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# Convergent Institutional Logics in Public Higher Education: State Policymaking and Governing Board Activism

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In recent years, there has been an incredible shift in scholarship toward improving our understanding of the politics of higher education. Empirical research has elucidated the relationship between state governance structures and policy development (Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Leslie & Novak, 2003; Martinez, 2002; Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999) and there is a compelling line of research examining the applicability of political frameworks in understanding policymaking (e.g., Lane, 2007; McLendon, Deaton, & Hearn, 2007; Mills, 2007). Another line of research, one all too rarely undertaken, has examined the perspectives of policymakers, legislators, and governors on higher education policy (Bastedo, 2005a, 2006; Eulau & Quinley, 1970; Martinez, 1999; Richardson et al., 1999; Ruppert, 2001).

Conceptually, these studies have considered alternative frameworks for understanding shifts in state policymaking for public higher education.

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Each of the major policy process theories used to understand radical shifts in policymaking contains an assumed—and often unknown—proposition about the values and beliefs of policymakers. For example, we need new conceptual models for understanding preference setting in punctuated equilibrium models (Jones, Sulkin, & Larsen, 2003; Mills, 2007); the construction of problems and solutions in multiple-streams/garbage-can models (Kingdon, 2003; Leslie & Berdahl, 2008; McLendon, 2003b; Zahariadis, 2007); the substance and source of emulative and isomorphic pressures in the political landscape examined in policy innovation frameworks (Berry & Berry, 1990; Doyle, 2006; McLendon, Deaton, & Hearn, 2007; McLendon, Heller, & Young, 2005) and the formation of normative causal beliefs that shape the values of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weikart, 2005).

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs and values of policymakers and associated changes in policy and governance can be aided by applying recent work in organization theory (Bastedo, 2007) and suggests an in-depth case study approach (Clark, 2007). In 1995, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, led by a new chair, was determined to overhaul a university system that politicians and the media attacked as illegitimate and adrift. Rapid adjustments were made in both policy and board organization, resulting in a bewildering set of changes at both levels. Many observers characterized these changes as a new trend in activist governance in public higher education, but few could make sense of the broad array of changes that were occurring over a short period of time. Key questions emerged: How should we understand this overwhelming, discontinuous change in policymaking? What were the key assumptions underlying these policies and how did the organizational structure change to support it?

To address these research questions, I conducted interviews with a broad array of higher education actors in Massachusetts, including board members, board staff, campus presidents, and unionized faculty. They revealed a consistent set of institutional logics (or the belief systems that predominate in an organizational field) that categorized the shifts derived from activist policymaking. These emerging logics framed policy development and implementation in the public higher education system in ways that can be sharply distinguished from past practice. Below, I define institutional logics, explain the usefulness of this new framework and apply institutional logics in an examination of the major findings. I then consider the possibilities for using institutional logics to study higher education politics from both macro and micro perspectives.

### INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS

Scholarship in the institutional tradition has emphasized the powerful and adaptive role of norms, values, and beliefs in the process of organizational

development and change (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). More recently, the concept of institutional logics has allowed scholars to articulate the dominant theories of action underlying institutional processes (Thornton & Ocasio, in press). Institutional logics are the “belief systems and associated practices that predominate in an organizational field” (Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000, p. 170). They are the “organizing principles” that organizations use when making decisions within a specified arena (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248). Analysis of institutional logics is increasingly common in the organizational literature, as scholars have recently examined their role in changing conceptions of the higher education publishing industry (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), in performance assessment in Canadian colleges and universities (Townley, 1997), in academic restructuring (Gumpert, 2000), in market reactions to corporate stock repurchase plans (Zajac & Westphal, 2004), and even in the *nouvelle cuisine* movement in French restaurants (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). When institutional logics have legitimacy among multiple types of actors within organizational fields, they can be described as *convergent*.

Convergent institutional logics convey the idea that there may be a single dominant principle, idea, or approach to policymaking. But logics are also a template for action, a set of characteristics that define the theory of action to be used in policy development. They embody the concept of an archetype, which is “a set of structures and systems that consistently embodies a single interpretive scheme” (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1053). An archetype is an array of multiple, interrelated features that need to cohere to provide direction for organizational action. An archetype is a representation of a contested whole, the result of a process where advantaged individuals and groups have consolidated their political position and gained control over organizational resources. Logics can thus be analyzed in a dual manner: There is simultaneously a principle that is compelling to policy actors in the organization and a set of organizational characteristics that have adapted to support the emerging principle.

In the construction of public systems of higher education, the predominant logic has been to differentiate the functions of all the campuses to increase system efficiency and improve the fit between students and the college they attend (Clark, 1983; Kerr, 1963). The functionalist approach can be understood as a rationalization process, which by definition seeks to closely tie the operation of a higher education system with its stated objectives and goals (Meyer, 1983, 1994; Toulmin, 1990). Substantively, rationalization seeks to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and standardization in policymaking and organizational structures. Thus, an efficient university system will place the best students in research universities, honors programs, and elite liberal arts colleges. Lower-performing students will be admitted to

community colleges, where they can prove their academic performance and receive instruction that is consistent with their academic preparation; those who succeed are then encouraged to move on to study for a baccalaureate degree through efficient transfer and articulation agreements with four-year colleges. This concentration of talent is believed to increase productivity, as the best and brightest benefit by working together to increase learning and research output (Clark, 1995; Trow, 1984). In turn, policymakers have supported this conception by establishing policies that increase the stratification of public higher education students and programs (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Gumport & Bastedo, 2001). This approach has prevailed despite the demonstrably negative effects of institutional stratification on student access and attainment (Hearn, 1991; Karen, 2002; Winston, 2004).

### STUDY METHODOLOGY

To investigate the role of logics in educational policy formation, I have selected a strategic site, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) from 1995 to 1999. This site was attractive because of the emergent nature of the phenomena to be studied and the complex and interrelated nature of the research question (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). The Massachusetts BHE constitutes an “extreme case” of theoretical interest, due to the board’s radical shift from a regulatory to an activist archetype in December 1995. It also presents a clear case of attempting systemic reform in higher education, as demonstrated through the wide array of policies developed and implemented during the 1995–1999 period to increase admissions standards, reduce remedial education, cut tuition and fees, and eliminate academic programs.

I conducted interviews with a wide range of participants, including members of the Board of Higher Education and elite actors in the system, such as legislators, legislative staff, executive office staff, system officers, unionized faculty, college presidents, and senior administrative staff members. I conducted these interviews in the participants’ offices in Boston and at campuses throughout the state. Ultimately, 21 interviews were completed, taped, and transcribed verbatim, while three others were completed with notes. All of the informants agreed to be named in the study; in a few cases, however, I decided to make quotations anonymous to ensure that no harm was caused to their relationships or reputation. The unit of analysis was the system board, but the questions focused particular attention on the board’s relationships both with campus actors and powerful actors in the external environment, particularly those connected with the legislature and governor’s office.

I developed the interview protocol to operationalize the theoretically derived concepts, but it also allowed for new conversations and ideas to

emerge from the participants. It was crucial to understand how logics might be operating but without leading informants to that conclusion. It was also important to have standards for distinguishing situations in which logics were not in evidence from those in which logics were clearly operating. I did this by focusing informants' attention on specific policies formulated during the period under study, and then asking broad questions about the integration of policies and probing the extent to which there was broad consensus among powerful actors.

I triangulated the interview data with documents, memos, media articles, and editorials to judge the extent to which the interviews confirmed these materials (Mathison, 1988). In addition, I had access to a rich array of archival documents, internal memoranda, letters, policy revisions, system reports, and budget data provided by the BHE, individual institutions, and union officials. I also sought additional data from secondary literature, media reports, and independent analyses.

The coding scheme accounted for both etic concepts driven from the conceptual framework of the study and new emic concepts generated through open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, the study used both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis through a constant-comparative method. I first conducted open coding, with the codes initially focused on separating policy issues (academic termination, remedial education, etc.). I wrote a narrative for each policy issue before completing the coding to allow an outline of the main events to emerge. Then, I conducted further coding to better understand the cross-cutting concepts that would illuminate the values and beliefs that supported the seemingly divergent policy decisions made in the case.

After the final round of coding, I conducted an intensive search for disconfirming evidence that would counter the emerging propositions developed from the axial and selective coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although I clearly identify my conclusions, I also include disconfirming evidence throughout the paper to allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

### **THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Massachusetts is a state with a long history of turmoil in governance and state policymaking for public higher education (Crosson, 1996). The state's higher education institutions have long suffered from inconsistent funding and legislative support, and the system has often looked impoverished compared to its large, elite, and world-renowned private sector (Bastedo, 2005b). Governance structures were radically overhauled in 1965, 1980, and 1991, with no appreciable improvement in the confidence of legislators or gov-

ernors. Numerous scandals, declining enrollment and academic standards, and major budgetary problems marred the reputation of the system.

In 1991, the Higher Education Coordinating Council was created and subsequently renamed the Board of Higher Education (BHE). This board has governing-level authority over the state's nine comprehensive colleges (called state colleges) and its 15 community colleges, but only coordinating-level authority over the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and its five campuses. The 11 voting members of the BHE, all appointed by the governor, are responsible for the hiring of a chancellor who serves as CEO of the system. Stanley Z. Koplík served as chancellor until he died unexpectedly in 1999; he was succeeded by his deputy, Judith I. Gill.

In 1995, James F. Carlin was asked to chair the board by Governor William Weld, a liberal Republican (Bastedo, 2005a). Carlin had a long history in Massachusetts politics, serving as transportation secretary and the head of a number of state agencies for several Democratic governors. Carlin also served as a trustee of the University of Massachusetts and chaired its finance board during the late 1980s and early 1990s. As chair, Carlin gave his support for rapid increases in tuition and fees and subsequently came to believe that public higher education needed drastic reform. After his successful work heading "Democrats for Weld" during the governor's reelection campaign, Carlin had an opportunity to make his ideas a reality.

While prior boards were primarily bureaucratic, with their logics and authority coming from statutes and regulations, the BHE relied upon charismatic leadership and widespread public support to move the system in the desired direction. (See Table 1.) Thus, the BHE was transformed into a political organization, with a small, flexible, and loyal staff that could quickly meet the needs of an active board. The executive office of the governor, which had been a persistent critic of the state board, was transformed into the board's biggest political supporter and establishing productive relationships with the legislature became a high priority. The news media became a key source of support for the board, and the board chairman and other board members were routinely available for interviews with journalists and editorial boards. In combination with policies that many in the state thought were long overdue, the result was a long series of positive stories covering BHE policy and laudatory editorials about the board's new direction.

The board's relationship with campuses changed dramatically after 1995. Where once college presidents had sought to manage the board's heavy regulatory demands, they now needed to meet the accountability demands of an activist BHE. The board increasingly utilized a "carrot and stick" approach to policymaking that provided incentives, including millions of dollars in grant money, to campuses that collaborated to meet board goals and comply with board policies. Campuses that failed to cooperate got the

**TABLE 1**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGULATORY  
 AND ACTIVIST ARCHETYPES, MASSACHUSETTS  
 PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION, 1991–2000**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Regulatory Archetype (1991–1995)</i>	<i>Activist Archetype (1995–2000)</i>
<b>Board</b>		
Organizational structure	Bureaucratic	Political
Main political support	Executive branch	Legislative branch
Locus of board conflict	Legislature and governor	Campus presidents and faculty
Source of authority leadership	Legal statutes	Public support, charismatic
Policymaking	By regulation	By standards and incentives
Use of the news media	Rare	Routine
Staff	Large staff, low pay	Small staff, higher pay
<b>Campuses</b>		
Oversight	Routine	Intermittent
Presidents	Low autonomy, low standards	High autonomy, high standards
Performance assessment	Rare	Routine
Incentives for change	Rare	Routine

stick, up to and including visits from the state auditor and angry phone calls from the chairman. Thus, while the campuses had somewhat greater autonomy, standards were raised to ensure their compliance with board policy. Progress in meeting these standards was published in biennial performance measurement reports to the legislature.

These new organizational processes were put in place to support rapid developments in BHE policy. (See Table 2.) Admissions standards, which had been set by campuses de facto prior to 1996, were now set by the BHE and monitored strictly for implementation. High school GPA requirements were raised and exceptions to the policy were progressively reduced. Remedial education, which the Board of Regents had largely ignored, was limited to 5% of the incoming class at four-year colleges. Student tuition and fees were lowered for six consecutive years, producing an overall cut of nearly a third. Academic programs were forced to undergo program productivity reviews, leading to the termination of 52 programs in 1996.

**TABLE 2**  
**SELECTED BHE POLICIES, 1995–2000**

<i>Policy</i>	<i>Practice</i>
<b>Academic</b>	
Admissions standards	Minimum high school GPA for incoming students at four-year colleges raised to 3.0. Percentage of students exempted from the admissions standards cut to 10%. Data monitoring to ensure compliance.
Remedial education	Remedial education limited to 5% of the incoming freshman class at all four-year colleges.
<b>Access</b>	
Tuition reductions	Tuition reduced six consecutive years from 1995 to 2001, for a total reduction of 32%. Fees increased, but overall reduction in student costs of 9.5% system wide.
Joint admissions	Program that allows students to be jointly admitted to the community college and four-year campus of their choice simultaneously, providing for “seamless transfer” if they attain a 2.5 GPA at the community college.
Tuition advantage	Provides a 1/3 tuition discount in the junior and senior years to students who transfer from a community college and earn a 3.0 GPA.
Community colleges	“Free” community college tuition and fees for low-income students with a family income below \$36,000. (Later eliminated due to funding cuts.)
<b>Mission</b>	
Mission review	Review of each institutional mission statement to align with state interests. Development of measurable campus priority statements. Use of incentive funds to push campuses to comply with board policies and priorities.
Academic programs	Statewide review of academic programs with low enrollments, leading to the termination of 52 programs by the BHE. Statewide reviews of program in various key areas, such as computer science.
Special colleges	Development of Commonwealth College, an honors college at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, to attract the state’s highest achieving students. Promotion of the idea of “charter colleges” that are released from state regulations but are more closely monitored for performance.

## FINDINGS

Four core logics for higher education policymaking in Massachusetts emerged during data analysis: mission differentiation, student opportunity, system development, and managerialism. While I treat each separately for

purposes of analysis, in reality these four logics are highly interrelated, and most key policies cut across two or more of them. Indeed, the degree to which a policy encompasses multiple logics may help to determine its success or failure. The interdependence of the logics created a situation where the whole is more than the sum of its parts, because together they represented a coherent vision and direction for higher education that aligns closely with the values of Massachusetts policymakers.

These four logics are highly legitimate principles that influence the governance of public higher education systems, both in Massachusetts and in the United States more broadly. In the field of higher education policy, these logics have become increasingly institutionalized over time, to the point where they have become taken for granted among policymakers. Although I analyze them largely as institutionalized principles for this analysis, they are also instruments that direct organizational action. For example, while system development is a principle, it is also a heuristic that directs how policies should be implemented and communicated. Thus, while the logics have organizational characteristics already described (the “carrot and stick” approach, for example), their dual roles as both principle and means are best analyzed as separate.

### ***Mission Differentiation***

Institutional differentiation is fundamental for all public systems of higher education (Clark, 1983). Over time, the various functions that a modern higher education system must serve need to be allocated across the institutions in a way that is perceived to be efficient and effective. Although each system of higher education is unique in some respect, all have three segments: a university system that offers all types of degrees and focuses on research; a comprehensive system that offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees and focuses on teaching; and a community college system that offers associate degrees and training certificates, and focuses on vocational education and baccalaureate transfer.

It is widely accepted that segmentation provides the most efficient way for a state to allocate functions among multiple campuses (Clark, 1983; Trow, 1984). It is also conventional wisdom that there is a certain degree of unnecessary duplication of functions that results in inefficiency and excessive costs. Thus, by logical extension, further mission differentiation among the three segments seems to promise greater efficiency by increasing the fit between students and the campuses that serve them. There was a strong belief at the BHE that although all campuses cannot be all things to all people, the state can serve all needs if the campuses work together as an efficient system (Koplik, 1994).

The policies enacted during the Carlin administration attended to three forms of differentiation: vertical, horizontal, and internal. *Vertical differen-*

*tiation* enhanced distinctions among the three segments of public higher education. Policies like admissions standards and remedial education standards served a gate-keeping function within the system ensuring that only students with the strongest academic preparation were permitted to enter the elite levels of the system. These policies sorted and allocated students among the various campuses independent of student aspirations and ambitions, which would lead to a greater diversity of preparation in the student body and thus dilute the perception of excellence.

Policies addressing mission, and mission creep in particular, also promoted vertical differentiation. “Mission creep” is a term used among higher education policymakers to denote campuses that reach beyond their stated mission into those of the segment above them. Generally, it applies to comprehensive universities that want to offer doctoral degrees and engage in more research, and community colleges which want to offer baccalaureate degrees, usually in areas of advanced vocational and technical training usually ignored by more “academic” four-year colleges. The BHE moved swiftly to keep campus ambitions in check by reaffirming the superior position of the University of Massachusetts in offering doctoral education and by forcing one comprehensive state college to remove university ambitions from its mission statement. The board took the position that mission creep would create further duplication of functions, resulting in greater costs and inefficiencies.

Reinforcing and enhancing vertical differentiation were access policies that encouraged students to enter the system through the community college segment. Policies like Joint Admissions, Tuition Advantage, and community college access grants all created financial incentives for students—particularly low-income students—to earn an associate degree and then transfer to a four-year college for advanced degrees. (See Table 2.) They reinforced the community college mission as open-access institutions that provide educational and developmental opportunities for immigrants and the poor at an affordable cost.

Part and parcel of vertical differentiation is the promotion of a flagship university that would have the highest status and resources of any institution in the system. The performance of the flagship is believed to provide a “halo effect” for the whole system, with all of the campuses reflecting its glory. The other segments would be more focused on what they are supposed to do best: teaching. A key to Carlin’s vision for the system was raising the stature of its flagship, UMass Amherst:

[UMass Amherst] would be an outstanding flagship university, truly outstanding: tough to get into, rigorous academically, and hopefully, over a period of time, more attractive. . . . The state colleges would be more intensive in their teaching, they would be more demanding academically, they would be slightly

more career-oriented. . . . The community colleges are the point of entry and I'd have the community colleges sort of doing what they're doing right now but a lot more of it. This is where people who are really poor, single parents, immigrants, get their first shot at higher ed, and I think there ought to be a lot more emphasis on the community colleges.

Thus, vertical differentiation is not a stand-alone tactic or strategy; it is part of a coherent vision for reforming higher education. In Massachusetts, there was always a particularly strong contrast between its world-class private higher education system—with over 50 private colleges in Boston alone—and its public higher education system, which was consistently poorly funded and castigated by the state's political leadership. In a private college environment like Massachusetts, it was crucial to establish elite functions at its universities to legitimize the public higher education system, thereby building its stature and attracting resources. Concentration of talent is thus one of the main justifications for vertical differentiation. Attracting and retaining the best students and faculty at the upper level of the system requires institutions designed to meet their needs.

BHE policies also forced campuses to focus their priorities and resources in a way that facilitated *horizontal differentiation*. The mission review process asked each campus to establish a set of institutional priorities which were substantially different from the priorities of its sister institutions and which reflected the needs of its local community. Campuses were also required to identify specific academic programs of strength that would be a priority for their resources and attention. These “programs of excellence” would make each campus unique and would be designed to attract students from throughout the state, thereby effectively meeting state and public needs.

Academic program termination policies also facilitated horizontal differentiation. Eliminating programs with a small number of student participants was an attempt to force campuses to focus resources on programs with strong enrollment and resources. Refining the focus and priorities of each campus helped to diversify each from the others, and particularly impacted the comprehensive state colleges. Doing so emphasized the role of each as a unit in the system rather than as an independent entity driven by internal ambitions or conceptions. Similarly, there was an attempt to create charter colleges (which BHE Chancellor Stanley Z. Koplik dubbed “Vanguard College”) that was designed to encourage radical change by freeing campus management from the constraints imposed by state regulations and collective bargaining contracts (Berdahl & MacTaggart, 2000). Faculty would lose the protections of unionization but could earn more income based on performance, bringing the carrot-and-stick approach to the level of individual faculty.

These academic program decisions may have been driven more by perceived efficiencies rather than actual ones, as suggested in a confidential letter by one community college president to Chancellor Koplik:

I attempted to rationalize the policy on the basis of efficiency (doing things right). I sought out the data to justify the allegations of either decreased productivity and/or increased expenditures as a result of adding programs. I looked for data on program efficiencies. I saw none. I then attempted to justify the policy on the basis of effectiveness (doing the right things). I looked for information which pointed to the fact that these new programs, or the existing ones in place where [sic] not meeting community or state-wide human resource or educational needs. The data was none-existent [sic]. I asked for the basis to support the implication that 1,334 existing and/or 50 new programs were too many, too few, or the correct amount? I saw none.

Faculty unions were similarly angered by the diversification-oriented policies and visibly frustrated by their inability to get the BHE to understand their concerns. The head of the faculty union at Bridgewater State College, Jean Stonehouse, was also the head of its master's degree program in history, which the board eliminated. "It was a good program," she lamented. "It was costing nothing because the students took the same courses as students in the Master of Arts in Teaching in history. Why this artificial number of five graduates per year meant anything I will never understand. . . . These are decisions colleges should make for themselves."

Ultimately, the BHE and the state's media were not sympathetic to these arguments. Board members and staff tended to see horizontal differentiation, not on a campus level, but on a *system* level. "I don't think this does any harm to the state," Koplik responded to the *Boston Globe* in 1997. "Sure, there's some dislocation for the student, but we have to look at the public system as a whole. It's a question of priorities. For programs in low demand, it's fine if they're offered only in one [public] college in the state" (quoted in Dembner, 1997, p. B1). Editorial page writers tended to agree. "With funding for mainstream courses of study at a premium, it makes little sense for public colleges and universities to dabble in frippery, duplication and academic arcana," said one editorial in the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* ("Cutting 'crust,'" 1998).

Finally, some policies encouraged *internal differentiation*. Unlike vertical and horizontal differentiation, which are system-level elements, internal differentiation creates substantive distinctions among students, faculty, and academic programs *within* a particular campus. Although it is well known that there is an informal structure which gives more power and resources to certain groups within the university (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974), it is gradually becoming official policy to treat certain groups differently based on their academic preparation or research productivity. These policies thus

facilitate a formal hierarchy of students, faculty, and academic programs within the university.

The obvious example of internal differentiation was the development of a “Commonwealth College” at UMass Amherst and a network of associated honors programs placed on campuses in all three segments. An honors program had existed at UMass Amherst for many years, but the creation of Commonwealth College provided stature and resources to the program. Full scholarships for high school valedictorians and salutatorians helped to attract students who normally would have attended a private college. Similar scholarships for the top graduates of the state’s community colleges were designed to have the same effect. Commonwealth College students held a privileged position at UMass Amherst and had academic and financial opportunities not available to other students. This special treatment of some students was rarely recognized as a problem by board members, who failed to see the development of honors programs as an issue of access or equity. “What’s wrong,” said one board member, “with a basketball team that’s predominantly black and an honors college that’s predominantly white?” (quoted in Kirp, 2003, p. 25).

Internal differentiation also can occur through the identification of flagship academic programs and departments. Although this policy was only rarely operationalized, the BHE sought to reallocate resources and attention on particular academic programs on each campus so that they would attract students from around the state who wanted to attend the “best” academic program in the state. State employers, for their part, would know where to turn to hire the “best” graduates in a particular field. Inevitably, the students and faculty in flagship programs would hold a privileged position on campus, with more power, position, and status than their colleagues but would also have to meet greater productivity expectations and have a stronger focus on research. Through the development of mission and priorities statements by each campus, the BHE encouraged each campus to have a designated focus on particular programs and then provided enhanced funding for those programs using competitive grants.

### ***Student Opportunity***

The second logic, which both Massachusetts BHE members and staff believed was most important, was student opportunity. It primarily encompassed the innovative financial aid and transfer programs that the board developed. For example, the BHE aggressively reduced tuition charges at all levels of the system for six consecutive years and urged campuses to reduce fees, over which the board had no control. To encourage student transfer, the board promoted the Joint Admissions program, which allowed community college students to be simultaneously admitted to the four-year state college of their choice, if they earned a community college GPA of 2.5,

thus circumventing the regular transfer admissions process. This policy was combined with the Tuition Advantage Program, which provided a one-third tuition waiver at the four-year college for Joint Admissions students who earned a 3.0 GPA. Finally, the board implemented a program that creatively combined state and federal financial aid sources to ensure that community college students from low-income families could attend at virtually no cost. (This program was later cancelled for lack of funding.)

For the BHE, the Joint Admissions program was win-win. Students who enrolled at community college could pass through the first two years of undergraduate education at a lower cost to themselves and to the state. Students with remedial needs could take developmental courses, repeatedly if necessary, and at a lower cost, without impacting the admissions standards of the four-year colleges. BHE staff believed that students, irrespective of their preparation, were being given every opportunity to earn an associate degree and to transfer to a baccalaureate program. Because more students could be accommodated by the community college segment, the board believed that ultimately more students (particularly minority students) would earn a bachelor's degree. The board's position was summarized in a 1996 editorial in the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*:

The arrangement allows the state colleges to demand respectable standards and pursue academic rigor without permanently barring the door to applicants who, for whatever reason, have holes in their educational background. . . . The state Board of Higher Education has concluded, properly, that the large number of incoming state college and university students who needed catch-up work were an unacceptable drag on the institutions' resources and academic aspirations. ("Joint Admissions," 1996)

Indeed, following a brutal series of investigative pieces in the *Boston Globe* (December 1996) and similar editorials in the *Boston Herald* ("Fit students," 1996) and other papers, the media coalesced around a position that the board felt compelled to adopt (Bastedo & Gumpert, 2003).

The student opportunity logic expands beyond financial aid and transfer. Nearly every policy passed during the Carlin administration reflected a deep concern for students, and the board often anticipated positive student impact to justify new initiatives. Commonwealth College, for example, was used as a means to produce a "halo effect" for the system; but it was also seen as a way to provide a public option for the state's highest performing students. A student who enrolled in Commonwealth College instead of a private school was far more likely to remain in the state and contribute to the state's economy and knowledge base. Charter colleges, too, were seen as a way to emancipate the productivity of faculty and administrators to serve students more effectively.

Programs to enhance student access and opportunity were often leavened with standards. Enhanced access was built into part of the system—e.g., the community colleges—but access was increasingly restricted at the upper segments of the system. In addition, the access policies themselves were often combined with standards. As noted, the Joint Admissions and Tuition Advantage programs required a 2.5 and 3.0 GPA, respectively. Full scholarship programs were created for high school valedictorians and salutatorians to attend the state colleges and UMass, and a similar program was implemented for the top community college students. The Stanley Z. Koplik Certificate of Mastery, named in honor of Chancellor Koplik after his death in 1999, provided tuition waivers to students with high scores on the state's new high-stakes graduation exam. These policies combined to create a burgeoning merit-aid program in the state, mirroring similar changes across the country (Doyle, 2006).

Cash grants for students nearly quadrupled during the Carlin administration, greatly increasing access for the state's low-income and minority students. Carlin's concern for access to education was stated repeatedly during his term in office; he saw it as the solution to a number of social and economic ills, including the country's racial divide (Carlin, 1997b). Yet Carlin was routinely called an enemy of students and an agent of the Weld administration who operationalized the governor's antipathy toward public education. "I'm convinced that the ultimate goal during that time was to do as much damage to the state college system in Massachusetts as was possible," one faculty union leader said. "That's what drove the academic policies. That's what drove the fiscal policies."

In reality, however, Carlin was to the left of the public on the issue of access, facing down complaints from the state's newspapers that he was being too profligate with taxpayers' dollars and that his policies would undermine student motivation to succeed. Carlin never accepted this view, arguing that public colleges were the only place where students born in poverty could acquire the tools for a better life. Furthermore, though faculty usually ignored this aspect of Carlin's chairmanship, he played an important role in delivering large increases in state appropriations—an increase of 48.5% during the five-year period from FY1996 to FY2001 (Palmer & Gillilan, 2001). Over that period, Massachusetts ranked fourth in higher education appropriations increases among the 50 states.

Politically, a truly conservative or Republican approach to higher education would never have worked in Massachusetts, a state dominated by the Democratic Party. In addition, the legitimacy of Carlin's policies depended upon their being accepted by a broad spectrum of policy actors, from the state's Republican governors to the legislature's Democratic leadership. The BHE itself contained a number of Democratic members, Carlin among them.

Carlin's policy efforts were dependent on strong, bipartisan support. In this instance, as in many others throughout the case, this bipartisan support was crucial for supporting the convergence of these institutional logics.

### ***Managerialism***

Finally, Carlin saw the locus of reform as lying in the development of a managerial philosophy for system governance that would give college presidents the power and discretion to make necessary changes. For him, there was a clear cause-and-effect chain from presidential impotence to rising costs in general and student charges in particular. A lack of leadership from the top leads to "layer after layer of personnel" at the top levels of the campus and faculty dominion of academic decisions that place huge demands on the budget, he believed, and it also leads to endless competition for resources, as presidents spend half of their time fund raising and inevitably raise tuition and fees at rates far above inflation (Carlin, 1999).

In an infamous speech to the Boston Chamber of Commerce in 1997, Carlin stated this philosophy succinctly. "It is the job of the president to manage all aspects of a college or university and be accountable for and responsible for measurable results" (Carlin, 1997a). The key to giving presidents the power and discretion they need, Carlin asserted, was to eliminate faculty tenure, which gave professors too much power over administrators and made it impossible for them to make changes to the academic structure of the university. Once presidents had power, trustees could hold them accountable for campus performance using measurable performance indicators, which would lead to demonstrable improvement. Measurability was absolutely key. "He had wisdom in terms of choosing real hard targets that you could quantify and point to as having achieved: numbers in admission to show academic quality, numbers in terms of affordability," one BHE staff member commented in an interview. "So I think you've got the numbers to show that [the policies] are working."

Although this managerial philosophy was found throughout Carlin's rhetoric—it was usually the second topic he mentioned after student tuition and fees—only a few policies substantively reflected this mindset. Early in Carlin's tenure, campus boards of trustees were given the power to set presidential salaries, implementing his belief that presidents needed to be paid a market wage in order to attract the best talent. The BHE began issuing a *Condition of Higher Education* report that used only quantitative, measurable indicators to assess campus performance, but ultimately no incentives were connected to these measures. Most prominent among Carlin's efforts was his attempt to eliminate tenure through collective bargaining negotiations with the state college faculty. After three years of contentious negotiations, the board—after Carlin's departure—compromised on a system of post-tenure review.

Based on his rhetoric and bombastic style, Carlin was often accused of trying “to run higher education like a business.” Certainly Carlin ran the BHE as he would run a corporate board, assuming that he was in charge of meetings and their agenda. He also believed that business practices, such as insisting on measurable outcomes and focusing on customers (students), would be useful to apply in the higher education context. “In business, you don’t confuse effort with results,” he said in 1999, after he decided to retire. “If you’re not realistic in business, you go broke. You have to see things how they are, not how you wish they were” (quoted in McGrory, 1999, p. B1).

Still, the accusation is mostly inaccurate. An examination of the substance of the policies developed during Carlin’s chairmanship reveals that his approach was most often representative of traditional policymaking for a higher education system: access, excellence, and mission. Carlin himself was adamant that he never wanted to turn higher education into a business:

I never talked about running it like a business. A lot of business guys doing what I’ve been doing would say, “We’re going to run this thing like a business.” You don’t run government like a business. They’re two different animals. You don’t have the discipline of the marketplace; you don’t have a situation where competitors are producing better products at lower prices. I really believe that taxpayer-supported institutions ought to try to be as effective and efficient as they can. They ought to try. I’m not saying they should be more effective; they should try to be more effective.

The activist BHE agenda was to take the existing conception of higher education policymaking further than the board had ever been taken before. Its policies were thus a logical extension of existing conceptions of system design rather than an entirely new approach to policy development. It is notable that, during this period, neither Carlin nor the board made a single attempt to address issues of workforce development in the state or to privatize any services, administrative or otherwise. This surprised board member Peter Nessen:

I think Carlin did certain things reluctantly that in business he would have done without a moment’s concern. . . . For example, with privatization, you could have seen the Maritime Academy spin out in some fashion or the Mass. College of Art because they really don’t fit the mold. And, as a matter of fact, there was some energy internally, by them, to do so and he never wanted to play with that much.

Indeed, under a new board chair and governor, the Massachusetts College of Art was made a “charter college” and was exempted from state regulations in return for decreased state support over the long term.

### ***System Coordination***

If access and managerialism were the predominant themes of Carlin's conception for higher education reform, system development was the predominant theme for the BHE Chancellor, Stanley Z. Koplik. From his appointment in 1993 until his death in 1999, Koplik hammered away at the system concept with each policy that he helped to develop. He laid out his agenda for the system in a 1994 plan, "Using Coordination and Collaboration to Address Change" (Koplik, 1994), which foreshadowed the features of what would be identified as the Carlin agenda, including financial aid, admissions standards, academic programs, and performance measures. To be sure, Carlin took many of these ideas two steps further—review of academic programs became academic program termination; examination of financial aid programs became free community college education for low-income students. Nonetheless, Koplik had an agenda of his own that strongly influenced Carlin's. Their essential agreement on substantive issues allowed them to work together, despite sharply divergent personalities.

Koplik's justifications for board policies nearly always centered on the concept of system, particularly when he talked with the media. A lack of policy on admissions standards and remedial education, for example, simply made for an inefficient system. "To take ill-prepared students directly from high school into the state colleges or university is not to run an efficient system," he said in 1993. Koplik stated his goals even more starkly in 1996, when discussing the board's new policy on remedial education. "Students needing extensive remediation will be encouraged to apply to community colleges," he said. "And in the end, *you may not reduce remediation*, but you will improve the strength of the system" (emphasis mine). Thus, increasing the vertical differentiation of the system, while not demonstrably providing educational improvements, was designed to project an image of efficiency and effectiveness to resource providers. Koplik received credit from many for pushing the concept of system in Massachusetts, including one UMass administrator: "I think he saw a system much more effectively than anyone's been able to see a system: the idea of twenty-nine campuses at different levels all working together and in support of one another to move as many students toward a higher education degree as possible, in the most effective way and using resources effectively, and elevating the image of higher ed."

Access policies further promoted the system concept. Financial aid funds were disproportionately directed to the community colleges, where the majority of low-income, minority, and immigrant students were enrolled. The Joint Admissions and Tuition Advantage programs were developed and promoted to move community college students up and through the system. In many ways, student transfer from the two-year to the four-year system demonstrated that the interconnected parts were working together

to produce more than they could alone; and thus, the baccalaureate transfer rate was a key indicator of the degree of system development in a state. It was also a demonstration that equal opportunity was being provided to all students in the system, even if at first they were barred from attending its flagship campuses.

Academic policies also played a salient role in policymaking for system development. Distributing academic programs efficiently among existing campuses sought to demonstrate that, while no campus could be “all things to all people,” the system could serve all of the state’s needs if the campuses worked in concert. The same philosophy drove policies that restricted doctoral education to UMass and kept baccalaureate education out of the community colleges. Developing Commonwealth College and its coordinated network of honors program in turn demonstrated that there was a place for the state’s highest achieving students in the public system. Almost relentlessly, board policies communicated the ideas of system, coordination, and efficiency.

## DISCUSSION

A single case study, even one as in-depth as this one, often has limited applicability to other situations. Still, for a case study to be useful, it must provide analytical leverage to understand similar situations, without making the common mistake of wholesale generalizability. Analysis of emerging developments in public policy reveals that aspects of the logics identified here, with their mix of mission differentiation, system development, student opportunity, and managerialism, have begun to extend throughout the country. SUNY, for example, approved a plan in June 2004 to test undergraduates at all of its 64 campuses in writing, critical thinking, and mathematics skills. In its documents justifying the elimination of remedial education at senior colleges, CUNY cited the Massachusetts experience (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003). Virginia’s major universities have extended the charter college concept by convincing the legislature to exempt some institutions from regulation and designate them as “state-assisted charter universities” with increasing freedom from state rules in exchange for measurable performance and accountability standards (Couturier, 2006; Leslie & Berdahl, 2008). And Tennessee, in the face of massive budget deficits, sharply increased admissions standards and reduced remedial education both to increase academic standards and to reduce costs. Policymakers did not mount significant opposition to any of these policies.

In Massachusetts, it is clear that decreasing campus autonomy and increasing access and standards have increasingly rationalized the formal structure of higher education in the state. Access and standards legitimate

the process by which students are efficiently sorted among the segments of higher education while opportunities to enter the system are maintained for all. Politically, each campus is brought under the enhanced control of state government, which helps to ensure accountability and efforts to maximize the public interest. Increasing the rationalization of the system has led to increasing legitimacy for the campuses and state policymaking for public higher education. The perception of legislators, the media, and the public is that higher education is working more efficiently and effectively at all levels (McGrory, 1999). This is no small accomplishment in a state where public higher education has always been the poor stepchild of the private sector and where it has endured a long history of indifference and even outright hostility from state government.

Activist governing boards have been almost universally accused of trying to impose a business model on the higher education system (e.g., Giroux, 2002). It is far more accurate to say that the BHE took the existing design principles of higher education systems to their logical conclusion. The intuitive common sense of the principles—and the extent to which they promoted a “master plan” for Massachusetts public higher education—helped build the faith of policymakers in the system and its leadership. But this appeal to common sense also helped to obscure the costs of the BHE agenda and thereby made it difficult for those costs to be identified and considered. As pointed out by Gordon Winston (1997), president of Williams College, “Paradoxically, the single most serious problem facing the understanding of higher education—and hence public attitudes and public policies—may well be common sense. Very persuasive and appealing common sense.”

Finding policy solutions to the legitimacy problem faced by Massachusetts public higher education before 1995 was a laudable and absolutely necessary goal, but it also foreclosed other principles that are important to academic communities. Indeed, each choice made by the BHE exacted a price that was rarely examined: Increasing excellence exacted a price in access to the upper levels of the system; increasing access to community colleges decreased the number of low-income students in the universities; and increasing mission differentiation took a toll on campus autonomy and the comprehensiveness of state colleges. All these policies were compelling to a broad spectrum of actors, from board members to legislators and op-ed columnists, but, overall, they did not build consensus with universities around shared values.

Examining institutional logics proved highly useful in understanding higher education policymaking. In this case, examining each of the factors behind institutional change led to the conclusion that higher education policymaking in Massachusetts has become dominated by an ideology of rationalization (Meyer, 1983, 1994; Toulmin, 1990). Rationalization serves as both a process by which objectives are more tightly linked to outcomes,

and as an ideology with value for solving social, political, and economic problems. The institutional changes in this case are thus not entirely new in their approach to understanding how higher education policy should be developed and implemented, although they were often identified as such by observers. They were tightly linked to traditional higher education policymaking but took those principles to such an extent that other values were placed in conflict. We should think of these institutional changes as a bricolage of old and new, where parts of the old institution were reconstituted, combined with new ideas, brought together, and moved forward to an extent previously unseen in the field.

An institutional approach to studying educational policy also provides a useful conceptual contrast to the predominant theories in political science that assume endemic group conflict and focus on the interest articulation processes of motivated actors (DiMaggio, 1988). Although the focus of these conceptualizations is conflict, the interest-group model is somewhat idealistic in that it portrays a more democratic process in which key actors, while not equally powerful by any means, have some influence on the policymaking process. The model does not apply well to cases where those with the most power in the system—including policymakers, the news media, and the public at large—hold highly similar, taken-for-granted assumptions about appropriate policy directions. In these cases, decision making *converges* on particular lines of choices and thinking that lead to similar policy conclusions.

Indeed, convergent institutional logics take us away from a common but sometimes misguided focus on partisan conflict over educational policy. Issues in education are often tied to raging social and economic conflicts that are high priorities for political parties, of which recent radical shifts in Colorado and Florida are good examples (Mills, 2007). In those cases, interests are well-articulated and debated among policymakers and pundits. Thus, institutional logics in these cases are divergent; there are multiple, legitimate logics within the organizational field that are competing for power and attention (Thornton & Ocasio, in press). In cases like Massachusetts, however, where institutional logics are convergent, partisan political analysis is not as effective, because party-based conflict is not relevant.

Institutional logics thus have a great deal of potential to contribute to our understanding of the normative and cognitive dimensions of policy process models (Bastedo, 2007). The construction of preferences (punctuated equilibrium theory), emulative behavior (advocacy coalition theory) and problems and solutions (multiple-streams/garbage-can models) all contain an element of relatively undefined influences on policymaker behavior. Institutional theory helps us to connect these values and beliefs with embedded institutions in modern society that penetrate public thinking

and organizational behavior. As a result, we can better predict the political outcomes of various conflicts in decision making by examining the degree to which particular policy solutions reflect institutionalized logics of action. Institutional logics, in short, help us understand and predict which issues are placed on the political agenda, how policy will be developed to address those issues, and the legitimated forms of implementation that will be designed to carry out those policy solutions.

Institutional logics have extensive applications in the study of education and social institutions more broadly, particularly through the study of divergent institutional logics (Scott et al., 2000; Thornton & Ocasio, in press). At the organizational level, the embeddedness of actors within institutions shapes decision making by placing institutional logics of action in conflict (Bastedo, in press). In policy, there are divergent logics that are inconsistent with the logics derived here, primarily those that are market driven. Analysis of market-driven policy formation could provide important information about the underlying assumptions that have shaped this form of policymaking and the possible implications for society. Institutional logics can also serve as a means for understanding institutional policies that are driven from a common framework and for comprehending seemingly incongruent sets of policies or programs. Finally, conducting historical analyses can help us understand the sources of the values expressed in the contemporary era.

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