

## STATE POLICY LEADERSHIP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: A brief summary of the origins and continuing evolution of a profession

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### INTRODUCTION

After writing this title, I decided to go to the dictionary and see what it had to say about the word “profession.” Naturally, I found several definitions, but drawing from those which apply to what I mean to say, I came up with this: *a vocational calling requiring knowledge.*

While state policy leadership for higher education is not universally recognized as a profession, either within states or within higher education, the profession has existed in the United States for more than half a century. Moreover, its essential work is now practiced in other countries all over the world. This essay will briefly consider how the profession emerged in the U.S, how it has evolved over the past half century, and the future implications of changing and growing demands for educational attainment. While the United States may have been the first country to develop this profession, every developed and developing country is now grappling with policy and educational issues involved in its work.

### THE TRUMAN COMMISSION: THE SEED OF A PROFESSION?

SHEEO, the U.S. association of State Higher Education Executive Officers, was founded June 24-25, 1954 in Santa Fe, New Mexico when ten of the then eleven statewide higher education executives gathered for their first annual meeting. John Dale Russell of the New Mexico Board of Educational Finance was the convener of the group. Russell had been Director for Higher Education in the Truman Administration, and was widely known for his educational leadership; for some years afterward the association gave a “John Dale Russell Award” to honor other members. (Other details of SHEEO’s early history are a bit murky; perhaps someday a scholar of higher education will be inspired to fill in a few gaps, perhaps in part by visiting the Truman Library which holds Russell’s papers.)

A summary of the Truman Commission was written by Russell for the *Journal of Educational Sociology* in 1949. (*Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 8, “Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education,” April, 1949, pp. 493-508.) These few quotes from the Truman Commission report and Russell’s commentary convey its essential message:

*American colleges and universities....can no longer consider themselves merely the instrument for producing intellectual elite; they must become the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult is enabled and encouraged to carry his education, formal and informal, as far as his native capacities permit. (Truman Commission, I, 101)*

*If the position is taken that the national economy is fixed and that expenditures for higher education are expenditures for consumption purposes only, then the view that America cannot afford the cost of the proposed program might appear justified. But such a position cannot be justified. Higher education is an investment, not a cost. It is an investment in free men. It is an investment in social welfare, better living standards, better health, and less crime. It is an investment in higher production, increased income, and greater efficiency in agriculture, industry, and government. It is an investment in a bulwark against garbled information, half-truths, and untruths; against ignorance and intolerance. It is an investment in human talent, better human relationships, democracy, and peace. (Truman Commission, V, 26-28.)*

Concluding his 1949 review, Russell wrote:

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***Truman Commission***

*The President's Commission on Higher Education undertook the most far reaching evaluation of American higher education that has ever been attempted. Its conclusions have been startling to a great many people. Too often its recommendations have been reviewed outside the context of the arguments from which they arise. Stated thus baldly, the recommendations have seemed to many people to be idealistic and impossible of attainment. Read in the context of the report itself, the recommendations appear to be almost invariably the conclusions of a thoroughly rational analysis. To put these recommendations into effect will challenge the best efforts of American educators and statesmen. (Russell, p. 508)*

Other articles in the April 1949 issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology* (by Allen P. Farrell, President of the University of Detroit; Paul Swain Havens, President of Wilson College; and T.R. McConnell, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Minnesota) vigorously debated both practical and philosophical questions about its vision.

## **AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION 1954 TO 1975— MANAGING GROWTH, THE NATIONAL IMPERATIVE**

In 1954, World War II veterans educated by the GI Bill were raising their families. The baby boom generation was in pre-school or elementary school. Higher education in the U.S. was important, but relatively small. Total higher education enrollment in the U.S. was 2.4 million, 1.6% of the total population, only 55% in public institutions, and 64% male. Total higher education spending was \$2.9 billion, 0.76% of GDP.

But Russell and the founders of SHEEO surely had a sense of what was coming, even if their knowledge was incomplete. The demand for higher education was destined to grow exponentially, driven both by increases in population and the proportion of the population enrolling. The launching of Sputnik by the

Soviet Union in 1957 amplified the impact of these forces. Postsecondary education became a greater public priority, and the object of exponential increases in public investment.

By 1975, two decades later, the face of American higher education had changed dramatically. Total enrollment was 11.2 million, almost five times that in 1954. The enrollments represented 5.2% of the population (a quadrupling of the 1954 rate), with 79% in public institutions. Higher education was still mostly male, but the proportion of male students had dropped from 64% to 55%.

The growing importance of higher education and of public spending for higher education drew attention to two fundamental questions: First, what is the balance between the public and private benefits of higher education—who should pay what fraction of the costs? Second, what is the proper relationship between accountability to the public interest and the traditional freedoms of the academy? What are the legitimate prerogatives of the state and how, if at all, should its power over the academy be limited or restrained? A substantial literature addressed these questions before, during, and after this period, but yielding to the demands of time and space, I shall resist the temptation to do little more than identify the issues in this brief summary.

When the baby boom generation reached adolescence in the 1960s, statewide planning for higher education became a national movement. Surging demand for higher education intensified competition among institutions for resources and advantage in the higher education marketplace. The California Master Plan emerged from a high-level negotiation among institutional interests in California, and those demographic trends and Clark Kerr's leadership in developing the California Master Plan placed him on an October 1960 cover of *Time Magazine*.

Institutions everywhere competed to serve growing enrollments. While no state replicated the California Master Plan, most faced similar challenges, and many were influenced by it. In the 1960s and early 1970s some form of statewide planning and coordination emerged in virtually every state. In the early 1960s states like Texas, Illinois, and Ohio established strong coordinating boards to mediate turf battles in the legislature among institutional and regional interests. In states such as Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, the statewide planning imperative led dominant research universities to establish local branch campuses to protect their brand and political influence. The Higher Education Act Amendments of 1972 sought to make statewide planning universal among the states by creating state postsecondary education planning commissions, known as 1202 Commissions, which were designed to reflect and incorporate the interests of every sector.

What actually emerged in each state was shaped by tradition, the established institutional distribution of political power, and the influence of political and educational leaders. Among the educators, Clark

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Kerr in California, John Millett in Ohio, Lyman Glenny in Illinois, Ken Ashworth in Texas, Bill Friday in North Carolina, and E. T. Dunlop in Oklahoma are just a few of a generation of leaders who had a statewide perspective on higher education and worked to shape policy and the allocation of resources. Despite the differences in the way states approached the issues, they all faced common problems. What will it take to accommodate enrollment demand? How should existing institutions be expanded? How and where should new ones be created? The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) was created with a large, multi-year federal grant to develop the knowledge and tools to address such questions.

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***Terry Sanford***

Recognizing that something significant was happening in higher education, the American Council on Education in 1970 commissioned and published a comprehensive study of statewide coordination by Robert O. Berdahl, *Statewide Coordination of Higher Education*. Berdahl's book is fundamentally sympathetic to the perspective that the public interest and the interests of colleges and universities are essentially the same. He quotes Terry Sanford, Governor of North Carolina, co-founder of the Education Commission of the States, and later U.S. Senator and President of Duke University as saying, "More universities have suffered from political indifference than have ever been upset by political interference." But the persistent tension between accountability to the public interest and the traditional freedoms of the academy is evident in his concluding comment:

***The state has every right to assure itself that the institutions within its jurisdiction are operating in the broad public interest, but it must be careful, in interpreting that interest, to recognize the special need of universities and colleges for a high degree of autonomy.***

***Robert O. Berdahl***

*Though politicians and the public may find it irritating to be told over and over that higher education is qualitatively a different kind of operation from other state activities, such happens to be the case. With roots that go back for hundreds of years, with a delicate inner rationale that differs markedly from those of government and industry, our universities and colleges are geese that lay golden eggs, and to kill them by improper treatment would rob our society of enormous benefits. The state has every right to assure itself that the institutions within its jurisdiction are operating in the broad public interest, but it must be careful, in interpreting that interest, to recognize the special need of universities and colleges for a high degree of autonomy. It has been said that no one who does not love a university should be allowed to tamper with it. We must hope that the coordinating and planning agencies, which will have such a vital role to play, will always be characterized not only by their concern for the public interest but also by their genuine affection and respect for our institutions of higher education. (Berdahl, p. 270)*

## 1975 TO 2000—

### THE END OF GROWTH? OR THE END OF PLANNING?

In 1974 when I started my career with the Illinois Board of Higher Education, we “planners” looked at demographic trends and concluded that impending declines in the number of people in the 18-24 age group portended the end of growth and actual declines in higher education enrollments. That conclusion turned out to be wrong, because we didn’t entirely foresee the persistent growth of adult and part-time students and the increasing economic importance and benefits of postsecondary education. But enrollment growth did slow down, and the obvious (to some anyway) needs for state agencies to plan and coordinate the expansion of higher education diminished.

In this period, matters other than growth captured the attention of the profession. What should students pay? Is low tuition for higher education a regressive tax, since higher income people enroll at a higher rate? What are the merits/demerits of a high-tuition, high-aid funding model? How much and what kinds of student aid should be provided to assure access to opportunity? What is the right balance of need-based and merit-based aid? How high should the maximum guaranteed loan be? Should institutions be permitted to increase student fees to increase campus amenities? Some even ventured to ask, what are students learning? How do we know, and is it good enough?

The growing competition for enrollment among all institutions of higher education, public, independent non-profit, and independent for-profit gradually made the traditional interest in program planning to avoid “unnecessary duplication” seem a bit outmoded – shouldn’t market forces govern program offerings, not planners in state office buildings?

As the benefits of higher education for individuals became more evident during this period, (a much larger fraction of the workforce had some college or a degree, and the income advantages of postsecondary education grew dramatically), another question emerged: Is higher education mostly or entirely a private good, rather than a public good? What is the rationale for public subsidy and public planning?

The never-flagging discomfort of institutional leaders with statewide governing and coordinating boards, and the evidently declining needs for overarching coordination and governance led to changes in several states. Multi-campus governing boards in Illinois and Colorado were eliminated in favor of individual governing boards for each institution. Strong coordinating agencies in New Jersey and Minnesota were diminished in role and capacity. While higher education funding fell behind enrollment growth during recessions during this quarter century, in most states it recovered nicely along with the economy. And in the prosperous 1990s, both state funding and net tuition revenues grew on a per student basis.

## 2000 TO THE FUTURE—

### THE AGE OF ATTAINMENT, CONSTRAINT, AND INNOVATION

While the postsecondary planning activities of the previous era declined in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seeds were planted for an emerging focus on increasing more widespread educational attainment. *A Nation At Risk*, released in 1983, was a wake-up call, and this report and the needs it described stimulated the emergence of a generation of educational “reformers” at the state and national levels.

The initial focus of reform was on K-12 education, but, by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reformers widened their scope to encompass postsecondary education. The challenge now facing state policy leaders for higher education is more difficult than the challenges they faced a half century ago. Then the job was to expand the nation's system of higher education to accommodate a rapidly growing population of students. Although the student population is growing faster than it has since the

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1960s (37% from 2000 to 2011 in public institutions), our challenge now has less to do with the numbers we must educate, and more to do with helping each student realize his or her learning potential. The knowledge and skill required to thrive in the global economy has grown to higher levels than ever before; the task facing educators is to educate a much larger fraction of the population to that higher level.

These needs became increasingly apparent in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as other countries rapidly improved the education of their young people while the U.S. sustained what was formerly "good enough" for world leadership. As our awareness of these trends grew, national commissions, philanthropic leaders, and eventually the President of the United States called for the nation to once again lead the world in postsecondary attainment.

Two recessions in the past dozen years, the most recent especially deep and far-reaching, have accentuated and exacerbated the challenges. As the baby-boom generation enters the retirement years, enhancing the knowledge and skill of the U.S. workforce will be even more critical to the quality of life and prosperity of the country.

What kind of leadership does the nation need to meet these challenges? How must the educational philosophies and practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century change in order to meet these needs? What core values should not change? What will it take to enable the American people to reach the higher levels of authentic knowledge and skill required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

It will most certainly take a focus on priorities, public investment, and creative and more cost-effective educational practices to meet these needs. It will require more effective instructional practices focused on key learning objectives and informed by valid assessments of student learning. It will require the creative use of technology in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction, and better means of granting credit and transferring credit based on what students know and can do. It will take stronger partnerships between K-12 and higher education in the development of capable teachers and school leaders and the reciprocal sharing of performance data among schools and colleges. It will take affordable prices in higher education and student financial assistance focused on the students for whom assistance is needed to enable their participation and success. The expansion of innovative delivery systems will require new standards of ethical good practice among institutions, and more effective and efficient mechanisms for quality assurance and consumer protection when those norms are violated.

It will take state policy leadership.



## A VOCATIONAL CALLING REQUIRING KNOWLEDGE

Let me end with the definition of a profession offered at the beginning. “A vocational calling,” asserts that state policy leadership for higher education is a real job, and that it has the kind of higher purpose that justifies the word “calling.”

While the need for state policy leadership in higher education has been contested, history demonstrates it is both legitimate and essential professional work. The constantly growing importance of education in the world, and the continuing importance of public support and public policy as a means of advancing the development and transmission of knowledge require that professionals devote their careers and pay serious, sustained attention to public policy issues. While the issues have clearly changed over time, they are increasingly complex, and the larger public interest is unlikely to be well-served by the improvisation of amateurs or the natural interplay of market and political forces among institutions and other interests.

***The profession’s two core values:***

***First, education is good for individual people and for humanity at large;***

***Second, education’s universal value requires disciplined attention to quality, trade-offs among priorities, and cost-effectiveness.***

Is it a “calling?” I would say it *is* a “higher calling,” and the Truman Commission report and John Dale Russell’s discussion of that report articulate its two core values: First, education is good for individual people and for humanity at large; every person should have an opportunity to realize his or her potential to be capable and productive and to enjoy the benefits of knowledge; and that all people benefit from the knowledge and skill obtained by others. Second, education’s universal value requires disciplined attention to quality, trade-offs among priorities,

and cost-effectiveness. Scarce resources must be allocated to priorities and used effectively. High public purposes require responsible stewardship.

But it is not the only high calling. One of my graduate school colleagues startled me by saying that “politics is the highest calling.” While his conclusion is arguable, a case can be made, as it can be for other professions. The profession of educator in all its dimensions also is certainly a high calling. State higher education policy leaders must recognize that their “call” invests them with neither moral superiority nor inherent wisdom. Their job is to work with others toward their professional objectives while respecting the callings and legitimate wisdom of those with whom they work.

And finally, this is a profession because it “requires knowledge.” The most accomplished professionals in the field have acquired the essential knowledge through many different pathways, but none have been effective without understanding the work. The required knowledge includes a basic understanding of the educational process from the perspective of both teacher and student. It includes an understanding of how government and the political process work, as well as the workings of the political processes that formally and informally govern schools, colleges, and universities. It includes familiarity with the perennial public policy issues of price, cost, subsidy, incentives, disincentives, performance assessment, and return on investment. Along with all this knowledge, it requires the skill to learn from others and to work with others—across party lines, branches of government, sectors of higher education, and terms of

office—in moving the educational community and the body politic forward toward achieving the public interest.

Appendix A (a brief statistical overview of higher education in the United States since the founding of SHEEO in 1954) demonstrates the foresight of the Truman Commission and how its vision was realized through public policy leadership in the ensuing decades. John Dale Russell’s summary of the Truman Commission Report included a review of its recommendations on the organization of higher education in the United States, found in Appendix B. Many of those recommendations were and remain controversial; for decades, balancing the competing values of planning and diversity, we have found multiple pathways for achieving national goals. Appendix C provides a capsule history of SHEEO as an association.

State policy leaders for higher education have been and will continue to be just part of the broad national conversation on the needs, purposes, goals, and priorities of postsecondary education in the United States. But the need for professional state policy leadership will continue.



## APPENDIX A

### ENROLLMENT TRENDS IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND EXPENDITURES AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP 1954 TO 2010

Higher Education in the U.S.	1954	1965	1975	1985	1991	1995	2001	2005	2009	2010
<b>Enrollment<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3.1 million</b>	<b>5.8 million</b>	<b>11.2 million</b>	<b>12.2 million</b>	<b>14.4 million</b>	<b>14.3 million</b>	<b>15.9 million</b>	<b>17.5 million</b>	<b>20.4 million</b>	<b>20.6 million</b>
% enrollment in public <sup>4,a</sup>	56.1%	69.4%	79.0%	77.4%	78.8%	77.8%	76.8%	74.5%	72.5%	72.5%
% of U.S. Population <sup>2,3</sup>	1.9%	3.0%	5.2%	5.1%	5.7%	5.4%	5.6%	5.9%	6.7%	n/a
% Female <sup>4</sup>	36.1%	38.7%	45.0%	52.5%	54.7%	55.5%	56.3%	57.4%	57.1%	57.0%
% of 18-24 year olds enrolled <sup>5</sup>	n/a	n/a	26.3%	27.8%	33.3%	34.3%	36.3%	38.9%	41.3%	41.2%
% enrollment Black and Hispanic <sup>6,b</sup>	n/a	n/a	12.9%	n/a	14.7%	n/a	20.8%	23.4%	26.8%	27.5%
% enrollment non-White <sup>6,b</sup>	n/a	n/a	15.4%	n/a	19.6%	n/a	28.2%	30.9%	34.3%	34.5%
<b>Expenditures<sup>7,c</sup></b>	<b>\$2.9 billion</b>	<b>\$12.5 billion</b>	<b>\$38.9 billion</b>	<b>\$97.5 billion</b>	<b>\$156.2 billion</b>	<b>\$190 billion</b>	<b>\$267.6 billion</b>	<b>\$353.6 billion</b>	<b>\$446.5 billion</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Percentage of GDP <sup>8</sup>	0.76%	1.74%	2.38%	2.31%	2.61%	2.56%	2.60%	2.80%	3.16%	n/a

#### Sources

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics 2010. Enrollment in educational institutions, 1869-2019. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_003.asp?referrer=report](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_003.asp?referrer=report)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Historical National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999. <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/national/totals/pre-1980/tables/popclockest.txt>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009. <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/state/totals/2009/tables/NST-EST2009-01.xls>

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics 2011. Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by attendance status, sex of student, and control of institution: Selected years, 1947 through 2010. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_198.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_198.asp)

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics 2011. Enrollment rates of 18- to 24-year-olds in degree-granting institutions, by level of institution and sex and race/ethnicity of student: 1967 through 2010. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_213.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_213.asp)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys, 1976 and 1980; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment Survey" (IPEDS-EF:90); and IPEDS Spring 2001 through Spring 2011, Enrollment component. Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010 [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_237.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_237.asp)

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, Various years. Expenditures of degree-granting institutions, Various. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2011menu\\_tables.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2011menu_tables.asp)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Survey of Current Business, April 2011. Gross Domestic Product in Current and Chained (2005) Dollars. [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income\\_expenditures\\_poverty\\_wealth/gross\\_domestic\\_product\\_gdp.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income_expenditures_poverty_wealth/gross_domestic_product_gdp.html)

<sup>a</sup> 1954 figure is an average of the 1950 and 1959 figures. 1965 figure is an average of the 1959 and 1969 figures.

<sup>b</sup> Figures for 1975, 1991, and 2001 are unavailable and have been respectively substituted with figures for 1976, 1990, and 2000.

<sup>c</sup> Figure for 2000 is unavailable and has been substituted with the figure for 2001.

## APPENDIX B

### A BRIEF EXCERPT FROM “BASIC CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION” JOHN DALE RUSSELL, 1949

*An entire volume of the Commission's report (Volume III) is devoted to the subject of the organization for higher education. Additional references to the topic of organization appear in other parts of the report, notably those dealing with the curriculum. The report deals extensively with the various types of institutions; the discussion of the proprietary school enters a field not well known to educators, but one that must certainly be taken into account in any consideration of total available educational facilities. The recommendation for the rapid development of community colleges is one of the most significant features of the entire report of the Commission.*

*A brief statement is made in the report regarding the desirable size of institutions. Rather timidly the Commission questions the wisdom of unlimited expansions on a single campus, and suggests the desirability of developing more widely diffused educational centers.*

*Governmental organization at the state level is given extensive treatment in the report. The Commission recommends that state education departments be strengthened and given centralized authority over higher education, with adequate staffs for the purpose. In states where this cannot be accomplished immediately, the Commission recommends the creation of a central controlling State Commission of Higher Education as an intermediate step. At the national level, the Commission recommends the strengthening of the United States Office of Education (now known officially as Office of Education, Federal Security Agency). Various alternatives are reviewed, without definite recommendation, for the administrative placing of the Office of Education in the organization of the Federal Government.*

*The creation of a continuing Commission on Higher Education, to advise the Commissioner of Education in this area, is recommended. It is also recommended that an interdepartmental committee on higher education be set up, representing all interested agencies of the Federal Government, with the Commissioner of Education as chairman.*

*A consideration of the place of voluntary educational organizations at the national, regional, and state level leads to the conclusion that such associations should be encouraged and strengthened. (pp. 502-503)*

## APPENDIX C

### A CAPSULE HISTORY OF SHEEO AS A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

From 1954 to 1976 the members of SHEEO organized their Annual Meeting informally without having a permanent staff for the association. The staff of the Education Commission of the States, particularly Dick Millard, Director for Postsecondary Education, provided assistance to the association in the 1970s. In 1976 SHEEO received a contract from the National Center for Education Statistics, to serve as a liaison between NCES and the States, and Jane Ryland was appointed as Director of the SHEEO/NCES Communication Network. She was succeeded in this role by John Wittstruck in 1981.

In 1982 the members of SHEEO incorporated as a non-profit corporation, and in 1984 the association retained James Mingle as its first executive officer. The presiding officers of the association who led the transition during these three years were Patrick Callan from California, Wayne Brown from Tennessee, and Gordon Davies from Virginia.

After sixteen years of building a strong staff and an array of association services and policy publications, Mingle resigned in 2000 and was succeeded by Paul Lingenfelter who currently leads the association's staff. The association's current members and work can be explored at [www.sheeo.org](http://www.sheeo.org).