be a need for localization.

CI: You've been to China...

JS: I can see eventually the University of Phoenix might develop a land-based program in China. But it would not be

There's a vast regulatory mechanism designed to protect markets, and our job is to find a way either to go over, around, or, if need be, knock 'em down.

run by Americans. It would be run by Chinese. We would take the model to China and the Chinese would operate it.

The Chinese people in industry have been very favorably disposed toward our model. But of course there is a vast government bureaucracy, so it wouldn't be practical at this time. However, they believe that electronically delivered education would be practical.

CI: There's a lot of pessimism regarding the costs involving online education.

JS: Our online program, with 6,000 full-time equivalent students, is the largest online program in the country. We've been doing it for ten years now.

CI: Is it making money?

JS: Oh yes. There's a very simple system: We decide the (profit) margin that we want, and then we price the product to provide the margin. If we can't sell that product at that price, we don't produce it.

CI: Since you are a for-profit school, are teachers under pressure to pass their students?

JS: I don't think our faculty members are under pressure. We operated tech schools at one time, we had six of them, and it's not the same population. Our average student has been working seven or eight years. He or she's got a family income of \$55,000 to \$60,000, so there's a great deal of difference between that individual and a 17-year-old coming in and trying to learn something about widgets.

We have a highly disciplined student population. They expect a lot from the instructor. Instructors don't get to slide. Students are much more demanding. If a student fails, probably the instructor doesn't even have to fail him. That's because students are required to be members of study groups, and a non-performing student in a study group is expelled by the group. And they always drop out if they are expelled.

CI: That's quite a jump—that students themselves dismiss a fellow student.

JS: When a student is asked to leave a study group, any other group will ask, "Why didn't you keep this person?" Because he didn't do the work.

We've had a couple of court cases in which students say you required me to be a member of a study group, so you must provide me a study group. Our response is that it's plainly set forth in all of the documents—you'll be a member of a study group, and if you can't hack it, well then, it's your problem.

Almost all of our students come from industry, and they're all working, and in almost every industry people work in groups. If you work at Intel, if somebody's dogging it, you're not going to put up with it, because your job is at risk.

CI: What portion of your students are funded by their employers?

JS: Seventy percent of them receive all or a portion from their employers. The total fully supported ranges close to half of all the students.

CI: Is it true that no higher education system has ever

been profitable before?

JS: I think it's summed up in the fact that our system is designed as a production function, with specialized learning outcomes, and those outcomes we believe are equivalent to, or better than, the outcomes in traditional education. Then we design a system the least costly way. We deliver the services that achieve those outcomes.

CI: Some for-profit HMOs have damaged healthcare. Is there any parallel to fear here?

JS: No. First, we have a comprehensive quality assurance system in place. We deliver a service and we price it correctly. They don't have to come. So it's not analogous to an HMO.

CI: You were a professor of humanities at San Jose, and earned a Ph.D. from Cambridge in economic history. Don't you want to expand your academic offerings?

JS: We respond to the market. In California, let's say, it's probably the case that state funded systems won't be able to provide the educational services demanded by the population. So there should be probably several hundred thousand students a year who aren't able to gain admission. That's why I think our lower-division programs, as general education programs, might be very popular there.

Once the general education requirement is met, students either enter into one of our professional programs or they transfer into a more traditional college, if they want to be a sociologist, a political scientist, study English or something else.

CI: At this point, are you cutting into enrollments of traditional institutions or serving a new market?

JS: I think what we are serving is a new market, and traditional institutions are coming into the market we defined and serve. Practically every college and university in California has what I call a copycat program based on the University of Phoenix design. Imitation is the greatest form of flattery.

CI: How about your programs to train teachers?

JS: We have fairly significant programs in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. In California, institutions are trying to maintain their monopoly in teacher training. It's no different from the battles of the early 1980s, attempting to protect the markets of established institutions.

CI: Do you expect these barriers to disappear?

JS: Economic analysis shows that the behavior of these colleges and universities is identical to those of industry when facing outside competition. As Adam Smith said, whenever you have two businessmen together, you have the beginning of monopoly. So they're simply behaving in a very predictable and rational way.

“Practically every college and university in California has what I call a copy-cat program based on the University of Phoenix design. Imitation is the greatest form of flattery.”

They will use the law, they will use regulations, they will use every technique they can, to protect their market. That's the way the world operates.

CI: Do schools hire teachers in states where you are allowed to train them?

JS: They are snapped up as quickly as they are produced. These are post-baccalaureate programs. They all have BAs and we award credentials.

CI: Do you try to overcome opposition?

JS: We have three full-time people dealing with regulatory barriers, two national lobbyists and 30 lobbyists at work in the various states. There's a vast regulatory mechanism designed to protect markets, and our job is to find a way either to go over, around, or, if need be, knock 'em down.

The most recent case of that was in Pennsylvania, where there was a law against for-profit entities offering degrees. It took us three years, but we got a law through the Pennsylvania Legislature that rescinded that requirement.

CI: Do you compete with public and private campuses for the best students?

JS: They're moving into an area that we defined. So we are all competing for students in that market.

CI: Aren't you competing for older students? The average age of students at the California State University campuses (the largest four-year degree granting system in the nation) is more than 27 years.

JS: For the most part our students are full-time, managerial employees. You could not work full-time and be a manager if you are a student at a Cal State campus which offers courses during the day. They are structured for youthful, full-time students, and adult students have to adapt to that system.

Any institution that tries to do everything probably doesn't do everything well. So we've defined our niche, as it were. We've defined our market, and we try to do that absolutely as best as we can.

CI: Still, where does the traditional concept of the well-rounded student fit into your system? Given your own academic background, don't you have concerns for that?

JS: Having taught at San Jose State for a long time, I can say that very few students graduate well rounded in Western or global civilization. It was spotty at best. The only students who

were well rounded were the honors students in humanities programs, which constituted half of their coursework for two years.

BAs come in all shapes and sizes. I doubt that even Princeton or Harvard produces well-rounded students anymore. Students now are so sophisticated when they come

in, and a lot of them have a very good idea of what they want. And if they're married, they want to study bits and bytes.

If they're of a scientific bent, they want to dip right into that. And there's so much information available. And so many venues are available that students can get educated in all sorts of ways.

I just don't think the old paradigms hold anymore. Knowledge has begun to democratize and commoditize and it's just too widely available to say anyone will be able to say, "Come here and we'll provide it for you."

CI: Isn't that a worrisome thought?

JS: Life is worrisome. Life is adventure. If you think we're having trouble, how'd you like to be in Indonesia today?

CI: A history professor turned you on at Berkeley, right?

JS: I'm sure our instructors turn our students on.

CI: But you don't have a history professor.

JS: We have history surveys in (lower-division) general education, and our instructors are quite competent.

CI: You're setting precedents that draw wide attention.

JS: What we do, we define very clearly. People know what we do, and we try to do it very well. So we'll take care of our knitting, and if the critics will take care of their knitting, the world will probably be a better place. ♦

"I think that in the U.S. we have a common culture. We haven't found that the material we prepare for Los Angeles is any different from what we need to prepare for Detroit or Seattle."

The Online Learning Boom

Tailoring college to the needs of working adults

By Gene I. Maeroff

WHAT OBSERVERS TEND TO OVERLOOK as online courses deepen their inroads at institutions of higher learning is that the content of, and audience for, these offerings remains largely specialized. Chances of signing up students for online learning are perhaps greatest in job-related fields in which courses tend to be more about training than about theory. It follows that students are found most readily among adults looking to upgrade or revamp their careers.

Requirements by states and professional organizations that people engage in continuing education help boost enrollments. The constituencies for the courses often include working men and women with positions that make it difficult for them to meet campus residency requirements and sometimes even to break away from work to attend courses. Thus, online courses have the appeal of giving students the chance, among other things, to overcome obstacles of time and place.

These students, in turn, are an attractive group for higher education. Unlike students of traditional age, they have money and are not as dependent on loans or grants. Anthony F. Digiovanni, formerly chief executive officer of the University of Phoenix Online, maintained that what gave his institution a kick start in e-learning was that the online component simply targeted the same audience that the university pursued in its campus-based courses: mid-career professionals.

Cornell University organized its for-profit arm, eCornell, along similar lines. It began by mounting courses for working professionals in human resources management, hospitality management and continuing medical education. These

online courses have been created with the help of Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the School of Hotel Administration, along with the Hospital for Special Surgery, an affiliate of Cornell's Weill Medical College.

Even blue-collar and service workers comprise a potential constituency for adult-oriented e-learning. Job skills of

all sorts seem to lend themselves to online instruction. The 16 institutions that make up the Wisconsin Technical College System, part of the statewide University of Wisconsin, joined forces in late 2001, for instance, to establish a collaborative online presence, etechcollege.com.

This venture represented a first step in lending coherence

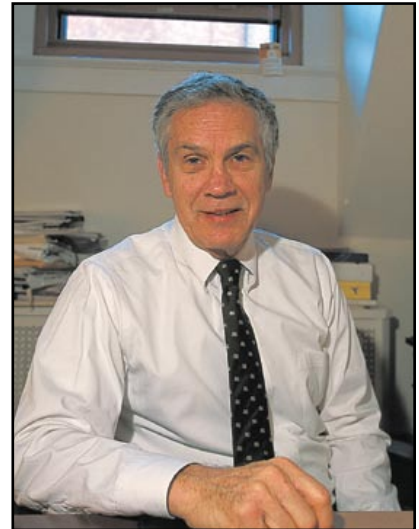
to what had been a collection of disparate online offerings. The 16 colleges continue to determine their individual fates in e-learning, but now, in addition to their separate home pages, they have benefit of a single portal at which potential students can find all of the system's online courses. "Our presidents expect us to coordinate this so eventually there aren't 16 versions of the same course," said Jeff Larson, who was charged with pulling together the project for the system. This is the beginning, some in the system hope, of higher standards and more quality control in the online courses.

Not scheduled to change is the orientation of the courses toward adults looking to change jobs, retrain, or earn certificates essential to getting and retaining their positions. For instance, there are certificates in clinical coding for specialists who analyze health records and assign diagnosis codes, for office workers who use Microsoft software, for wastewater operators, business managers, legal assistants and information management specialists. There are associate's degrees in microcomputer programming, emergency dispatch, and developing websites.

Policymakers sometimes regard education as the engine that drives economic development. Some people in Michigan had the novel notion of harnessing that engine to the Internet. It all began in the mid-1990s as an idea that appealed to the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and the Automotive Research Center. The goal was to use online courses to accelerate workforce development. Governor John Engler embraced the approach and helped persuade the Big Three automakers to commit themselves to buy \$5 million each of professional development from what was dubbed the Michigan Virtual Automotive College.

By 1998, the idea had snowballed into the creation of Michigan Virtual University (MVU), a private, nonprofit, market-driven entity that contracted for the delivery of programs and services by Michigan's colleges and universities and by private training providers. Michigan Virtual Automotive College was absorbed into MVU as part of the Michigan Manufacturing Training Network. In all, MVU by 2002 carried out three missions, all linked to its original aim of economic development—operating Michigan Virtual High School, providing online career guidance, and offering corporate learning services.

MVU was not authorized to grant degrees, which



Online courses have the appeal of giving students the chance, among other things, to overcome obstacles of time and place.

students earned through the educational institutions that offered the courses. The courses were not only for workers in manufacturing and information technology; hundreds of schoolteachers throughout the state took professional development courses online via MVU. A feature available to educators was a program to help them learn to develop their own online courses. MVU's online career guidance was used by employers and by individuals seeking jobs and internships, as well as by high school students trying to plan careers and choose colleges and universities.

Even blue-collar and service workers comprise a potential constituency for adult-oriented e-learning. Job skills of all sorts seem to lend themselves to online instruction.

Michigan Virtual High School, like the online university, brokered courses for students whose brick-and-mortar high schools did not have such courses or whose regular schedules could not accommodate certain classroom courses.

Elsewhere, the emphasis on economic development by Kentucky Virtual University (KVU) provides another example of using online courses for nonprofessional education. In 2002, KVU directed the largest portion of its students to the institutions of the Kentucky Community and Technical

system. The virtual university itself offers no courses, instead facilitating enrollments and providing various support services to students who found their way into online programs through its auspices.

Both for-profit providers and traditional institutions of higher education have recognized that one of the best chances for early acceptance of online courses resides in enticing people who most need the courses for instrumental purposes. Some of the shrewdest, profit-oriented education entrepreneurs have, in the best tradition of commerce, coalesced around these career-oriented, professional-based courses tied most tightly to the needs of employers.

Not surprisingly, courses in the humanities and the social sciences are not featured in most online programs. Philosophy, literature and art history, for example, have a much smaller online following than management, finance and marketing. Working students, whether they attend classes in person or online, usually want courses that will advance them in the workplace, not in the marketplace of ideas.

In shunning traditional-age college students, the University of Phoenix fashioned itself as a place for adult learners. This focus has been the force behind the growth of the University of Phoenix Online. The university aimed a corporate training effort at Fortune 1,000 companies, promoting online courses in such fields as business management, international business, e-business, information technology, project management and marketing.

Phoenix operates on the basis that online students with full-time jobs who enroll in such programs want more education to advance their careers, not to learn Shakespeare or to study ancient Greek civilization. The institution figures that business travel and constraints on time enhance the attraction of online learning for adults who want to learn at hours and places convenient to them. Phoenix assumes

that such students do not want to study abstract theories, that they seek to learn theory only to the extent that they can wed knowledge to practice. Phoenix therefore hires mostly practitioners as instructors, people who are part of the work-a-day world and who teach on the side. Such a policy is undoubtedly cheaper, too, than employing a full-time traditional faculty.

Various colleges and universities have carefully structured approaches to appeal to this same student market. The University of Baltimore, an older institution with a traditional history, went online as a survival mechanism, when its former practices no longer paid dividends. The web was a life preserver for the University of Baltimore, an urban commuter institution where enrollments dwindled in the 1990s.

The university's first online program was a master of business administration degree, offered as a companion to a campus-based program accredited by the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business. The numbers tell the story. In the fall of 1999, the total M.B.A. enrollment was 538, with 522 in the regular classroom-based program and 16 in the new online program. By the fall of 2001, enrollment in the campus M.B.A. program had fallen to 365 but the online M.B.A. program had grown to 141 students, producing a total M.B.A. enrollment of 506 students and stabilizing the program.

By going online, the University of Baltimore no longer had to rely on the willingness of students to commute to its urban locale. This change could be seen in the fact that by 2001, the online M.B.A. program drew 52 percent of its students from outside Maryland, while the on-campus program got only 27 percent of its students from outside the state. The experience at the University of Baltimore demonstrates how commuter institutions might use e-learning to change their enrollment profile without having to spend money to accommodate on-campus students.

Purveyors of online learning see elementary and secondary schoolteachers as one of their biggest potential markets. The numbers are huge. About one of every ten undergraduates prepares to teach, and public and private elementary and secondary schools employ some 3.5 million teachers. Not only do these positions turn over with regularity, but there are also shortages of candidates in some subject areas and in certain geographic locations.

The demand for post-baccalaureate professional development by educators already working in schools is inexhaustible. State regulations and collective bargaining contracts mandate that teachers engage in continuing education, so-called in-service learning.

Schools and colleges of education are pondering how

Working students, whether they attend classes in person or online, usually want courses that will advance them in the workplace, not in the marketplace of ideas.

Purveyors of online learning see elementary and secondary schoolteachers as one of their biggest potential markets. The numbers are huge.

to pitch online courses to this vast market. Leading teacher-training institutions could end up competing fiercely through e-learning for enrollments from across the country. The best-known institutions now have the opportunity to attach their well-known names, what the business world calls “branding,” to courses that they can offer in all parts of the United States and even abroad. Graduate schools of education at Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley,

Columbia University’s Teachers College and other prestigious institutions might eventually associate their names with widespread online continuing education for teachers.

For-profit providers recognized such possibilities long before the traditional institutions, and they now compete with them for the enrollments of such students. A white paper prepared for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in 2001 estimated that more than 650 for-profit degree-granting institutions, and more than 2,000 virtual companies and universities, offered education courses.

Mounting interest among teacher educators looking to assure places for their institutions in the evolving market for professional development and graduate study prompted AACTE to hold a special, day-long institute, “Exploring the Education Industry,” prior to its annual meeting in 2002. Teacher educators from more than 70 institutions went to New York City the day before the annual sessions to attend this institute. It was a program of the sort that would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier, when business was anathema to educators, who still behaved as if they owned exclusive rights to the future of teacher education. “The old model may be ending,” said Allen Glenn of the University of Washington in his opening remarks. “We’re now in a neutral zone, and we’re not sure where it’s going.”

Online learning very likely could subsist almost entirely on a diet of occupationally related courses. Accountants, teachers, health personnel, business and commercial workers, computer specialists—both in undergraduate and continuing education—could provide a wealth of ready and willing cyber learners. Jack M. Wilson, chief executive officer of UmassOnline, a part of the University of Massachusetts, went so far in 2002 as to predict in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that online programs will displace most professional graduate programs in business, computer science, engineering, nursing and education.

Critics of cyber education say it is just as well that the humanities and the liberal arts have not found succor in e-learning. They regard the web as a wrong and possibly perverted place to study Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, the Platonic dialogues, the Federalist Papers or the technique

of Rembrandt. Students can pursue such subjects, in their opinion, only in person.

Such a perfunctory dismissal of e-learning smacks of snobbery. Students in classrooms across the country flock to majors in business, communications, healthcare services and other applied fields that they think will lead to the surest employment. Colleges and universities often sustain enrollments in the liberal arts only by compelling students to take these courses to satisfy degree requirements.

It remains to be seen just how extensive online learning will become. In some ways, it amounts to a stripped-down version of education, devoid of some of the basic amenities that Americans take for granted as part of colleges and universities. Moreover, online courses are still regarded with suspicion, generally lacking the respectability of classroom-based courses. But the growth spurt of job-related online learning demonstrates the imperative for traditional institutions to respond to the demand by working adults for education more closely tailored to their needs. ♦

Gene I. Maeroff is the author of 14 books and many articles and reports. This article was adapted from his book, “A Classroom of One.” His most recent book, “School Boards in America: A Flawed Exercise in Democracy,” was published in December 2010 by Palgrave Macmillan. He may be reached at info@genemaeroff.com.



College Presidents, or CEOs?

Presidential pay is escalating at a time when institutions are cutting budgets

By Robert Atwell

WHILE MANY SITTING and aspiring college presidents seem to be applauding the run-up in presidential compensation, at least a few of us are concerned. The escalation is thus far largely limited to a few wealthy private institutions, but it has also opened the door for the governing boards of public institutions to engage in keeping up with the Joneses.

There is no doubt that the job of college or university president, always difficult, has become much more demanding, with increased attention to fundraising, the intense competition within the industry, and the necessity to work with stakeholder groups with often conflicting pressures. It may not be a 24-7 job, but for many it allows little time for a private life. I have known and worked with hundreds of presidents and have admired the energy, tenacity and vision of most of them.

Governing boards should not follow the recent corporate models characterized by excessive CEO greed, often unrelated to performance.

But it does not follow that governing boards should follow the recent corporate models characterized by excessive CEO greed, often unrelated to performance. For one thing, some of us believe that greed is out of hand in corporate America as the gap between

the compensation of top executives and their workers grows exponentially and scandalously. That is something to be deplored and not emulated.

But more importantly, successful college presidents need the support of their faculties and other stakeholders. Governing boards too often believe that their institutions are just like a business, in which the CEO, supported by a few carefully selected directors and executives, can call the shots. That is not generally the case in academe, where the stakeholders have much more sway than in corporate America. The responsibilities are comparable but corporate CEOs have much more authority than college presidents. The very term “CEO” is a bit misplaced when applied to academe.

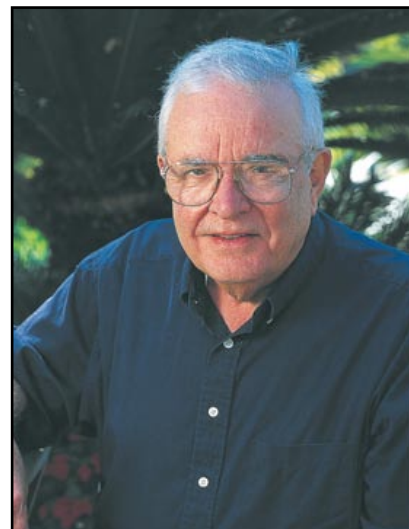
Most college presidents have the credentials and academic record associated with the teaching and research enterprise. This is not to minimize the success of a few “non-traditional” presidents—and I have advocated that governing boards and search committees should be more open to the candidacies of non-traditional persons—but their road to acceptance is made more difficult by the fact that they have not “gone through the chairs.”

Academe has a rather rigid institutional pecking order, accompanied by the snobbery of faculty members who are not easily persuaded to accept any leadership—it is often said that the academy is the last bastion of professional anarchy—and, when persuaded, insist that the leader be one of them. This world view is both the glory and the curse of our industry. Anything that separates the leader from the followers, and escalating presidential compensation is certainly a big factor in this separation, is divisive and ultimately works against the notion of shared governance which is so central to most of our institutions.

It is the case that many presidents (particularly community college presidents) are underpaid, just as it is the case that most faculty and senior staff members are underpaid in light of their responsibilities and their value to society. An oversupply of Ph.D.s in many fields, coupled with the budgetary problems of many institutions, has allowed professorial salaries to fall behind other professions. By contrast, one of the factors contributing to escalating presidential salaries is the mistaken belief that good people will not otherwise take these difficult positions. My experience in the executive search business convinces me that there is no shortage of good candidates for strong institutions, and, while compensation is important, it is not the major driver of presidential aspirants. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to lead a college or a university, and the experience of many of us who have held these jobs is that, with all the difficulties, it is hard to imagine a more rewarding experience.

In addition to the corporate mentality of many governing board members, and the urge to “keep up with the Joneses,” another major force driving up presidential pay is the pressure applied by search firms, which have a tendency to raise the salary bar somewhat higher than necessary in order to be sure their client institutions get the people they want.

Market-driven excesses in football and basketball coaching salaries are another important factor. Those salaries have reached new levels of excess at the top levels of NCAA Division I and are an embarrassing statement about the values



Escalating presidential compensation is divisive and ultimately works against the notion of shared governance which is so central to most of our institutions.

of our institutions. Making little effort to hold the line on coaching salaries and feeling embarrassed about presidents being paid less than football and basketball coaches, some

While compensation is important, it is not the major driver of presidential aspirants.

governing boards simply apply the same misplaced sense of values to the presidents.

For presidential pay to be escalating at a time when institutions are cutting budgets, laying off faculty and staff, denying access and raising tuitions undercuts the credibility of the institutions and damages the

relationship between them and the publics they are meant to serve.

Governing boards are urged to exercise caution in the matter of presidential compensation and not follow the herd. I have long believed that multi-year contracts are more important than high compensation because they afford the

president some security when he or she is forced to make decisions that will seriously alienate one or more stakeholder groups.

Academe is increasingly market-driven in everything from curricula offerings to enrollment management and corporate sponsorship of research. Now we are seeing a seemingly market-driven escalation of presidential salaries. While respecting market economics, our colleges and universities have always stood for values that rise above market considerations. The liberal arts embody a set of values by which an educated person is more than a candidate for the labor force, and scholarship is about more than what will sell in the market. These values are seriously compromised when presidential salaries escalate while faculty and staff salaries stagnate. ♦

Robert Atwell is president emeritus of the American Council on Education.

The Dark Side of Merit Aid

Funding for merit programs has greatly expanded, often at the expense of need-based financial aid

By Donald E. Heller

OFTEN SPEAK with policymakers, researchers and parents about state-sponsored financial aid programs. While almost every state has a grant program that awards scholarships to students based on financial need, the trend in recent years has been toward the creation of programs that award grants based on some measure of merit, rather than financial need.

Legislators and governors have noticed these trends, and for those states that do not yet have merit scholarship programs, or have only small-scale, limited programs, there is great pressure to make available more funds for merit aid.

Most state financial aid programs were founded after the enactment of the federal Higher Education Act of 1965. One of the provisions of the 1972 reauthorization of the act was the creation of the State Student Incentive Grant (SSIG) program. This program created a federal-state partnership whereby the federal government provided matching funds for state-run, need-based grant programs. SSIG sought to reinforce the goals of the Higher Education Act's Title IV programs to promote access to college for low-income students. While in 1969 only 19 states had need-based scholarship programs, totaling under \$200 million in awards, by 1974 these programs had expanded to 36 states and \$423 million.

In the 1990s the Clinton administration attempted to kill the SSIG program (since renamed LEAP—Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships), but Congress has continued to fund it. Its funding level has not kept pace

with the growth of the state need-based scholarship programs, however. This has helped open the door to the creation and expansion of new merit scholarship programs by the states, moving them further away from the goal of using grants to promote college access for needy students.

The inexorable trend toward merit

scholarships has been well documented. Between 1982 and 1998, state funding for need-based grants for undergraduates increased 88 percent (in current dollars). During the same period, funding for merit programs increased 336 percent.

In 1982 the share of grant dollars in the merit programs was 9.3 percent of the total appropriated by the states; by 1998, this share had doubled to 18.6 percent.

While the Georgia HOPE scholarship program has garnered much of the national attention, other states have jumped on the merit aid bandwagon in recent years. Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, Texas and Washington have either created new merit programs or have greatly expanded the funding for existing programs, often at the expense of need-based financial aid.

There are a number of characteristics of these merit aid programs that are troubling from the standpoint of public policy. Having examined several of these programs, including how they are funded and the criteria used to determine “merit,” I have reached the point where I can formulate a clear set of recommendations for policymakers who wish to craft these programs in a manner to ensure that they are the most abhorrent to the goal of promoting college access for low-income students.

The recommendations are:

- Use a high-stakes test to determine who will receive the awards.
- Have no income eligibility requirements for the scholarships.
- Fund the scholarships from state lottery revenues or tobacco settlement funds.

Use a high-stakes test to determine who will receive the awards

The relationship between standardized tests and socioeconomic status is well established. In general, groups who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education in this nation—poor, African American, Hispanic and Native American students—score lower than students from higher income, white and Asian American families. Thus, the use of a high-stakes test to award merit scholarships is likely to channel money away from students who need the financial assistance to enable them to attend college, and award it to students who are likely to attend college without the financial help.

An example of this phenomenon can be found in the newly implemented Michigan Merit Award Scholarships. This program, which provides one-time grants of up to \$3,000 for college, awards the aid based on students' scores in



From the perspective of public policy and the use of public resources, it makes little sense to give financial aid to individuals who would attend college without that assistance.

the statewide 11th grade Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests.

In research I conducted with Douglas T. Shapiro of the University of Michigan, we found a large gap in the scholarship qualification rates of white and Asian American students on the one hand, and African American, Hispanic and Native American students on the other. For the first cohort of eligible students, those graduating from high school in 2000, 22 percent of white students and 25 percent of Asian American students qualified for the scholarships. In contrast, the scholarship qualification rates of underrepresented minority students were three percent for African Americans, 11 percent for Hispanics, and 11 percent for Native Americans.

We found the same types of gaps in the scholarship qualification rates when we examined students from schools in richer and poorer communities. Almost one-quarter of the students in the wealthiest communities qualified for the scholarships. In contrast, only six percent of students in the state's poorest communities qualified. Our conclusion is that the program is unlikely to have much impact on its stated goal of increasing access to college in the state.

These scholarship qualification rate differences have led to a "disparate impact," in legal parlance. This disparate impact is the core allegation in a federal lawsuit filed against the Michigan program last June by a coalition of groups headed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan. The suit, *White et al v. Engler et al*, alleges that the program violates the civil rights of minority and poor students in the state through the use of criteria that are not educationally defensible. The suit is expected to go to trial this year.

A similar suit has been filed in federal court in Arkansas, alleging that a merit scholarship program run by that state also discriminates against minority students. The Arkansas Governor's Distinguished Scholar program, which bases the scholarships on students' SAT or ACT scores, has given only four of the 808 grants awarded since 1997 to African Americans. And this is in a state where approximately 20 percent of the high school graduates are African Americans.

These are only two examples of the misuse of high-stakes tests. (For more on the misuse of high-stakes tests, see "Standards for the Standards Movement: Do High School Exit Exams Measure Up?" by Rebecca Zwick, in the Fall 2000 issue of *National CrossTalk*.) Other states use high-stakes tests for merit scholarships in conjunction with other criteria, which, while a step in the right direction, is still problematic if the use

of these criteria results in the awarding of scholarships to students who are likely to attend college anyway.

Have no income eligibility requirements for the scholarships

As described earlier, one of the strongest predictors of whether an individual will attend college is the income and

wealth of his or her parents. Data from the College Board indicate that 89 percent of high school graduates from families in the highest income quartile (family income above \$74,500 in 1997) attend college. For students from families in the lowest income quartile (below \$25,000), only 53 percent continue on to college. While many factors help to determine whether somebody attends college—including academic preparation and aptitude, and the influence of parents, siblings and peers—the research on college choice tells us that financial considerations are an important part of the equation.

The Georgia HOPE scholarship program, when first introduced in 1993, included a family income cap of \$66,000. Students from families with incomes above this level were excluded from participation. By the program's third year, however, the income cap was eliminated, thus opening up participation to all academically eligible Georgians. Most other state merit programs, such as the Michigan Merit Scholarships and the Bright Futures scholarships in Florida, similarly have no income ceiling.

An analysis conducted by the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission found that almost 40 percent of the scholarships in 1998 went to students from families with incomes above \$60,000 per year. Charles Reed, former chancellor of the state university system in Florida, related a vignette that summarized his frustration with the Bright Futures scholarships. After being approached by a man who praised the program on behalf of his two children who received the scholarships and were attending the University of Florida, "Reed was troubled when he learned that the man was an orthopedic surgeon who could easily afford university tuition without financial aid from the state. 'Something is really wrong when you do that,' Reed said. 'When you can give something away to the middle and upper-middle class, in politics, it doesn't get any better than that.'" (*Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, December 20, 1997)

There are some exceptions to this trend. Texas placed an income cap of \$40,000 on its Toward Excellence, Access & Success scholarships. California's Cal Grant program uses both financial need and merit criteria in the awarding of scholarships. (The recent legislation to greatly expand the Cal Grant program, which has fairly stringent income requirements, is a welcome correction to the movement toward merit programs.)

The exceptions are few and far between, however, as most of the newly established merit aid programs have no financial need tests at all.

While the Georgia HOPE scholarship program has garnered much of the national attention, other states have jumped on the merit aid bandwagon in recent years.

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Fund the scholarships from state lottery revenues or tobacco settlement funds

The nation's two largest merit aid programs, Georgia HOPE and Florida Bright Futures, are funded from lottery revenues in each state. Research on lottery participation has found that tickets are disproportionately purchased by lower-income individuals, making it among the most regressive of all implicit state taxes. Charles Clotfelter and Philip Cook in their 1991 book, "Selling Hope: State Lotteries in America," also note, "The fact that participation declines with education appears to support critics' charges that with their relatively high takeout rates, lotteries take advantage of the ignorance of bettors."

The regressive nature of lotteries, when combined with the income-stratified nature of college participation in the nation, leads to a situation described by the Business/Higher Education Partnership of Florida as a "popular wealth transfer from low- and mid-income people to the well-to-do." (*St. Petersburg Times*, December 21, 1997) In commenting on the trend toward state funding of merit scholarships via lotteries, Philip Cook said, "An education lottery is an odd link between two government enterprises. One exploits the public ignorance, and the other is supposed to be helping that ignorance." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 16, 1999)

Michigan took a different tack toward funding its merit scholarships. Rather than relying on lottery revenues, it instead decided to apply a portion of its tobacco settlement funds (slated to reach 75 percent of the total by 2002) to support the scholarships. While most of the states looked to spend the tobacco funds on public health programs such as

youth anti-smoking initiatives, other states, including Oklahoma and South Carolina, have proposed to use the settlements for merit scholarships.

Like lotteries, cigarette use—and thus the payment of cigarette taxes—tends to be correlated with socioeconomic status. Lower-income and less-educated individuals are more likely to be smokers, and therefore provide a disproportionate share of the state revenues from these taxes. The policy of

funding merit scholarships with tobacco settlement funds represents one more mechanism for transferring financial resources from lower-income to upper-income individuals.

Following these three steps in creating merit scholarship programs will ensure that individual states and the nation as a whole will move even further away from the goal of using financial aid to promote access to college.

Publicly funded merit scholarships are a form of public welfare program, and can perhaps best be understood through analogy with a similar public benefit. We do not provide food stamps to people who can afford to eat anyway—doing so would do nothing to promote the overall nutritional health of the nation. Similarly, from the perspective of public policy and the use of public resources, *it makes little sense to give financial aid to individuals who would attend college without that assistance.* Doing so does little to move us toward the goal of promoting college access for needy students. ♦

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Changing the Subject

Costs, graduation rates and the importance of rethinking the undergraduate curriculum

By Robert Zemsky and Joni Finney

A PALPABLE EDGINESS now swirls about much of higher education. While business as usual still holds sway—at least most of the time and in most institutions—the specter that haunts is a future of escalating risk: for public institutions, more, perhaps even draconian, budget cuts; for private institutions, new worries about where their students are going to come from and whether those students can continue to afford the tuitions they must charge; and for the nation’s richest and most selective institutions, a humbling sense of false pride and broken promises.

Not surprisingly then, just two issues now dominate discussions of higher education: costs and outcomes. American higher education today is an expensive enterprise that frequently lacks both the will and the know-how to do things differently. It is also an enterprise in which an embarrassingly large number of students start but do not finish a baccalaureate education—that, and the fact that completion rates all too often track the wealth, location and ethnicity of enrolled students.

What does surprise us, however, is the fact that these two concerns—escalating costs and disappointing attainment rates—have long been treated as separate issues. It is a division of responsibility as well as blame that mirrors higher education’s view of itself as having a hard side where monies are concerned, and a softer, more nurturing side when helping students achieve their academic ambitions.

What surprises us is the fact that two concerns—escalating costs and disappointing attainment rates—have long been treated as separate issues.

Over the last year we have increasingly come to ask: Are we sure these concerns have either separate causes or separate consequences? Is it not possible that controlling costs, encouraging more adaptable and nimble institutions, and achieving higher graduation rates each requires the same rethinking of a collegiate production function that

has become both too expensive and too cumbersome to achieve the academic purposes for which it was originally designed?

...and spend all the money they raise

Since the 1980s, the dominant explanation for how and why colleges and universities cost so much has been Howard Bowen’s telling observation that “universities will raise all the



money they can and spend all the money they raise.” The way to excellence and reputation lies principally in having more money to spend on the good things colleges and universities want to achieve. Just as clearly, the quickest and easiest way to make colleges and universities cost less is to starve them of revenue—a proposition that the recession and state budget shortfalls are now testing with a vengeance.

Given the near absence of new monies and the looming presence of more economic bad news, higher education’s leaders have come increasingly to portray themselves as being caught in what John Immerwahr of Public Agenda has described as an “Iron Triangle.” Somehow they must find ways to simultaneously control costs, increase quality, and improve access—and that, they argue, is simply not possible.

State policymakers, less persuaded by their universities’ arguments and newly frustrated by their universities’ reluctance to change, have begun to experiment with strategies that use the power of the public purse to exact greater efficiencies on the part of their states’ public systems of higher education. And yet the result can best be described as an operational cul-de-sac. Rhetorical tough love hasn’t worked. Budget incentives have not yielded changed educational processes. Reducing state appropriations, along with limiting tuition increases, has yielded public colleges and universities that spend less money without becoming either better or demonstrably different. Salaries can be reduced, positions left unfilled, perks and amenities eliminated, all without impacting the basic production functions that shape the enterprise’s teaching and research missions.

The tragedy of the commons

It is this dismal prospect that has led us to search for a different set of strategies for controlling and perhaps even lowering the cost of a college education. Here, the question we asked ourselves was simply, What costs the most money? And

our answer: the curriculum!

We start, then, with the curriculum, invoking a concept economists use to illustrate how perfectly rational actions on the part of individuals can, when summed, produce unintended and devastating consequences. The “tragedy of the commons” tells the story of what happens when a

American higher education today is an expensive enterprise in which an embarrassingly large number of students start but do not finish a baccalaureate education.

community-owned pasture (or commons) is at or near its capacity in terms of the size of the herd that can be fed without destroying the pasture itself. Even then it remains in the interest of each farmer to increase the size of his own herd since he, like each of his neighbors, has a right to feed all the cattle he acquires on the same pasture where his, as well as his neighbors’ cows graze. The problem occurs when the total number of animals exceeds the pasture’s grazing capacity, and the pasture begins a near

irreversible cycle of decline. For economists, the moral of the tale is that a perfectly rational act (the individual sending just one more animal to graze on the commons) can have a devastating impact on the system as a whole (the withering of a productive pasture).

In many ways the dilemma now facing higher education reflects the tragedy of the commons. Three decades of constantly adding new programs and more choices to the undergraduate curriculum have yielded colleges and universities that are economically unsustainable and educationally dysfunctional. To understand how this came to pass, we need to revisit a piece of curricular history that dates back to the 1960s. Sparked by student revolts in Europe and a wave of student-led political protests in this country, American colleges and universities responded by granting students more personal freedom and by adopting curricular changes that reduced both general education and graduation requirements. In time, the faculty, who had at first opposed student demands that they be allowed to “do their own thing,” discovered that what was good for the goose was even better for the gander. Few faculty enjoyed grading senior theses or comprehensive examinations, or teaching the required course sequences that comprised many major and pre-major programs at most institutions.

What took hold was a laissez-faire environment in which nearly every possible subject was admitted to the collegiate curriculum, provided the new course was taught by a fully qualified member of the faculty. Whole new disciplines and concentrations were similarly added, often in response to demands that full recognition be granted to specialties that previously had been considered outside the accepted canon. At the same time, except in the sciences, most courses became stand-alone experiences not requiring prerequisites or, in fact, much if any coordination among the faculty who taught similar courses in the same department or discipline.

For those of us on the faculty, the lessening and then the elimination of most requirements proved a bonanza. We could teach what we wanted—principally our own

specialties—when we wanted, without having to worry too much about how or what our colleagues were teaching. Each course became a truly independent experience, and our principal responsibility was to absorb our fair share of the enrollments, thus ensuring our department would not lose valuable faculty lines.

For students, this commitment to unfettered curricular choice proved more than appealing—a chance not only to do their own thing, but to change their minds, not just once but frequently. The curriculum became a vast smorgasbord of tempting offerings. Faculty seeking to insure adequate enrollment were careful to tailor their requirements and expectations to meet student tastes. Students could design their own majors and concentrations. But as has become increasingly obvious, too many students also got lost, unsure of what it took to graduate, on the one hand, or, on the other, unsure as to what was actually being asked of them in terms of either subject mastery or learning skills.

Institutions faced even greater problems—and here is the core of the financial side of our argument. The more open-ended the curriculum became—the more faculty and students were free to set their own schedules—the more resources, both financial and human, the institution required to meet its educational obligations. Adding more courses and majors to the curriculum forced the institution to spread its current faculty resources ever thinner, to increase the number of full-time faculty, or, as has proven most often the case, to hire more adjunct faculty.

The result was an almost endless series of undergraduate curricula in which “almost anything goes.” That observation was supplied by the Association of American Colleges (AAC)’s “Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community” (1985). The report went on to complain, “We have reached a point at which we are more confident of the length of a college education than its content and purpose.” What was true then is even more so today. Repeated calls for greater efficiency and the more parsimonious expenditure of public funds and tuition receipts have been rhetorically responded to and then largely put aside. In the meantime the fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum continues unimpeded.

And as before, worries about the escalating cost of an undergraduate education, on the one hand, and, on the other, the large numbers of students who begin but do not finish a baccalaureate education have remained separate

Three decades of constantly adding new programs to the undergraduate curriculum have yielded colleges that are economically unsustainable and educationally dysfunctional.

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concerns. Those who focus on costs talk about outmoded work rules including tenure, presidential salaries and perks, the avariciousness of athletic departments, and higher education's commitment to research always trumping its commitment to teaching. Those who worry about the curriculum continue to focus on its fragmentation,

on a corresponding devaluing of the liberal arts, and on the continued sense that “almost anything goes” when it comes to approving new courses, new majors, even new disciplines.

Curricular change as the solution

The way out of this box, we believe, is to change the curriculum to productively constrain both student and faculty choice. We would start by having students choose not among an expanding menu of courses, but among a much shorter list of curricular pathways—that is, an ordered sequence of courses linked together by faculty design. This curricular structure would yield a much more efficient match between student needs and institutional resources. There would be fewer underenrolled courses and, not so incidentally, more courses taught early in the day as well as on Mondays and Fridays (perhaps even on a Saturday morning).

We would also use a cohort model in which sets of students take most, perhaps even all of their courses together. Faculty responsible for remedial and developmental educational programs using a cohort model report important learning advantages leading to substantial increases in student attainment. At the University of Pennsylvania we teach in a graduate program that employs a fixed curricular pathway (no electives at all) and a cohort model in which peer learning is a constant, and faculty discussions of what and how each of us is teaching occur regularly.

Several other innovations would be made more likely by this restructuring of the curriculum. A changed curriculum that employs well-defined pathways through the curriculum could also award credit for demonstrating competence in the subject without having the student sit through a particular course. In general we believe a changed curriculum could take greater advantage of technology, both to achieve better learning outcomes and to verify that specific competencies have been mastered. In the process of recasting the curriculum it should also be possible to take greater account of the large numbers of students who will earn their undergraduate degrees while attending several, rather than just one, undergraduate institutions. Finally, it is even possible that such a curriculum would allow students to graduate in three rather than four years.

The kind of reform we have in mind has one final distinguishing characteristic—it cannot be accomplished without full faculty engagement. Only the faculty can design the curricular pathways we have in mind—a lesson that those who constantly prattle about greater efficiency and more learning productivity need to keep in mind. ♦

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The West Virginia Experience

Creating a sustainable public agenda for higher education

By Brian Noland

THE DIVERSE INSTITUTIONS that comprise the American system of higher education are currently operating in an extremely volatile policy environment marked by shrinking state support for operations, rising tuition costs, fluctuating commitments to financial aid, and constant institutional efforts to garner essential resources while concurrently reducing operating costs. While these pressures are unrelenting, the demands on higher education to serve the multiple missions of teaching, research and service have amplified as states increasingly turn to universities to serve as drivers of innovation and economic development. These pressures are inflated by the growing state and federal focus on productivity, college completion, and heightened calls for accountability.

As institutions struggle to adapt and respond to these uncertainties, policy leaders have urged states to establish a public agenda for higher education that is focused on developing clear and consistent policy mechanisms whereby institutions work strategically to meet statewide, rather than institutional, goals. At the core of this call to action is the need for institutions to work in a coordinated manner to meet the nation's growing demands for higher education. Concerns over this need have been amplified by the declining position of

In 2006 the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission began a planning process that resulted in the creation of "Charting the Future: A Master Plan for West Virginia Higher Education."

the United States as a world leader in human capital production. Consequently, critics argue that higher education must re-evaluate and modify its mission so that it meets the educational, economic and workforce demands of the nation. Unless institutions are accountable to these changing demands, many fear that they will lose legitimacy and relevance in the face of an evolving educational

marketplace in which the for-profit sector is actively creating and expanding market opportunities.

While there is an understanding and appreciation of the need for states to forge a public agenda for postsecondary education, there has been scant attention paid to how states actually develop, implement and sustain an environment that engages institutions in finding solutions to these broad public

policy challenges. The remainder of this essay will focus on actions taken by policymakers in West Virginia to establish a public agenda. While the policy experience is unique to the state, it contains a variety of elements common across state systems of higher education.

Creating a Public Agenda— The West Virginia Experience

In 2006 the state's coordinating body, the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, began a strategic planning process that resulted in the creation of "Charting the Future: A Master Plan for West

Virginia Higher Education." Built upon civic, corporate and community partnerships, "Charting the Future" outlined the state's public agenda for higher education and focused on addressing critical policy challenges facing West Virginia such as: leaks in the education pipeline, the loss of knowledge workers, blurring institutional missions, increased student debt, and changing job market demands. Concurrently, the state synchronized master planning with the creation of an incentive-based funding formula and the development of new accountability metrics for postsecondary education. Together, these provided the basis for West Virginia's public agenda and served to frame the conversation about the role of institutions across the system in addressing statewide goals.

The public agenda in West Virginia is predicated on the recognition that the democratic and economic viability of the state rests on educating more underrepresented (e.g., first-generation, low-income, rural) students. West Virginia is among those states with the lowest levels of postsecondary educational attainment and the highest number of underrepresented students. U.S. Census data demonstrate that West Virginia has the lowest percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree in the country, ranks 48th with respect to the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 with an associate's degree or higher, and has the sixth highest percentage of citizens living below the poverty line. A recent study by labor economist Anthony Carnevale estimates that the state will need to produce at least 20,000 more residents with postsecondary credentials by 2018. To reach the more aggressive goal set by Lumina Foundation for Education, 60 percent degree attainment across the United States, West Virginia would need to increase the number of adults with postsecondary credentials by approximately 400,000.

Consequently, one of the initial steps undertaken to ensure that higher education is accessible to all West Virginians was to develop partnerships with legislative and executive leaders



to reframe and restructure the state's complement of financial aid programs. West Virginia has historically demonstrated a strong commitment to financial aid; the state ranks fifth nationally according to a recent NASGAAP survey of grant aid per full-time equivalent student. While the state has a rich complement of need- and merit-based aid programs, it faced mounting cost and demand pressures at the onset of the master planning process that placed the sustainability of the largest aid programs in jeopardy. Given the integral role of financial aid as a support structure for the public agenda, higher education leaders worked vigorously with elected officials to restructure these programs and protect and promote the goals of student access and affordability. Faced with escalating cost pressures in the merit-based financial aid program—the PROMISE scholarship—higher education led a series of reform efforts that restructured the program, yielding both additional funding and programmatic stability, thereby negating the annual need to raise academic eligibility standards to maintain budget solvency.

By forging a partnership with legislative leadership, higher education was able to build support for the programmatic goals of PROMISE, as well as the need for increased funding to support the public agenda. As a result, over the course of five consecutive legislative sessions significant annual improvements have been made to the state's financial aid programs, with more than \$20 million in new revenues appropriated to support student access and affordability. Furthermore, during the 2011 legislative session, additional need-based aid funding was provided to offset potential declines in the federal Pell grant program.

Once these structural changes were made to the aid programs, the next step in the implementation of the access goals of the public agenda was the simplification of the college application process. In order to ensure that students and families were aware of financial aid opportunities, the state launched and intensively marketed a one-stop web-portal that provided information on planning, applying and paying for college. Modeled after a similar effort in North Carolina, the College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) was launched in October 2009. Funded through a seed grant from the legislature, CFWV enables middle school students, high school students and adults to explore college and career options, apply to college, and find financial aid.

In addition to the traditional students who enroll in college after high school, policy attention was also given to the 173,000 adults in the state with some college but no degree. In conjunction with institutional leaders and Shepherd University President Suzanne

Shipley, chair of the system's Council of Presidents, the RBA Today initiative was launched. Through direct marketing of the program to adults who had completed 60 or more hours of credit but did not complete their degree, RBA Today (which enhances the state's existing Regents Bachelor of Arts program) has provided a flexible and accelerated degree alternative that supports the broad public agenda goal of diversifying the state's workforce.

In addition to the items noted above, the system has been active in its pursuit of federal and external grant opportunities. Rather than piecemeal federal programs such as GEAR UP and the College Access Challenge Grant, the state worked to coordinate activities under a unified planning structure via the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission's Division of Student Success and P-20 initiatives. In concert with institution staff, the commission has deepened its outreach efforts to underserved communities and strengthened its policy relationships with our P-20 partners.

The second area of emphasis within the state's public agenda focused on cost and affordability. Like many states, West Virginia has struggled to protect affordability in an era of fluid state support. Over the past two decades, the landscape of funding for higher education has been characterized by rising costs, shrinking public appropriations, and an increased hostility to the tuition increases that inevitably follow. With a systemic budget malaise that often prevented policymakers from looking beyond short-term solutions to long-term problems, policymakers yearned for more effective education and fiscal policy. This tension was ultimately mitigated with the passage of Senate Bill 595 in 2008, which called for higher education to develop and implement the finance and accountability goals inherent within "Charting the Future." This legislation cemented the partnership between the legislature and higher education, as both entities worked in concert to develop policies that contained incentives linked to the goals of the public agenda such as college completion, degree production, and increasing the enrollment rates of adult students.

As a result of these efforts, higher education was better positioned to provide the legislature with a series of data-driven benchmarks to assess performance, as well as to articulate the need for sustained investments to promote the competitive health of the system. The creation of a unified finance policy clarified the inherent link between state support and student-generated revenues and demonstrated that, absent state appropriations, fee increases may be needed to protect the core components of the public agenda. Such increases were avoided in the short term as the system was able to successfully negotiate with the governor and legislative leaders a multi-year commitment to hold higher education harmless from budget reductions, in return for concurrently freezing tuition and fees for the 2010-11 academic year.

The third area of emphasis within the state's public agenda is the focus on student learning and accountability. A key part of our focus in this area has been to deepen the alignment across both the secondary and postsecondary levels of our education system. Such P-20 efforts are centered upon curricula alignment, early identification of college readiness, early remediation of academic deficiencies while students are enrolled in high school, and enhanced professional development via faculty exchanges. To support these objectives, the commission developed a series of report cards for parents, students, policymakers and the general public that demonstrate the quality and performance of public higher education. These reports address numerous accountability indicators such as academic preparation, participation, affordability, educational outcomes, and staffing. Much of this work formed the foundation of the state's participation in Complete College

West Virginia is among those states with the lowest levels of postsecondary educational attainment and the highest number of underrepresented students.

America, the SREB college completion initiative, and former Governor Joe Manchin's Complete to Compete initiative as chair of the National Governors Association. Under Manchin's leadership, significant focus was placed on college completion, a policy realm that is a particularly large challenge for West Virginia, where the systemwide six-year college completion rate is below 50 percent. In order to bring attention to the issue and develop a clear plan for addressing it moving forward, higher education leaders have developed a systemwide taskforce that cuts across institutions and brings together business and university leaders, faculty members, K-12 representatives, and students to identify barriers to completion and develop plans for achieving the state's goals.

The final area of the state's public agenda, economic growth and innovation, strikes to the core of the changing expectations placed on our nation's system of postsecondary institutions. As noted in a broad array of articles published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the success of institutions will be determined by the extent to which they serve as drivers of economic expansion, job creation and human capital development. In order to remain competitive in an increasingly diverse global marketplace, institutions must strive to utilize the creative capacities of their faculty to drive innovation, research and service to our communities.

As part of West Virginia's efforts to implement the economic imperatives of the public agenda, presidents from across the system worked in concert with members of their respective governing boards to highlight the importance of investing in applied science and research to stimulate economic growth and job creation. Over a four year period, \$60 million in state funding was secured for research via the Eminent Scholars Recruitment and Enhancement initiative and the "Bucks for Brains" Research Trust Fund. Each of the programs requires institutional matches of state funds, thereby doubling the impact of the initial state investments. Targeted toward the state's two research institutions, Marshall University and West Virginia University, these programs have assisted institutions in their efforts to recruit scholars with demonstrated research competitiveness in specialties that build on their core research strengths.

In addition to these efforts, the commission, in conjunction with the Battelle Memorial Institute, is working to redevelop the West Virginia Education, Research and Technology Park, which served as the former international headquarters of the Union Carbide Corporation. The Park serves as the backbone of the state's growing economic and community development efforts and provides a venue through which the resources of the institutions can be brought to bear in a collaborative manner with regional industries to create new economy businesses in West Virginia.

Contextual Issues—Impacting Policy Outcomes

One of the items central to the development of the public agenda in West Virginia was the establishment of a shared commitment among legislative, executive and external constituencies for the goals of the public agenda. As the plan evolved in West Virginia, members of institutional governing boards also became integral partners in the process. Key legislation was passed in 2009 which required the professional

development of board members as a condition of service, provided an impetus for partnerships across institutions, and brought the influential voices of the boards into the policy discourse. Through the annual Board of Governors summit, system leaders in conjunction with the staff of the Association of Governing Boards brought attention to critical elements of the public agenda, such as completion and cost efficiencies, as well as a deeper sense of board responsibilities beyond the confines of the individual institutions. The importance of boards as active partners in this policy journey cannot be overstated.

Despite the challenges facing West Virginia, a higher education policy strategy focused on critical areas of need and cooperation with other agencies has helped improve the outlook for the future of the state. The state has been fortunate to have economic stability in a time of severe national fiscal constraint, but the challenges other states are facing has brought a keen awareness on the part of higher education leaders and state policymakers to be proactive about setting policy and program strategies. In the end, the success of the public agenda in West Virginia can be traced to the fact that the state developed a plan, worked the plan, and strategically aligned policy and legislative initiatives to implement the plan. From small actions such as adjusting the agenda of board meetings to align with the goals of the plan, to linking staff performance reviews so that individual performance connected to planning outcomes, the state has placed an unwavering focus on the goals of the public agenda.

Conclusions

The paradox of American higher education is that while the pressures on academe to serve as both the great social equalizer and a vehicle for economic development have increased, the economic commitment provided to the corpus has decreased. In many states, funding for higher education has declined significantly as a result of the Great Recession, a trend that will only grow more troubling in the years to come. Current economic pressures are forcing institutions to redefine their missions and become more efficient in the delivery of their services. While the demands on higher education are increasing, the economic capacity to handle these demands is decreasing.

The decades of shifting the funding responsibility away from state appropriations and toward students' resources have not been the result of a well planned or thoughtful policy discourse. Given the critical role that higher education plays as a facilitator of human capital development, policymakers must remain attentive to the diverse needs of all students requesting access to postsecondary education. Unless careful and deliberative attention is given to the establishment of a public agenda for higher education that builds consensus and support for its broad goals, the academy will continue to suffer a loss of support in the American polity. ♦

Brian Noland is chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

U.S. Census data demonstrate that West Virginia has the lowest percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree in the country.



Application Madness

For many parents, the college admissions process leads to panic

By Anne C. Roark

IKNEW we were in trouble when I started rearranging the furniture in our family room.

At first, the changes were inconsequential—a couch pushed aside, a library table installed in front of the television. But then things grew more complicated. I dragged in a round table from the garden, and chairs from the kitchen, and scavenged a bunker-sized bulletin board from my office. We needed a place to post deadlines, keep track of names, and record other intelligence gathered.

The mail had already begun to pile up, sending me on a frantic search for storage files. I improvised with a set of large wooden crates, which my friend Gracie had left in my care after her fiancé found out they were a gift from one of her old boyfriends.

Then came the most drastic step of all: I began emptying book shelves (fiction stayed, but philosophy and poetry were wiped out altogether) to make room for our new collection of 600- and 700-page guidebooks. They were mostly filled with propaganda, but some offered strategy options and collected data that might be useful, and even practice drills.

All this may sound like someone on a compulsive reorganization rampage. But I was dealing with a much more serious problem: Our first-born child, Kate, now a senior in high school, was preparing to apply to college. Our family room was about to become command central for an uncertain campaign that lay ahead.

My husband Marshall and I had always assumed our children would go to college, but we had no particular place in mind. He graduated from a college everyone in the world knew about, while I went to a college almost no one had even heard of. Yet we both ended up in pretty much the same place: living in a crazy city, making less money than we wanted (but more than we needed), doing work we loved to hate and hated to love, and raising children we idolized but who felt about us much the way we felt about our careers (loved to hate,

etc.). Out of that experience, we became what you might call college admissions pacifists.

I swore never to be one of those hysterical parents who are convinced their children's fates—their careers and lives—are



Prospective college students are deluged with booklets, brochures and guidebooks; some run to 600 pages or more.

determined by where they go to college. My children's acceptance (or rejection) by a particular institution would not be the ultimate test of my mettle as a parent. I was especially offended by the feverish slogans tossed about by so many parents: Berkeley or Bust, Princeton or Perish, Harvard or Hang (Yourself). These struck me as the worst kind of academic xenophobia.

A few years earlier, poolside during a family vacation in Hawaii, my resolve had been momentarily tested. I was cornered by a talkative father who bragged about how he was gaming the college admissions system on his daughter's behalf. He had been driven to it, he said, by the frightful competition to enroll.

I expressed surprise: "It seems to me that it's easier to get into college today than it has ever been."

That set him off. "Let me tell you," he said. "These places are so swamped with applications that they can now afford to wait-list students with 1500 SATs and A-minus averages."

Worried that his daughter would be shut out, he had sought the advice of a consultant who specialized in college admissions. "This woman," he said, "takes one look at our daughter's application—which is pretty impressive, I've got to tell you—and she is ready to toss it in the trash. 'They see a million of these,' she tells me. 'Good grades, good test scores, good athlete, good recommendations, good prep school. We've got to do something to make her stand out.'

"So here's what this woman does," he went on. "She creates a new profile for our daughter—a whole new persona. No more talk about loving math and science and wanting to be a doctor. She doesn't care if the kid's already a doctor. Brown

Our first-born child was preparing to apply to college, and our family room was about to become command central for an uncertain campaign that lay ahead.

and Yale are overloaded with them already. She notices our daughter has taken some Latin, so she tells her to downplay the math and science, and announce her intention of majoring in classics. That should impress them!”

Evidently, it didn't. Marshall and I found out much later that the big guns turned the daughter down. So did most of the medium-sized guns. We didn't hear it from the father, but

friends of friends told us that the girl was fine with the outcome and eventually loved where she ended up. The father was said to still be recovering.

I found his story vaguely amusing and a little tawdry, but also mildly troubling. If the competition had become that fierce, perhaps my husband and I should reexamine our serene attitude about which college to attend and how to get in. Sure, neither of our two daughters was in high school yet, but maybe it was time to do something.

When I broached the subject with Marshall, he became enraged. The only way I could calm him down was to promise never to reinvent our children as classics majors, not even if they begged us.

I swore never to be one of those hysterical parents who are convinced their children's fates are determined by where they go to college.

Our stack of college guides

Once the family room was reasonably well organized, I settled down with our stack of college guides. There were insider's guides and outsider's guides; compilations of the best colleges and compendiums of even better colleges; testimonials on colleges that made a difference in lives, and exposes of colleges that had no impact.

The more I read them, the more I began to think our boorish friend in Hawaii hadn't been as alarmist as he seemed. Colleges I'd never heard of, some more obscure than my own alma mater, were turning down 40, 50, 60 percent of their applicants. Competition at the brand-name schools had gone beyond the ridiculous.

Then I recalled hearing an administrator at Harvard trying to explain to a group of alumni why so many of their brilliant little legacies were being turned away by the university. In one year alone, he said, the undergraduate admissions office rejects enough valedictorians to fill the freshman class four times over. Or was it the entire undergraduate college? I couldn't remember, although with that kind of competition, I wasn't sure it made any difference.

Stanford administrators were telling their alumni virtually the same thing. Not only were they turning away students who had been first in their classes, they were turning away valedictorians who had perfect 1600 scores on their SATs. There just wasn't room for all of them.

I began to feel uneasy. I should have had a better fix on the situation. After all, I had written extensively about colleges and universities as a journalist in Washington and Los Angeles some years earlier, and had even done a stint as a college admissions officer. Clearly, I had been away from it too long. I needed to know more.

That is how I found myself packing to attend the annual meeting of the National Association for College Admission

Counseling in Long Beach, California. I had covered the organization from time to time in the mid-1970s. Maybe, I thought, I can get some inside tips, or at least some perspective.

“You're not going to talk to any of the colleges I'm interested in, are you?” my daughter asked with alarm.

“No, this is purely professional,” I said, trying to be the cool, inquisitive reporter rather than the frantic mother. “I'm just going to poke around and see if there are any trends worth writing about.”

“There are some sessions about problem parents that look interesting,” I told my husband. “If I pick up any tips, I'll let you know.”

“You'll fit right in,” he assured me.

In search of answers

The Long Beach Convention Center is a large, glassy structure overlooking the city's harbor. Despite the warm and sunny Southern California day, people were milling about in tweed jackets and sweater vests, looking very east coast. I didn't know when I had seen so many men in bow ties—or, for that matter, any kind of ties. It was similarly odd to see so many women walking around with fully covered midriffs.

I went in search of someone who could answer my questions, and managed to snag the director of college counseling at a high-powered New York prep school. “There's been a sea change,” he said as we sat outside on some steps. When he started in the business in 1985, he talked to students about “good choices, colleges that matched their interests, were the right size, in the right location. Now it's all about strategy. They want to know, ‘What's the best place I can get in, and how do I go about doing it?’”

There are plenty of colleges and universities in the country, he said, about 2,000 in all. The problem is with the 75 that are really competitive, meaning fewer than half of the applicants get in. There are more and more 18-year-olds applying to those 75 colleges today than ever before. Moreover, there is a higher percentage of smart 18-year-olds applying.

“Let me give you the history behind this,” my New York expert said.

In the 1960s, as the post-war Baby Boom generation crowded into the system, colleges and universities built new facilities and enlarged their faculties. By the mid-1970s, the boom had collapsed, brought down by a deepening population trough. Private colleges and universities struggled to attract students. Top colleges hired publicists and mounted recruiting and advertising campaigns. Prestigious universities in the northeast began reaching into public schools in the south and midwest and plucking out the best graduates. Soon, the smartest student in a high school in Arizona no longer settled for an honors program in a state university. That same kid was now applying to Yale.

Colleges and universities that had long had excellent reputations in their own regions but were largely unknown elsewhere also began national recruiting campaigns. Institutions no one had heard of one year became hot tickets the next; their applications doubled and tripled. Small colleges and medium-sized universities that had once been open to strong students suddenly found themselves wait-

listing superb ones.

That was when students began to panic. Seeing colleges turn down fully qualified applicants for no apparent reason except that there were too many fully qualified applicants, students began to see the admissions process as a game of luck. To increase their odds of winning, they started doubling or tripling the number of applications they submitted. This made college admissions committees crazy because the more applications they got, the less sure they were about whom to admit.

“Which brings us,” the New York counselor said, “to where we are today, which is that everyone, almost, is pretty much consistently hysterical.”

No one more so than parents. In fact, the conference program listed three panel discussions on how to deal with anxious parents. I picked “Parents: the Good, the Bad and the Hysterical.” By the time I got there, they had evidently finished with the “good” part and were jumping back and forth between “bad” and “hysterical.” One admissions director recounted a conversation he had had with an applicant. When asked how many colleges he was applying to, the student replied, “I’m applying to three colleges; my dad’s applying to six.”

Next there was a recounting of e-mails from parents to directors of admissions: One mother expressed anxiety about what her daughter will eat; another sent in her laundry list of questions about the laundry service; a third mother wanted a rating of the air quality in dormitories; a fourth inquired about the availability of a single room for her son who had suffered a football injury.

A high school counselor, standing to ask a question of the panel, sheepishly admitted to being a parent herself. I began to wonder why only mothers were being singled out. Was

When asked how many colleges he was applying to, one student said, “I’m applying to three colleges; my dad’s applying to six.”

there some gender stereotyping going on here? Or were female parents more obnoxious than their male counterparts? While I was cogitating on this, a woman in the back of the room told a father story. She was a college counselor in a high school and described a particularly pesky father who was

stalking her. He managed to track her down in a hospital an hour after she was wheeled out of a delivery room. “He wanted to talk about his daughter’s SAT scores,” she said.

The audience guffawed, but I got up and left. I wasn’t offended so much as worried. There I was in Long Beach, doing nothing. I hadn’t sent e-mails to admissions directors or stalked a single high school counselor. I didn’t even know the name of my daughter’s counselor.

I had allowed myself to think that helping my daughter apply to college was going to be a smooth and quick



Next fall, Kate, the writer’s daughter, will enter Connecticut College, where she expects to major in studio arts and international relations.

operation. In fact, it was beginning to seem a bit like the war in Iraq: a protracted mission with no clear plan.

Who needs experts?

Back in the family room, daughter Kate was online investigating colleges. She was very clear about her academic priorities: a great international relations program (she loved history and had become a political junkie) and an even better studio arts program (she was an accomplished artist). Having spent two and a half years in a huge public, highly diverse, urban high school in Los Angeles, she wanted to chuck large and public but was determined to hang on to urban and diverse. She liked the idea of old buildings nestled in beautiful surroundings, walking distance from swank shops, magnificent museums, renowned restaurants. The emerging profile was that of a small, private liberal arts college located in a city, preferably on the east coast. Middlebury in Manhattan, maybe? Williams in Washington?

While Kate took virtual tours of classrooms and dormitories, I was doing my best to remain calm, having just discovered that she didn’t know her college counselor either. She was a senior and an honors student taking a slew of Advanced Placement classes, which would suggest she was eligible for college counseling. But two counselors in a school with 3,800 students didn’t have time to do much counseling. They had sent home with each senior a package of college-application materials and instructions on how to fill them out. One assignment was to write a recommendation about yourself “from the point of view of your counselor.” This did not bode well.

“You need a professional,” my husband’s friend David told me. He had a friend who had talked her way into college and, realizing she had a marketable talent, had since become a private admissions counselor. Now she helped other

determined applicants talk, test, write, play, paint—whatever it took—their way into the college of their dreams.

I was mildly skeptical. In my experience, the first thing a college counselor will tell you is to stop saying “we” when talking about your child’s college applications. “These are not our applications; they are hers. We are not applying to college; she is.” Right. Just like she’s paying the \$40,000 it costs to attend a private college for one year, or—if we were to be so lucky—the \$10,000 to \$15,000 it would cost to stay in-state.

Setting aside my doubts, I called David’s friend in New York. Her receptionist said the woman was too swamped to get on the phone and say hello—business was that good. But not to worry. They would send me to their new Los Angeles office where I could customize a program for Kate. And the cost? Not to worry.

I don’t know why I wasn’t more surprised when the list arrived and I saw the prices. I just assumed \$28,000 was a typographical error. When I called the receptionist back, she said not to worry; we didn’t need all the services in the \$28,000 package. We could probably get by with something more modest, say, in the \$17,000 or \$18,000 range.

I told her I thought \$1,700 was too much, that \$170 was closer to what I was thinking. This time she didn’t tell me not to worry. “You get what you pay for,” she said.

I tried again with a college counselor who made house calls for \$170 an hour. Her first suggestion was a college on board a ship. We reminded her of my daughter’s desires—a small liberal arts college on the east coast. The woman moved on land, but she wasn’t any more helpful. She came up with a list of 75 or so colleges that would be “perfect” for Kate, forgot to leave it with us, and that was the end of her.

We were on our own again. Kate was interviewing with college representatives who were visiting her school from all over the country. Marshall and I were organizing trips with our daughter to prospective campuses in the east and midwest. Who needs experts?

By now, I was well versed in the admissions strategy most often touted by private counselors. It went like this:

First, pick three target schools. Those are the ones that should accept your child because her grades and test scores match those of the students who are already there. (The operative word is “should.” Remember, there are no guarantees in this business.)

Next, pick three “reach” schools, where your child’s test scores and grades look competitive but really aren’t because there are so many applicants with similar qualifications. Usually reach schools aren’t any better than target schools but for some reason have more cache.

(Note: Don’t confuse reach schools with beyond-reach schools. Most beyond-reach schools come with full bragging rights, which makes them difficult to evaluate, but not necessarily the right choice even if your child got in, which odds are she won’t.)

Colleges I’d never heard of were turning down 60 percent of their applicants. Competition at the brand-name schools had gone beyond the ridiculous.

UPDATE **The College of Her Choice** **August 2007**

THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS process would have been well worth all the trouble if our daughter had ended up happy with her choice, but she wasn’t. She liked the professors at Connecticut College, and her classes were interesting, but a small college in a small New England town was far too provincial for a public school graduate

A small college in a small New England town proved far too provincial for a public school graduate from Los Angeles who had spent her summers studying art and languages in Paris and Madrid.

from Los Angeles who had spent her summers studying art and languages in Paris and Madrid.

The admissions brochures she had gotten, and the campus tour with the charming student from Thailand, had made her think she would be living with students from around the world. Instead, she was assigned a dorm room next to a bunch of boisterous, inebriated New England party boys. Officials offered to move her to a quieter floor in another dorm.

Instead she decided to move to another college altogether.

Given how onerous the admissions process is, it’s hard to imagine someone going through it voluntarily a second time. Yet one out of five college students do just that, either because they are homesick or don’t have enough money or want a more prestigious degree or become interested in a program that isn’t available where they are.

The second time around, our daughter did everything on her own. Without any help or even any encouragement from her parents, she filled out applications, arranged interviews and got test scores and recommendations sent. She did all of this as a full-time student and without any of her mother’s meddling. She was accepted at Brown University, and is about to begin her senior year there as an honors major in art.

Our other daughter is beginning her junior year at Northwestern. Her mother had nothing to do with her applications.

—Anne C. Roark

Given how onerous the admissions process is, it’s hard to imagine someone going through it voluntarily a second time. Yet one out of five college students do just that.

Next, settle on three safety schools. These are colleges that will probably accept your child whether she wants to be accepted or not. Unless, of course, they, too, are suddenly deluged with applications.

If that should happen, go immediately to Plan LD. Late Decision is essentially a behind-the-scenes triage system that matches overlooked students with one of the country's 1,925 schools which still have room even after the admissions process has officially ended. The good news is that some of those are sleepers, good colleges that have yet to be discovered. Until that happens, they will probably be happy to take a look at an overlooked student or two.

"That's not the way to do it!" Henry said, pounding his fist on the table. Henry, a friend for over 20 years, normally was not a fist pounder. But his daughter was also applying to college and he was showing the strain.

He had just finished reading a study published by Harvard University which provided incontrovertible evidence that applying via Early Decision greatly improved an applicant's chances of being admitted to a highly selective college. It was the equivalent of boosting SAT scores by 100 points. It could double—sometimes triple—the odds favoring admission to a prestigious college or university. The study, published in a book entitled "The Early Decision Game," was based on analysis of 500,000 applications at 14 schools.

I'd heard some of this before, but assumed it was just one of the many theories parents pass around but have no evidence to support. Henry, however, was a statistics stud (he knew, for example, the career batting average of every important Los Angeles Dodger for the last 40 years). When it came to college admissions stats, I figured if Henry said it was true, it had to be true.

My husband was skeptical. Our daughter had so much going for her, he argued. She had done her SAT prep classes and brought her scores up 300 points. She had As in her AP classes and was passing all her AP exams. She'd spent the summer at the Rhode Island School of Design, painting. The summer before, she'd been in Paris, drawing. She was bright and talented—this was her father talking—and shouldn't be asked to limit herself to one school as required by Early Decision. She should play the field for as long as she can.

It was true that Kate was in love with a dozen schools, all different from one another: Barnard, Bowdoin, Brown, Colby, Connecticut College, Carnegie Mellon, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Haverford, Vassar, Wesleyan, Washington University in St. Louis—to name a few.

But when the blush wore off, I knew she'd dump some of them because they had baggage she couldn't handle. She could deal with St. Louis, Providence, even Pittsburgh. But Poughkeepsie? No way. Bowdoin was too cold; Barnard was cold in a different way. The tour guide at Wesleyan had an attitude.

Let's face it, I ventured, there are problems with all of them. Why not pick one now, and get it over with?

But most of the schools use a common application form, so why not give lots of schools a chance? asked Marshall.

Because she'll have less of a chance.

But she'll be devastated if she goes Early Decision and doesn't get in.

She'll be more devastated if she gets 12 rejections.

Why do you always have to worry so much? She's going to get in everywhere she applies.

Kate ended the debate by announcing that she would apply Early Decision.

The application

They say the essay is the single most important part of the application. It is the one thing that is truly unique, where the applicant reveals a bit of who she is, how she reacts to the world and what matters to her.

Since I was a writer, I was only too happy to offer my assistance in this endeavor. She should write about Iraq and Afghanistan to show her knowledge of current affairs. She should do more than send a portfolio of her art; she should write about it and turn her art into words.

She rejected everything I suggested. Instead, she wrote about herself—why she practiced yoga for two hours a day seven days a week, how it felt to drink a cappuccino at a sidewalk cafe in Paris. She explained how she had come to choose this place, Connecticut College in New London, a former women's college most people in California had never heard of. She wrote about how impressed she was with the college's new center for art and technology, and how she liked the large number of foreign students on campus and the even larger number of domestic students who went abroad to study. New London may not have been the sophisticated urban center of her dreams, but it was only a short train ride to New York, Boston or Providence.

What really won her heart, she admitted, was the view from campus of Long Island Sound. Without it, New England would be just too claustrophobic for a girl from California who needed a large body of water and a big horizon stretched out before her.

Oh great, I thought, she's going to come off as the quintessential California girl. They'll be making LA jokes around the admissions table all winter. But when I finally sat down and read the entire application, I was astonished. I had no idea how fascinating and engaging this daughter of mine had become. This was a young woman who had everything going for her; she was a force to contend with. There was no way any college admissions committee would pass on this one, not even Connecticut College, which turned down 67 percent of its applicants this year.

Naturally, I didn't bother to organize applications to other colleges so she could get them out quickly in the event she was deferred or turned down by Connecticut College. I told her not to worry about getting additional recommendation forms to her teachers. She'd hear from Connecticut on December 15; her high school didn't close for Christmas vacation until December 19. Even if the worst happened, she would still have four days to get everything together.

The letter was late. We had expected it before the weekend, a little ahead of schedule. Some colleges send out acceptances

An administrator told a group of alumni that in one year alone Harvard rejects enough valedictorians to fill the freshman class four times over.

and rejections online, but this was coming the old-fashioned way, by post. The weekend dragged by, then Monday's mail came: nothing. It would definitely be in Tuesday's mail, only it wasn't.

I finally called. There'd been a computer glitch. We'd probably get it Wednesday. We didn't. I called again. Could they tell us on the phone? No, it was on its way. It would be there. When it wasn't, I panicked. One day left. Everyone would be gone from the high school. If Connecticut had decided to say no, we'd miss the January 1 deadline to apply most everywhere else.

An admissions officer kindly said she would extend a professional courtesy if Kate's college counselor would give her a call. We still hadn't met the college counselor. My daughter had managed to enlist the help of the assistant principal, who had graciously agreed to fill out her forms, write a glowing personal recommendation and forward a transcript. Now we needed him to call Connecticut College to learn Kate's fate.

Sorry, said his secretary, he'd already gone. He'd left for vacation a day early. Awful thoughts raced through my head. I had surely destroyed any chance my daughter had of ever getting into college. I frantically tried to think of alternatives. How about taking a year off? Go to Afghanistan and build hospitals.

I phoned the school secretary again, and she reluctantly agreed to call Connecticut herself. Five minutes later she called back and said she couldn't do it.

"You didn't call?" I cried.

"I did call. I just can't tell you what they said."

"What do you mean, you can't tell me? You have to tell me."

"I can't. They told me not to tell anyone. The answers come in the mail."

"So what am I supposed to do about getting the recommendation forms to all the teachers and figuring out who can fill out all the official school forms?"

There was a pause.

"Throw them away," she advised.

"That means she is in? Is she? Are you sure?" I was on the verge of tears.

There was another pause. Then, choosing her words carefully, she said: "I'm sure you don't have to do anything with those forms."

The family room looked bare

A few weeks later, I took the round table back to the garden, moved the library table back where it belonged, and stripped everything off the bulletin board before returning it to my office. I stuffed all the old brochures into shopping bags and stowed them in some mildewed cabinets. The family room looked bare so I went to Crate and Barrel and bought a new chair. I realized afterwards it was a peculiar acquisition for a family that was about to have one less person around.

I talk to Gracie now and again. Sometimes she makes noises about wanting the crates back. I guess she figures her husband is getting old enough that he doesn't remember where they came from. They live all the way across the

country, so I assume she won't collect them anytime soon. The truth is, I still need the crates because the mail hasn't stopped. In fact, it's starting to pick up again. But now some of the envelopes are addressed to a different person.

I told you, didn't I, that we have another daughter? Rachel will be a senior in the fall. She's more the scientific type. These marketing people the colleges use are really good because they've already picked up on that. She's getting mailers from very different places than her sister did. One came from MIT just the other day. "We helped get a man on the moon," it read. "We should be able to help you finance your education." Now wouldn't that be nice? ♦

Anne C. Roark, a former higher education reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, is a freelance writer in Los Angeles.

Applying to college was beginning to seem a bit like the war in Iraq: a protracted mission with no clear plan.

One mailer from MIT said, "We helped get a man on the moon. We should be able to help you finance your education."

Enduring Values, Changing Concerns

Increasing necessity and declining availability of higher education creates a challenge for many Americans

By John Immerwahr

OVER THE LAST eighteen years *National CrossTalk* has featured a number of articles about the National Center's remarkable collaboration with Public Agenda. The two organizations have conducted a series of studies of public and leadership opinion on higher education, from "The Closing Gateway" (1993) up to our most recent study, *Squeeze Play 2010: Continued Public Anxiety on Cost, Harsher Judgments on How Colleges Are Run*.^{*} The studies have tracked attitudes as both the national economy and higher education itself have gone through a number of dramatic changes, including those associated with the recent financial collapse and recession.

Because we asked many of the same questions from survey to survey, the studies have allowed the researchers to tease out two different strains in public opinion. On the one hand, the research highlights stable and unchanging values that have had rock-solid consistency over a decade and a half. While these fundamental values have remained constant, the studies have also allowed us to understand changes in the public's fears, concerns and attitudes toward specific issues. These shifts are apparently driven by changing perceptions of economic, global and technological realities. Understanding and distinguishing between the public's deeply held values and its changing concerns is profoundly important for policymakers interested in higher education.

In this article we draw on past *National CrossTalk* articles and the studies themselves to reflect on how these changing attitudes have played out over the years; we then go on to speculate briefly about the implications of these findings for higher education policy.

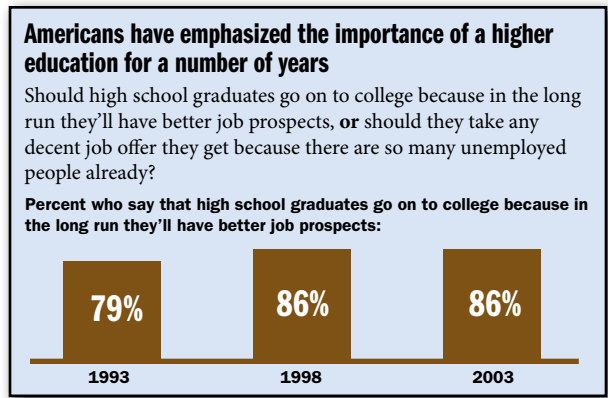
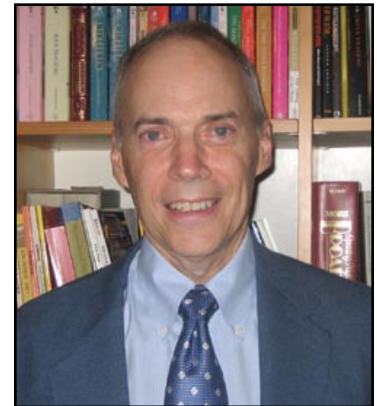
^{*}Previous reports from Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education include the following. Note that in most cases the actual survey was conducted in the year before the study was published. In the text of this article we give data by the year the study was done.

2010 <i>Squeeze Play 2010: Continued Public Anxiety on Cost, Harsher Judgments on How Colleges Are Run</i>	n=1,031
2009 <i>Squeeze Play 2009: The Public's Views on College Costs Today</i>	n=1,009
2008 "The Iron Triangle: College Presidents Talk About Cost, Access and Quality"	N/A
2007 <i>Squeeze Play: How Parents and the Public Look at Higher Education Today</i>	n=1,001
2004 "Public Attitudes on Higher Education: A Trend Analysis, 1993 to 2003"	n=801
2000 "Great Expectations: How the Public and Parents—White, African-American and Hispanic—View Higher Education"	n=1,015
1998 "The Price of Admission: The Growing Importance of Higher Education"	n=700
1993 "The Closing Gateway: Californians Consider Their Higher Education System"	n=502

Fundamental Values

The *National CrossTalk* articles have discussed two deeply held attitudes toward higher education:

1. *The importance of higher education as a gateway to the middle class.* As social scientists have long observed, the vast majority of Americans aspire to be middle class, which can be roughly defined to include a complex of elements such as home ownership, a good job, healthcare, a secure retirement, and the hope of a better life for one's children. Throughout the period of our study, a college education (and its promise of a better job) has been perceived as an important gateway to those goals. Huge majorities have consistently held, for example, that it is far better for a high school graduate to go to college rather than take a decent job offer right out of high school.



A woman from New Jersey (quoted in the spring 2000 issue of *National CrossTalk*) said it this way: "Today you don't even question whether you are going to college. It is a sign of the times. When I was growing up, what was important was to make the home front, with marriage and children, but today it is college." We heard exactly the same sentiments in our 2007 study (*Squeeze Play 2007: How Parents and the Public Look at Higher Education Today*), such as the remarks of a respondent in Atlanta who said, "Once you have that degree, all of a sudden it just puts you into a whole new career field

Understanding and distinguishing between the public's deeply held values and its changing concerns is profoundly important for policymakers interested in higher education.

of opportunity or a whole new segment of opportunity to get work. You just totally disassociated yourself from the high school graduate.”

Given the importance of higher education, it is hardly surprising that access to higher education has assumed, at least in the public’s mind, the status of a virtual right. The public’s logic is straightforward. Since a college degree is closely linked to a good job, to deny a motivated and qualified student access to a higher education is to say to that person, in effect, “You have no chance to become full partner in American life.” This idea is clearly unacceptable to the vast majority of Americans. Nearly nine out of ten Americans have consistently endorsed the idea that no qualified and motivated student should be priced out of obtaining a higher education.

Percent who agree strongly or somewhat that we should not allow the price of a college education to keep students who are qualified and motivated to go to college from doing so:					
1993 (n=502)	1998 (n=700)	1999 (n=1,015)	2003 (n=801)	2007 (n=1,001)	2008 (n=1,009)
89%	89%	93%	91%	88%	89%

2. *Reciprocity.* The demand for access to higher education, however, has always been balanced in the public’s mind by a second equally important value, which we call “reciprocity.” Although people believe that no deserving person should be locked out of the American middle class, they also do not believe that people should “get something for nothing.” There is a deep attachment to the view that people don’t really appreciate things that they don’t have to work for. The public seems to prefer a sense of reciprocity, where there is a balance giving and getting. As much as Americans stress the importance of higher education, they have also emphasized the idea that students should “pay for part of their education”

and that financial aid should go only to those who “work hard and seem to take individual responsibility.” (*National CrossTalk*, spring 2000)

As a result, most Americans seem to reject the European conception that higher education should be a free entitlement. The respondents in our surveys believe instead that students should contribute at least something to the cost of their higher education. An Alabama man articulated a sentiment that we heard in virtually all of the dozens of focus groups and

interviews conducted over the years: “I think that anyone, no matter how destitute they are, should work or do something to help defray their educational expenses, because they will appreciate it more than if it was just a gift handed to them on a silver platter.” (“Great Expectations,” May 2000)

Many people also believe that having to make sacrifices for a college education actually increases the benefits of a college education. In our 2007 survey, large majorities said that students who have to make sacrifices (such as going part-time or living at home) actually learn more than students who get an education entirely paid for by their parents. A California

woman, interviewed for *Squeeze Play 2007* put it frankly: “I think the ones who work for it are actually more on the ball than the ones who went to Stanford, and Daddy paid for it and gave them the yacht in the summertime. When I see the kids who don’t work for college and have been handed everything, they don’t seem to have gotten anything out of their degree.”

Students who sacrifice to get an education learn more and appreciate their education

Percent who say they agree with the following:

Strongly agree Somewhat agree

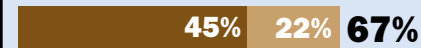
People who make sacrifices will appreciate college because they sacrifice to get it



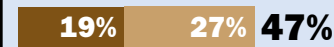
They will learn more because they are more disciplined



Students don’t appreciate the value of a college education when they have no personal responsibility for paying for it



Students who sacrifice will miss out on the best parts of the college experience



Although people like the idea of students working for their education, in reality the option of students working and going to school at the same time may be more problematic than many realize. A recent Public Agenda survey of young adults ages 22 to 30 conducted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation showed that many college students who drop out say they do so because they are attempting to work and go to school at the same time. For many, this becomes a balancing act that eventually overwhelms them. (“With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them,” Public Agenda, 2009)

Another aspect of the public’s belief in reciprocity and the emphasis the public places on student effort is the long-held conviction that what a student gets out of a higher education depends largely on what the student puts into his or her experience in higher education (as opposed to the quality or reputation of the school). People seem to believe that a motivated student can learn a great deal even in a college that does not have the latest equipment or the smallest classes, while an unmotivated student won’t learn much even at the best institution.

Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own view?	1993	1999	2007
The benefit a student gets from attending college depends on how much of an effort he or she puts in	71%	88%	86%
The benefit a student gets from attending college mostly depends on the quality of the college he or she is attending	23%	11%	11%
Don’t know	7%	2%	3%

Nearly nine out of ten Americans have consistently endorsed the idea that no qualified and motivated student should be priced out of obtaining a higher education.

Changing Concerns

The public's commitment to the importance of higher education and to the concept of reciprocity has remained largely unchanged over the years, but in many other ways the public's views on higher education have been surprisingly fluid. The biggest driver of these changes appears to be the public's perception of changing economic conditions, and, in that sense, the history of public attitudes has mirrored the state of the economy. The first *CrossTalk* analysis of our public opinion research was issued in October 1993 and reflected the public's position during the recession years of the early 1990s. That issue discussed the deep anxiety about higher education that we found, especially among Californians who were hit especially hard by the recession. As the economy eased up through the boom years of the 1990s, people's fears lessened, and we saw a decrease in the public's anxiety about higher education. Our studies in 1998 and 1999 documented the high-water mark in public optimism about the accessibility of higher education.

Some of the most striking results, however, were from a series of our three most recent studies. The first was done in 2007 just before the financial crisis hit; we followed that research with studies in both 2008 and 2009, which documented how attitudes changed as the financial crisis developed. Not surprisingly, public anxiety and concern rose sharply as the economic disaster unfolded. Two indicators are especially significant:

Most Americans seem to reject the European conception that higher education should be a free entitlement, believing instead that students should contribute at least something to the cost.

1. *Increasing belief in the necessity of higher education.*

As long as we have been tracking public opinion on this topic, Americans have always believed that

higher education is *important* for success in society. When we began these studies, however, most people thought that higher education was not strictly *necessary* for success. In focus groups, respondents consistently stressed that there were other paths to success. Bill Gates, a college dropout who became the richest man in the country, was frequently mentioned as an obvious example. But in our recent studies, we see a significant change, with growing numbers of Americans believing that a higher education is not only important but necessary for success. They increasingly believe that it is nearly impossible to climb up to a higher economic status without the benefit of higher education. A woman in a 2006 Detroit focus group said it this way: "At this point in time, a lot of places, in order to even chicken pluck, you need to have an undergrad degree." (*Squeeze Play 2007*).

As the chart below indicates, this shift increased even further after the financial crisis, so that by 2009 the percentage

of people who believed that it was impossible to succeed without a college degree had risen to 55 percent, almost twice what it had been when we first started tracking this in 1999. In public opinion research, such a sharp increase in such a short period of time in responses to a general question is extremely unusual.

Do you think that:	1999	2003	2007	2008	2009
A college education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world, or	31%	37%	50%	55%	55%
There are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education	67%	61%	49%	43%	43%
Don't know	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%

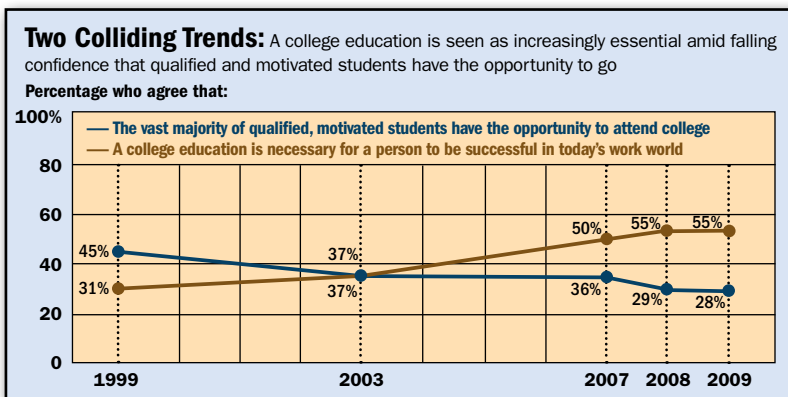
2. *Growing perception of the inaccessibility of higher education.* This increase in the perception of the necessity of higher education has been accompanied by an equally sharp increase in the percentage of those who believe that a college education is becoming unavailable to many qualified and motivated individuals. Over the years, we asked the public if it is true that there are many qualified and motivated students who don't have an opportunity for a higher education. Back in 1993 during the recession years, six out of ten Americans endorsed that sentiment. In the later 1990s, as the economy improved and people became more optimistic, the percentage of people who felt that college was unavailable dropped significantly. Even before the financial crisis the trend began to reverse itself, with more and more people feeling that a higher education was inaccessible. When the financial crisis hit, the numbers jumped even higher, reaching 69 percent in 2009, the highest percentage we had ever measured.

Do you think that currently:	1993	1998	1999	2003	2007	2008	2009
The vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or	37%	49%	45%	37%	36%	29%	28%
There are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so	60%	45%	47%	57%	62%	67%	69%
Don't know	4%	5%	8%	7%	2%	4%	3%

This concern about inaccessibility is paralleled by another concern about the growing price tag of a higher education. The public has been concerned about higher education tuition and fees for a long time; our recent studies show that many people think that higher education expenses are escalating rapidly. In our most recent study, 65 percent said that college prices are growing faster than other things, and of those who said this, more than seven out of ten said that college prices are growing as fast or even faster than healthcare. And while loans may be widely available, many people are concerned that students are borrowing too much. In 2009 we found that more than eight out of ten agreed that students have to borrow too much money to attend college.

Squeeze Play

When taken together, these two trends—increasing necessity and declining availability—create a difficult conflict for many Americans, which we have described as a “squeeze play,” where people perceive a college education as simultaneously more essential and less obtainable.



The numbers speak for themselves, describing a situation where a fundamental element of full participation in our society is becoming both more important and less available. As we will see, this painful dilemma has also been accompanied by a growing frustration with higher education itself.

Implications for Public Policy

What is the message in these findings for higher education administrators and state officials concerned with higher education? On the one hand, the conviction that attending college is the key to a secure economic future remains steadfast. Interestingly, the combination of rising college prices and a financial crisis has not made families reconsider the option of sending their children to college. Even after two years of the financial crisis, we found that most parents are still optimistic about their own children's ability to go to college. In 2009 we found that 80 percent of parents felt that it was somewhat or very likely that their oldest child would go to college.

Our focus groups suggest that people may be responding to financial problems not by taking their children out of

college, but by “trading down” to less expensive alternatives such as community colleges. Indeed, given the lack of jobs for young people, many may be thinking that college is a better alternative for their children than ever, despite its rising prices. In other words, the concerns about accessibility voiced in our studies are—at least for now—at a more abstract level about higher education accessibility in general. The results here do not suggest that the public is ready to turn its back on higher

education, dismiss its importance, or stop encouraging their children to attend.

But the results do suggest that the public may be becoming less receptive to the argument that is often made by college

presidents—that their institutions need more resources if they are to continue their mission. This line of thinking among higher education leaders emerged in “The Iron Triangle,” another recent study from Public Agenda and the National Center, which was based on interviews with 25 college presidents, published in 2008. In these interviews, many college presidents say that they were caught in an unbreakable relationship between the cost of running their operations, the number of students they can educate, and maintaining educational quality. Specifically, they argued that if they were to increase the number of students or the quality of education they would need more money, and conversely, cuts in their budgets would inevitably translate to either a decrease in the number of students they could educate or diminished educational quality. The solution that many of the college presidents offered was a major reinvestment in higher education. Several of our interviewees remarked that the country needs to make a mental shift away from thinking of higher education as a private good, toward seeing it as a public good that deserves more public support.

The findings from our most recent studies of public opinion suggest that the majority of the public doesn't buy this argument. Solid majorities believe colleges could increase enrollment without having to raise prices or cut quality. Most also say colleges could spend less and still maintain quality. Indeed, these views were held by healthy majorities of the public even before the current financial crisis.

Which comes closer to your own view?	2007	2008	2009
If colleges cut budgets, the quality of education will suffer	40%	42%	40%
Colleges could spend less and still maintain a high quality of education	56%	53%	54%
Don't know	4%	5%	6%

We have also seen a growing skepticism among the general public about the idealism and motives of higher education leadership. When we began this research, most of our respondents had a positive opinion about higher education in general, seeing higher education as different both from business and from K–12 schools. When we were doing focus groups for our 2007 study, however, we began to hear voices that suggested that people no longer saw any significant difference between the motives of higher education leaders and other institutions such as business. A man in Atlanta described higher education as “a growing business” with “money coming in from everywhere.” When

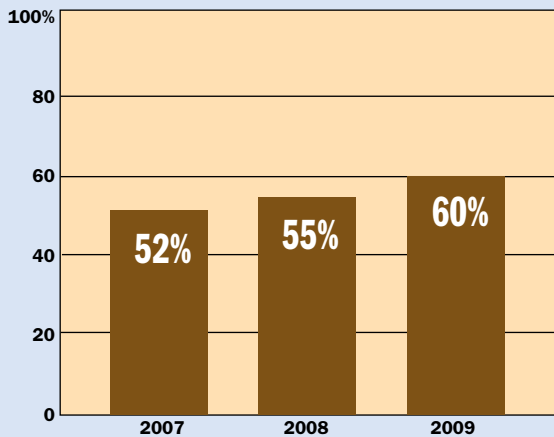
Growing numbers of Americans believe that it is nearly impossible to climb up to a higher economic status without the benefit of higher education.

Studies in 1998 and 1999 documented the high-water mark in public optimism about the accessibility of higher education.

we began to track this attitude in 2007, we found that a majority of Americans (52 percent) did, in fact, feel that colleges are like most businesses, and care mainly about the bottom line, as opposed to being primarily concerned about educating students. The percentage of people who felt this way continued to rise through the financial crisis to 60 percent in our most recent study.

**Rising Public Skepticism:
Americans increasingly believe colleges care more about their bottom line than the educational needs of their students**

Which comes closer to your view—colleges today care mainly about education and making sure students have a good educational experience, or colleges today are like most businesses and care mainly about the bottom line?



Percent who say, "Colleges today are like most businesses and care mainly about the bottom line"

A growing number of people seem to be saying something like this to America's colleges and universities: "Now that times are tough, we are getting a better idea of what you really care about, and it isn't the educational experience of your students." In part, this attitude might be a reaction to service cuts and tuition price hikes in colleges and universities around the country as they cope with reduced revenue from the state (for public systems) and/or declining endowments (for private institutions). As we have seen, most Americans are convinced that the institutions could do more with less.

This does not mean that the public is actively hostile to

higher education, but it does suggest that the public might not be especially sympathetic to the internal problems of the higher education system, either. Our findings suggest, in other words, that the public may be poised in a period of ambivalence and perhaps

Even after two years of the financial crisis, we found that most parents are still optimistic about their own children's ability to go to college.

unpredictability toward the financial difficulties of higher education. On the one hand, people believe that higher education is important and necessary. But at the same time, we find no evidence of sympathy for the argument that colleges and universities are starved for financial resources. If higher education leaders want to make the argument for a significant reinvestment in higher education, they may find that their words fall on deaf ears, given the public's current state of mind, and that they will need to make a more specific and compelling argument to bring more Americans to their side.

To put this in another way, higher education leaders are now hearing calls from a variety of sources demanding greater productivity and, indeed, a fundamental change in higher education's "business model." While not denying that they can do things more efficiently, higher education leaders often say that they cannot meet the challenges that face the country merely by changing or streamlining their operations. Our research suggests that in this debate, the public is not currently sympathetic to the position of higher education. Education leaders thus will need to make a better case to the public, significantly change their operations, or look elsewhere for political support. ♦

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Higher education leaders are now hearing calls from a variety of sources demanding greater productivity and a fundamental change in higher education's "business model."



Making the Middle Class

Don't let the recession fool you—postsecondary education is more valuable than ever

By Anthony P. Carnevale and Michelle Melton

WE'VE BEEN HERE before. The Great Recession, like recessions before it, has many people publicly wondering whether college is a safe investment. With many college graduates unsuccessful in finding work, the temptation to reject postsecondary education as a viable option grows stronger, especially among working families.

Unfortunately, the media have added confusion to the story at a time when clarity is needed most. Media stories on the value of college follow the business cycle, and when the cycle is down, journalists on deadline often find it easy to write a story that bucks the conventional wisdom. Headlines that suggest postsecondary education no longer pays off in the labor market are news because they play into middle class parents' fears that they will not be able to give their children the advantages they had. The bad advice gets more pointed as the recession deepens. This year, the *New York Times* had "Plan B: Skip College," while the *Washington Post* ran "Parents Crunch the Numbers and Wonder, Is College Still Worth It?" Even the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has succumbed, recently running "Here's Your Diploma. Now Here's Your Mop," a story about a college graduate working as a janitor that implies a college degree may not be worthwhile in today's economic climate.

The current recession isn't the first to produce such gloom. The *New York Times* and other prominent newspapers were

The negative press on college fuels pre-existing biases among working families that college is neither accessible nor worth the cost and effort.

printing the same stories in the early 1980s, during the last severe recession. At that time, the *Times* ran headlines like "The Underemployed: Working for Survival Instead of Careers." The *Washington Post* even ran the college graduate-to-janitor story back in 1981: "When Lyman Crump graduated with a liberal arts degree he was confident his future rested in an office

somewhere. But after working a year as a file clerk, Crump, 31, took a higher-paying job as a janitor."

And it's not just the journalists that get gloomy. The *New York Times* quoted Ronald Kutscher, associate commissioner at the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1984, as saying, "We are going to be turning out about 200,000 to 300,000 too many college graduates a year in the '80s." Yet the 1980s was a decade that saw an unprecedented rise in the wage premium for college-educated workers over high school-educated



workers that has not been matched since—an indication that the postsecondary system was underproducing college graduates, not, as Kutscher went on to say, that "the supply far exceeds the demand." The Bureau of Labor Statistics still hasn't changed its mind; according to the bureau, in 2008 the education system produced 22 million more people with postsecondary education than the economy required. Never mind that the college wage premium over high school degrees still exceeds seventy percent.

The sensationalist stories, the high unemployment among college grads, and the misleading official data are unlikely to keep middle- and upper-class youth from going to college. The real tragedy of these headlines is the message they send to less privileged youth for whom college is not an assumed path. The negative press on college fuels pre-existing biases among working families that college is neither accessible nor worth the cost and effort. Moreover, the bad press and worse data strengthen the hand of elitists who argue that college should be the exclusive preserve of those born into the right race, ethnicity and bank account.

Yet evidence demonstrates increasing demand for college, and the future promises more of the same. By 2018, 63 percent of jobs nationwide will require some form of postsecondary degree. Moreover, postsecondary education has become the only way to secure middle-class earnings in America and, for the least advantaged among us, is now the only way to escape poverty. In 1970, about 60 percent of Americans who attained middle-class status were high school graduates or dropouts. Today, only 46 percent can be found there. In contrast, 44 percent of the top three income deciles had postsecondary education in 1970; today, 81 percent do.

The press coverage and expert stumbles don't reflect the empirical reality, but they are symptomatic of a mundane human instinct. People tend to project what's happening in the present into the distant future. If housing prices are great,

they'll be that way forever! If job creation is slow, it will be that way forever! The reality is that jobs come and go with economic cycles. But what lies beneath the economic cycles, and what has remained constant, is the relentless engine of technological change spurred onward by global competition that demands more skilled workers. It is this persistent dynamic of up-skilling that has been driving the increased demand for more postsecondary education and training. There is no indication that the trend has suddenly reversed itself.

Meanwhile, when jobs disappear, more college is also the best safe harbor to wait out the recession and improve prospects in anticipation of the recovery. Indeed, college-educated workers are much more likely to be employed than their high school-educated counterparts, even during a recession. Even the bemoaned janitor in the *Chronicle's* story emphasized that his current job scrubbing toilets was a good job—because it would pay for his graduate school. He clearly understands, in spite of a less-than-ideal present, that the future benefits of more postsecondary education will eventually pay off.

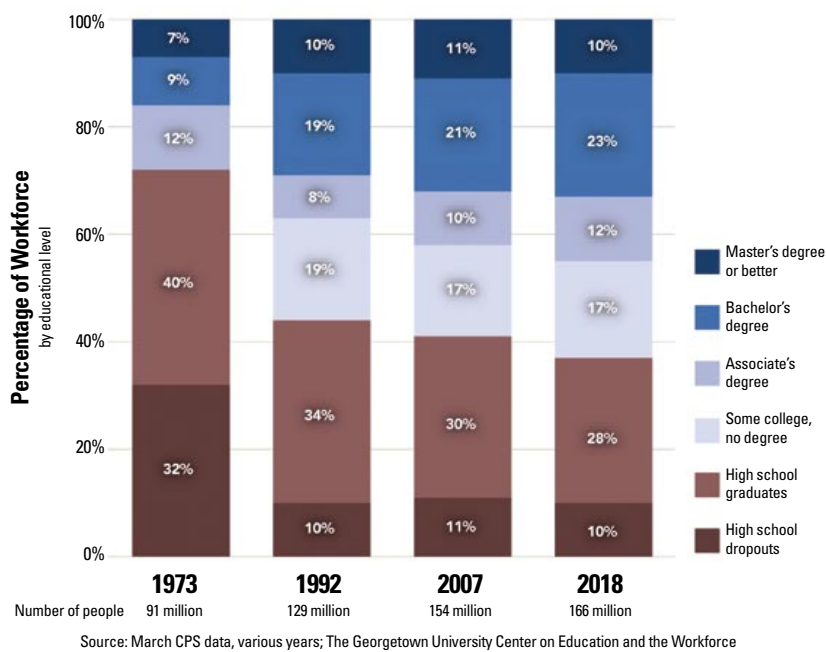
Irrespective of the current economic conditions, individuals need to consider college as a life-long investment decision. Likewise, the investment horizon for economic development needs to be measured in decades, not annual budget cycles. Skipping or shortening college on the basis of a headline or even a few years of bad economic news is foolish for individuals whose careers will span forty or more years of working life. On average, skipping an associate's degree

will cost a high school graduate half a million dollars in earnings, and skipping a bachelor's degree will cost a million and half dollars in potential earnings over a lifetime.

Our own research shows that we have underproduced college graduates by almost ten million since 1983. We also find that through 2018, at least three million jobs that require postsecondary education and training will be unfilled due to lack of supply. The share of jobs for those with a high school education or less is shrinking. (See chart.) In 1973, high school graduates

and dropouts accounted for 72 percent of jobs, while by 2007 it was 41 percent. The opposite has happened for those with at least some college: The share of jobs has increased from 28 percent in 1973 to 59 percent in 2007, and is projected to be 63 percent by 2018. Likewise, the share of national wage income from college-educated workers has increased from 38 percent

By 2018, about two-thirds of all employment will require some college education or better



to 73 percent since 1970, and there is every reason to believe that this trend will continue.

The longer we are focused on the past, the less time we will have to confront the realities of our fast-approaching economic future. In reality, the recession is *accelerating* the shift to jobs requiring postsecondary education. The jobs that replace the jobs we're losing will be very different kinds of jobs, requiring very different kinds of workers, that will need different kinds of preparation—mostly postsecondary preparation in one form or another.

While the economics of higher education are clear, the politics are not. Investing in schools and higher education is an easy political applause line, but it is often neglected in the budget line. The economy's lackluster demand in recession, coupled with the stories questioning the value of college, makes it easier to excuse cuts in public funding for postsecondary education. In the short-term, federal stimulus funds have helped fill the gaps for postsecondary cuts driven by declining state revenues. But the stimulus funds will be unavailable after 2011, and federal money can't make up the difference indefinitely. Paradoxically, we need postsecondary education more than ever but are less able to pay for it.

The current funding crunch in higher education is a symptom of a larger mismatch between public revenues and public commitments. Higher education is especially vulnerable in the debate about public priorities. It lacks the core constituency and the immediacy that issues like Social Security or homeland security have.

Reducing funding for postsecondary education is bad economic policy and also bad social policy. The consequences will reverberate society-wide because slashing higher education budgets is a decision that will affect inequality for the next several decades by determining who gets access to

In 1970, 44 percent of the top three income deciles had postsecondary education—today, 81 percent do.

middle-class careers.

Calls for greater efficiency in higher education are often touted as a way to squeeze more from the system without allocating additional resources. Although more efficiency in postsecondary education is necessary, simply increasing professor course-loads and cutting services without addressing the way that we allocate funding in higher education is likely to result in further stratification of our already inequitable system. Currently, the bulk of the resources of our higher education system are going to institutions concentrated at the top of the postsecondary hierarchy, and the fewest resources are allocated to the institutions that serve the majority of postsecondary students—especially the community colleges, which serve 43 percent of all undergraduate students. Only about seven percent of students are enrolled in institutions that spend more than \$25,000 per enrollee, while almost half of students enroll in institutions that spend less than \$10,000 per enrollee. Differences in spending at private schools and public schools amount to \$6,000 to \$20,000 per student, per year—or up to \$80,000 over four years.

These discrepancies are not just between public and elite, private institutions. On average, differences in spending among public institutions run about \$4,000 per student per year—or \$16,000 over the course of four years of study. These gaps are growing as spending at two-year institutions declines, spending at four-year public institutions remains flat, and spending at private, four-year institutions grows.

This growing stratification is not just about money; it is also about the individual empowerment that money buys. Those with access to the brand-name four-year colleges are on their way to professions that not only deliver higher earnings but also bring higher levels of personal empowerment at work and in our society at large. Those who end up in the less selective colleges find their way into jobs, and more narrow social roles, in the rank-and-file professions like K–12 teaching and the uniformed services. Those with certificates and associate's degrees tend to find their way into even more

Irrespective of the current economic conditions, individuals need to consider college as a life-long investment decision.

narrow roles as technicians and para-professionals. The least advantaged, those with no postsecondary credential, risk life-long economic and social marginalization.

The institutions that we are systematically underfunding not only serve the majority of students, but they are also far more

likely to serve low-income, older and minority students. The inequitable distribution of resources has detrimental impacts on access, quality and completion in the system, and consequently it has enormous impact on the economic mobility of individuals in our society at large.

The increasingly powerful role of postsecondary education as the arbiter of economic and social empowerment is not

a problem by itself; the problem is the mounting evidence that postsecondary access and selectivity may be becoming an institutional device to perpetuate intergenerational reproduction of social stratification. The only way to ensure that these trends don't solidify is to make high-quality postsecondary education more available.

The point is not to take away all the money allocated to elite institutions and spread it around. Siphoning money from these institutions is not a solution. Elite institutions are well-funded, but redistributing their resources would only level down quality to the lowest common denominator across the system. If we cannot move large numbers of these less-advantaged students into the higher-priced and higher-quality programs at the selective colleges, then we may need to move quality programs, and the additional money to pay for them, to the community colleges and less selective four-year colleges where the least advantaged are currently enrolled.

Without resolving the inequality in the way we fund the institutions in our postsecondary education system, greater efficiency is likely to perpetuate a cycle where the privileged alone have access to the skills and credentials necessary to lead in the 21st-century economy. The economic consequences of failure to act are costly—and the social consequences are ruinous. ♦

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Investing in schools and higher education is an easy political applause line, but it is often neglected in the budget line.



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