This article is based on reviews of the annual evaluations of the Associates Program, which included interviews with each of the Associates and many of the presenters, using common interview guides. During fall 2007, a random sample of 20 Associates, drawn from all seven classes, but with some weighting given to the first three years, were contacted for follow-up interviews. A number of program presenters also were interviewed, along with senior staff of the National Center and others knowledgeable of the program and its purposes. It was not possible to include all of their comments in this article but an expression of gratitude is both due and extended to all. This article could not have been written without their help.

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION'S ASSOCIATES PROGRAM

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MAY 2009

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William Chance conducted annual evaluations of the Associates Program from its inception. Mr. Chance attended one or more of the national symposia for Associates each year, interviewed each of the Associates and submitted reports to the National Center. As the number of participants in the Associates Program approached 100 and in 2008 the National Center engaged in a far-ranging assessment of all of its programs, Mr. Chance was asked to provide a multi-year perspective, drawing upon the annual evaluations, interviews with several Associates some years after their participation, and with others who had participated in the program as presenters at the symposia, as funders, and as managers of the program. This essay draws on Mr. Chance's data, observations, and conclusions and was written for prospective nominators and applicants, as well as for the National Center's Board of Directors, funders, and staff.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Chance is the Executive Director of NORED, an organization that specializes in higher education policy and program research and evaluation. Chance conducted the seven annual evaluations of the Associates Program for the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education. He is former Executive Director of the Washington State Committee on Education Policies, Structure, and Management, and Deputy and Interim Executive Director of Washington's Council on Postsecondary Education. Chance also is a former member of the research faculty of the University of Washington, a past "Scholar in Residence" to the Western Governors' Association, and author of a book entitled, "*. . . the best of educations*" prepared for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science from The Ohio State University.

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In 1997, nearly 20 years after *Change's* 1978 issue listing 100 young education leaders, David Breneman and Barry Munitz, "troubled by a sense that neither could begin to name a comparable list of leaders today,"[1] collaborated on a replication of the earlier study. Although the 1978 survey had readily found qualified candidates for the list of 100, in their 1997 survey these authors were able to come up with only 40. Troubled by this, they wrote:

> *We firmly believe that higher education needs young, vital leaders for the years ahead, regardless of the vicissitudes of growth or development that the enterprise experiences. We believe our survey findings should give us pause—we are not prepared to declare a crisis, but we are troubled by what we found. Perhaps the most important issue to discuss is whether some extraordinary activity needs to take place to ensure that higher education secures its necessary share of leadership talent for the years ahead. If we conclude that action is warranted, today's leaders must discuss exactly what type of action might be effective.*[2]

People at the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Ford Foundation had similar concerns about a leadership crisis and the need for extraordinary activity in 2000 when they launched the Center's Associates Program.

Early in October, 10 members of the first class gathered at Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia, for the opening meeting. The group was composed of early- and mid-career professionals engaged in higher education policy and research of the applied and academic varieties. They were mostly state government staff and university faculty members.

Six and one half years later, in May 2007, 21 Associates completed the last year of the program at their final meeting in Seascape, California. Although twice the size of the first group, the last class also was made up of people of similar professional interests working at essentially similar points in their careers.[3] Nearly 100 people went through the program during its seven years of operation. It would be interesting to see how many of their names would be on the list of education leaders were such a *Change* survey conducted today. Many surely would, and their participation in the Associates Program certainly would have something to do with it.

Because the program was unusual, comparisons with others are hard to make, but by virtually every measure it achieved national recognition while remaining true to its central leadership concerns—capacity building and diversity enrichment.

Diversity—demographic, professional, and geographic—was a natural goal. When the program began, impressions of "a lot of aging white males at the head of the queue" were strong. Its accomplishment in this respect was evidenced by the racial, ethnic, and gender distribution apparent in each of the seven classes, by the range of professional fields from which they were drawn, and by the varied locations of the places where they worked.

[1] Breneman and Munitz, "The 1997 Leadership Poll," p. 12, Change, January-February 1998.
[2] Ibid., p. 13
[3] The class size figures are: 2000–01 = 10; 2001–02 = 12; 2002–03 = 13; 2003–04 = 15; 2004–05 = 14; 2005–06 = 15; and 2006-07 = 21, for a total of 100 participants.

Participants included people in state government, most of whom were legislative or executive staff members, or people from state higher education agencies (e.g., statewide coordinating or governing boards). Forty percent were directly associated with institutions of higher learning, usually as faculty. Federal agency staff, national higher education organizations (including ACE, NCHEMS, SHEEO, and ECS), regional associations (e.g., WICHE), philanthropic foundation staff members (e.g., Pew and Lumina), and people who worked with national polling associations also were represented. A few graduate students, higher education consultants, and some others whose job descriptions do not fit readily into the aforementioned categories (e.g., people from K–12) round out the list. The mix of professions bridged the policy and academic sectors; geographic spice was added by the fact that Associates came from 28 states and the District of Columbia.

The program's main purpose was directed to future needs for leaders in higher education. The presumption of the authors of the second *Change* survey found restatement in the Center's initial grant proposal to the Ford Foundation: "Emerging social and political conditions affecting higher education in America will require scholars and leaders who understand the complexities of developing and implementing sound public higher education policies from both the academic and practical perspectives." The sentence ended with the clause, "and someone should be thinking about this."

Some people were thinking about this, and they also were thinking about such related matters as, "Where are these scholars and leaders to be found?" "How should they be brought into the program?" And, "How should they be prepared?" A lot of the answers were discovered in the doing, but the original model proved unusually durable and accommodating.

It was apparent from the early planning conversations between Pat Callan, President of the National Center, and Jorge Balan, then with the Ford Foundation, that the capacity issue involved not only concerns about a diminishing higher education leadership corps but needs for people who could advise and inform the policy process and be sensitive to state problems while staying attuned to the great potential that exists within institutions of higher learning. A lot of attention during the design stage was directed to a program that would join these communities.

THE APPROACH

The program provided an experience that usually does not become available to policy staff and faculty until much later in their careers, usually long after they become established and recognized in their fields. Jorge Balan credits Pat Callan with the concept:

> *The shaker and mover was Pat, who had the right idea about not bringing people into the National Center as interns or fellows in residence but having them meet away from their places of work for three extended weekends a year. There was not a model to follow; it was a departure from most training-in-residence programs. The program would not be restricted to any one professional environment, academics or policymakers but would include all of them. This was brilliant. They [the National Center] got good candidates and a good diversity. These were different people—some bright and upcoming in academia but who were interested in the policy arena—learning from those who were in day-to-day policy settings but who were not engaged in scholarly pursuits. This kind of combination, the level of commitment, the links to the Center, and the varied professional backgrounds of the participants made for a very good mix.*

The program was funded as part of a Ford Foundation grant to the National Center. The Center's commitment was manifest in the organizational and logistical support it provided. This included the continuous involvement of senior staff, Pat Callan and Joni Finney, and their participation, along with members of the Center's research staff, in all of the meetings. Indeed, the senior staff assumed management and direction responsibility for the program throughout its life. It never really had a separate director or coordinator. According to Pat Callan, "The cost of the program was pretty modest—travel expenses—but a lot of time and effort went into it, and this was a substantial commitment." Associates' travel and lodging expenses were covered, and an annual stipend of $1,500 was provided (some Associates could not accept the stipend because of their organization's policy; most said it was nice but they would have done it for nothing).

The program brought the Associates together for discussions with experts on contemporary higher education issues in a series of "think tank" symposia on three weekends spread across the program year (usually in October, February, and May). These were held in "retreat-type" settings located on the East and West Coasts, with the winter meeting usually in Santa Fe. Meetings were organized around topics high on the national policy agenda, identified collaboratively by the Associates and the National Center staff at the beginning of each program year. Attendance was mandatory.

The symposia served as the essence of the program. For Lumina's Dewayne Matthews, a presenter at several of the meetings, these were crucial:

> *One of the most important functions such programs serve is socializing people into accepted values and mores. In higher education, meetings and seminars are how this is done. Knowing how to use such settings to challenge people has a definite value. The Center does have a way of doing meetings that is really effective. Nobody does it better.*

The meetings commenced on Friday evening and continued until noon on Sunday, with an afternoon break on Saturday. Evenings were spent over dinner and informal conversations. Arrangements were made for the participants to informally interact at other times throughout the weekend. Session presenters were encouraged to stay for the entire meeting and socialize with the group. Most did, and the conversations often continued well into the early hours of the morning.

Meeting weekends normally commenced with a Friday evening conversation with such notables as former New Mexico Governor Garrey Carruthers, Senator Jack Scott of California, SREB President David Spence, and NCHEMS President Dennis Jones, among others.

Session topics, sometimes discussed while still in report draft form, varied from class to class but together covered a comprehensive range that included such issues as college cost and price, the education pipeline, inter-sector transition, accountability, access, outcomes, effectiveness, international comparisons and economic competition, public opinion and the public agenda, finance, budgets, tuition and student financial assistance, capacity, quality, the independent and for-profit sectors, governance, and education re-form, to name a few. The first meeting in the three symposia sequence also usually featured a discussion of the National Center's signature biennial report, *Measuring Up*.

Visiting presenters, Associates, and Center staff discussed essential aspects of these and related matters throughout the meetings. David Breneman of the University of Virginia, SHEEO's Paul Lingenfelter, Dewayne Matthews of Lumina, Gordon Davies, former head of the Virginia Council on Higher Education and Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, David Longanecker of WICHE, John Immerwahr of Public Agenda, Jane Wellman of the Delta Project, Scott Pattison of the National Association of State Budget Officers, Peg Miller of the University of Virginia, John Tapogna of ECONorthwest, Howard Block of Banc of America Securities, Dennis Jones, Aims McGuinness, and Peter Ewell of NCHEMS are some examples.

Later in the program's life, Associates from earlier classes were invited back to present and discuss current projects. Lara Couturier [2001–02], who was working with Frank Newman on The Futures Project at Brown University when she was an Associate, Marlene Garcia [2001–02], then a California Senate staff member, Mario Martinez [2000–01], a faculty member at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Bridget Terry Long [2002–03], a Harvard University faculty member, and Nancy Shulock [2002–03], Executive Director of CSU-Sacramento's Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, are a few.

THE ASSOCIATES

Candidates for the program were selected through a nomination process that relied on recommendations of higher education leaders and former Associates (because of their program experiences, former Associates proved especially adept at identifying people who would both contribute to and gain from the program). People who had some familiarity with the new faces in higher education were prominent among the nominators. Each year the Center would invite nominations from those on its distribution list and through announcements in its quarterly publication, *Cross*Talk, and this too served to focus the candidate lists on the professionals the Center was trying to reach. Visiting experts who had served as presenters were also consulted. The goal was not so much a competitive application process as the identification of talented people with leadership potential who could benefit from an unusual opportunity provided at no cost to them, other than some committed time at a formative stage in their careers. This required a fairly perceptive recruitment effort, in this case one that also was kept in alignment by requests to the members of each graduating class for suggestions of professions whose representatives could add to and enrich the conversations.

Pat Callan believes the resultant professional diversity met a vital program objective:

> *In order to have a robust policy debate, it had to be a program that had a diversity of professionals from different backgrounds who were brought together with others. This usually does not happen until you are pretty senior. A lot of things can happen if you are exposed to other opinions early, at a point where you can really think about them, and about the perspectives and experience others bring to the table.*

Many others recognized the value of the exposure to such a broadened range of opinions and perspectives. In the words of Diane Deane [2006–07], an Associate who is also an Illinois State University faculty member:

> *It was almost like a return to graduate school, although no one in graduate school ever taught this kind of course. It was great to hear from so many top-notch people from so many sectors. It has and will continue to shape both my teaching and my research. The other part is getting to know the other members. I expect these people to come up [career-wise] together. These are going to be the leaders in the field.*

George Wimberly [2002–03], with the American Educational Research Association in Washington D.C., expressed a similar view about the variety of opinions present at the table:

> *The Associates Program gave me a different perspective on what's going on in higher education: how universities are governed, policies are made, funding is determined, issues get stressed, roles of states in the pipeline, and moving students through school into the work force. It was quite an eye-opener, and it has informed a lot of my work.*

Putting people in touch with their contemporaries was a natural result. Travis Riendl [2000–01], who when an Associate was with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (now he is with Communication*Works* in D.C.), offered this comment:

> *The Program really placed me in contact with a group of professionals from around the country that continue to be very beneficial in my work—it enriched my network of contacts with people specialized in student financial aid, economic issues, with academic and practitioner backgrounds. By connecting a diverse group of people at this stage in their careers I think it really helped to cultivate a new generation of leaders.*

This aspect of diversity, getting to know others from different walks and backgrounds, was recognized by most of the Associates as a compelling ingredient. Peter Blake [2002–03], former Virginia Secretary of Education, now with that state's community college system, put it this way:

> *I really enjoyed the diversity of backgrounds among these people. I got to mix it up with young faculty members, people from other states, and people in non-profit associations. It was not a bunch of systems office people who were dealing every day with the same issues. These people were from other sectors and dealt with many of the same problems but in very different ways. They were engaged and brought different perspectives to bear. They were exceptionally bright. It really broadened my perspective.*

For Marlene Garcia [2001–02], who was a California Senate staff member when she was an Associate (she now is with the community college central office in that state), reaching outside her normal peer group was an especially valuable feature:

> *Those of us who work in the policy arena tend to look at issues from within the policy experience we have in our own state capitals. We talk more often than not with people who are in the state, dealing with state issues—people who are trying to advance their own agenda (I do not mean this in a negative sense). This is what we hear all of the time. In the Associates Program you have a cross section of folks from state government, faculty, administration, legislatures, and many other sectors, from the federal government and many other states. The program took us out of our comfortable mindsets and exposed us to a much broader range of views on how to define and solve problems. This is immensely valuable, even if we don't really agree with what someone else may be saying. It gets people to step back and hear different arguments and see different perspectives. If you listen hard, you will learn something. Here [in California] we tend to think in California terms. While California's problems may be bigger, they are not very different than those of other states.*

The annual evaluations found consistently high levels of participant satisfaction. The grades they gave the program ranged between 3.83 and 3.95 on a four-point [GPA] scale. Nearly all of the reports from the program participants (Associates, the people who employed them, and the meeting participants) applauded the experience. Satisfaction also was apparent in the Associates' commonly and enthusiastically expressed willingness to do it again if given the opportunity.

With the initial funding exhausted, the program is in hiatus as the Center conducts an operations and mission review and decides on what comes next. Fundamental questions are: "Did it work?" And, "Did it contribute to capacity?" Here the words of Associates themselves continue to be helpful, as many report their careers were enhanced by the experience. Peter Blake is among them:

> *Dozens of Associates have gone on into fairly prominent positions and are quoted frequently in the press. You can see in those comments many of the things we discussed in those late night sessions. A commonality of policy goals is manifest among this group. They are living some of these ideas in their current jobs. After the program I moved into a more prominent position in the governor's office. It was a very successful experience for me—the program has continued to shape my thinking on things I've thought about for years—it gave a much sharper focus. In Virginia there is a string of Associates who worked around capital square on these issues. At least three in a row were in the program; they shared their experiences and have been able to put into play many of the ideas we talked about in the program.*

Brian Noland [2002–03], now Chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, offered this:

> *It was the most significant opportunity I have had since graduate school. It was a chance to broaden my understanding of higher education policy, make life-long connections in the field, and be exposed to different sides of issues I had not seen before. It really brought together a diversity of people from across the field and contributed to a cross-pollination that has pushed higher education. Many others have gone on to bigger and better things after they graduated; the doors were open to them because of the program.*

For Darcy Renfro [2006–07], policy advisor to Arizona's Governor Napolitano, the program came at an almost perfect place in her career. Darcy's comment also speaks directly to one of the program's objectives—enriching the higher education policy debate:

> *It was extremely useful to me in my job, particularly since my Governor was Chair of the National Governors Association during the same time as my Associates Program, and one of her priorities was post-secondary education. This program gave me a level of expertise I wouldn't have gotten otherwise. I could take all of the best information available and synthesize it and integrate it for the Governor to use at NGA. Being able to hear different viewpoints is something you almost never get to do, it seems, talking with faculty, for example. In the program we had all of these different perspectives in one room. It provided a condensed learning experience I could not have got otherwise.*

They also have stayed in touch, and many continue to collaborate. Most believe the opportunities to meet and form networks with those within their own class and from other years was one of the strongest features of the program. This feature received the most frequent mention among them, but it was not the only benefit they identified. Lara Couturier feels that by bringing these people together:

> *The program did what it set out to do—it created a network of young professionals that trust, respect, and continue to work together. I have continued to work directly with four, and there are three more I have maintained contact with [of her class of 12] by collaborating on research. For me, this says it all. It really did establish long-term relationships.*

Karen Paulsen [2001–02], a Senior Associate at NCHEMS, also stressed the networking dimension:

> *There is only one person in my class I have not been in touch with this year. I stay in touch regularly with at least six, whom I did not know before. We really do talk to each other on professional and policy matters. The bottom line is that I call them; they call me. These are people I can rely on in a professional way.*

For Brian Pusser [2001–02], a University of Virginia faculty member, the program was an excellent professional development experience even for academics:

> *If there were a list of best practices in leadership development in higher education, the Associates Program would deserve a prominent place. There is an important element of mentoring present, and this is pretty rare once you leave college—the opportunity to spend quality time with people from different sectors who are about where you are in their careers. The program moved me into different arenas and helped me build alliances that last. Although it is not an "academic" professional development program, it is a model of what institutions want to support and be affiliated with. So it is a recognized accomplishment for faculty who are in the tenure track.*

Another Associate, Terese Rainwater [2002–03], a member of the WICHE staff, viewed it similarly:

> *It was a wonderful professional development opportunity. It did a number of things all at the same time. It carved out a space to think about higher education and where it is going for people who are in the field. It created a network that I use and often turn to when building relationships with people in my field. My husband, a trial attorney, said he would give anything to do something like this in his work.*

Exposing people to a wider range of policy issues than they typically encounter also was mentioned frequently. For University of Michigan faculty member Mike Bastedo, who was an Associate during the 2005–06 year, the program:

> *Oriented me to what was really on the national agenda. I had worked in a board office before and had a pretty good sense of issues in the field. The best thing was getting me more current on some things like student learning and assessment, which were then just barely on the horizon. A second important thing was building a relationship with the Center; I did find it useful to get to know them.*

For a program focused on higher education policy rather than on more academic or theoretical matters it achieved perhaps unexpected resonance in the academic community. Mario Martinez [2000–01], a faculty member of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, alluded directly to this appeal:

> *The program has had a great effect on academic careers, as well as on those of people in the policy settings. It gives people the ability to establish literature ties—[during the program] all of the Associates use the same literature and this gives them a base to establish connections to do research on prominent topics. The program's ability to create networks is a particularly important function. Much of this is up to the initiative of the individuals to keep these going. As a professor I have some time to do this. For emerging scholars, the program provides national visibility. It fits into the academic culture as an example of national service with an organization with high national visibility. Service is always kind of tangential to research and teaching in academe, but if you have something like this with the National Center it is particularly valuable. One gains a lot of visibility and traction as a young scholar. From a personal standpoint it is probably more valuable for a professor than it is for a policy analyst. It is noticeable on a dossier.*

Another, perhaps unexpected, program consequence was the creation of an identifiable reservoir of people with talent that employers could visit and draw from to fill open positions. Dennis Jones, President of NCHEMS and a program participant and nominator, spoke about this, and about the broadening effect he has seen in the Associates who work in his agency.

> *I think the real thing for the participants was a broader understanding of real policy issues—I can see that from the people I know who were in the program here and elsewhere. They have a much broader perspective than when they went in. This is a set of much networked folks, people who really have colleagues, and these things have lasted; they consult, meet, and trust one another to be helpful in talking through issues. The value to us as employers is that I get asked for nominees for various positions and tend to go through the list of Associates I know as the first place to look. This is an important source of referral opportunities.*

For its part the Center was able to get fresh ideas from people who were not yet set on what they believe policy could (or could not) accomplish. During the symposia, Center draft reports sometimes were discussed, and comments and advice were gained from people who had done their homework (and doing their homework was one of the implicit expectations). Pat Callan viewed this as a clear benefit when he noted that the Associate Program served as "an advisory tool to test ideas, and as a source of really good and helpful policy advice and conversations."

The Center was created in part to continue and enhance the national higher education policy debate. The program's contribution to that prompted a question to this effect in the follow-up interviews. ACE's Melanie Corrigan [2004–05] responded,

> *As part of its goals the Center wanted to create a group of people who could be prepared and really engaged in the debate on higher education. They sought a return to the debates of the '70s, and they mourned the loss of this exchange of ideas. They felt very passionately about the value of this and have tried to recreate it. This was a contribution to something the Center was created to advance. This was something I really valued about the program. It provided a safe place to have radical ideas.*

Paul Lingenfelter of SHEEO believes the program is "contributing to the national policy debate by getting people engaged and exposing them to others who are in leadership roles already."

For higher education consultant Derek Price [2001–02], "If I think of the policy debate in a very broad sense, the dialogue, the conversations, I feel the program has contributed to it. But I don't know if enough time has passed for it to have been effective yet. The Center and the program have influenced the conversations but have not yet enabled the ideas to become legislation. This may be too much to expect in a short period."

Others agree that with the program the Center has built a critical mass of people and stimulated a dialogue involving staff in the states and the nation's capital. Chris Mazzeo [2003–04], a higher education consultant, agrees the Associates Program is changing this but it is a slow process. He suggested we are still 20 years away from the point where we can overcome the self-interested nature of the participants in it.

Brian Noland also believes the higher education policy conversations were enriched by the program, but he sees this as happening now:

> *I think [the program] has contributed to the national debate by bringing together people from different fields and sectors. About 100 exceptional people came together to write, think, debate, and expand their horizons about concepts, purposes, best practices, and many other crucial subjects.*

> *The master plan for West Virginia will ask one fundamental question— How can institutions better serve the needs of state, rather than the state serving the institutions? This question, which was prominent in the Associates program discussions, has fundamentally changed the character of the debate.*

WHAT NEXT?

Most of those who were in some way part of it agree the program accomplished its main purposes. The question now is: What next? Although it has completed its initial run, there are questions about its future: should it continue, and if so, should it do so in its present form? Is there another program design worth considering, especially if the Center, an essential ingredient in the success of the effort, were not to continue it?

The business of capacity building and national conversation enrichment are not finished. As the program's alumni advance in their careers, it is a virtual certainty that the three crucial "A–words" in higher education, Access, Affordability, and Accountability, will become even more strongly ingrained values in the policy process, as will the question that was raised over and over again in each program class—How can institutions serve the needs of the public rather than vice-versa? Whatever may be the future of the program, these things are not going away.

Decisions about its future are dependent on a number of things. But most who know it agree that it should continue. One of the Associates concluded his interview with this thought:

> *It is really important that some form of this program continues. The best thing we can do is keep professionals who are coming up in the policy world connected. There is no manual on how to do this—you learn from others. The different perspectives as you are developing connections, learning how different parts of the enterprise work, all would be gone. This would be a really lost opportunity if it were dropped.*

Mario Martinez returned to the continuing importance of what the Center is attempting to accomplish with respect to capacity building when he concluded his interview:

> *This is something that gets a lot of talk—planning for the next generation of policy leaders, but few actually try to do it. The Center—Pat and Joni—are doing this. With the program they are cultivating the seeds of the next generation of leaders who will continue the work. They will be needed, and they will continue and enrich the debate.*

The Associates Program indeed was an extraordinary action dedicated to the assurance of an enriched supply of leadership talent for the years ahead. The discussions Breneman and Munitz were calling for did occur, at least they began, and in no small part because of the Associates Program they are unlikely to soon end.