

led UNC-CH to establish SERVE-NC, the Service, Education, Resources and Vision program, a unit of the Provost's Office that coordinates field placements and other community-focused service projects among the five health science schools.

Also in the 1990s a number of federal agencies and foundations funded projects specifically to bring together grassroots organizations and university researchers. Many of the faculty who chose to collaborate in these original programs had worked with communities or were at least sympathetic to the concept. More recently federal agencies have begun mainstreaming these partnerships—requiring collaborations with communities in regular grant programs and involving faculty with less experience in the community setting (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, 1997). However, even faculty who are predisposed to collaborate with communities have found that working in the community setting demands trust, requires continuity, and hence takes time (Reardon, 1998).

Inasmuch as faculty and students cannot spend all their time in the community, there is a role for organizations such as the Environmental Resource Program and other community-focused research units. Such intermediary organizations can keep their fingers on the community pulse, facilitate faculty and student partnership, and provide, if needed, education and training to ensure that collaboration occurs in a sensitive and culturally appropriate manner.

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## POLITICAL

# Student Outcomes and State Policy in Public Higher Education

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**H**igher education has become increasingly important to both economic and social status in America, and funding has increased accordingly. The public, however, has begun to demand accountability from higher education institutions in return for its investment. When the accountability movement began in the early 1960s, states relied upon rather vague reassurances of institutional compliance. Today, most states are collecting specific data to assess campus performance.

Subtle changes are occurring, however, in the way that states and their agencies view their roles as public policymakers for universities. Trustees have taken on a

**Although trustees have traditionally deferred to the expert counsel of campus presidents and other administrators, activist trustees believe that shifts in policy can and should reflect public needs and interests.**

more activist orientation to their responsibilities to the public. Although trustees have traditionally deferred to the expert counsel of campus presidents and other administrators, activist trustees believe that shifts in policy can and should reflect public needs and interests. We have seen activist boards elected at the state level in Massachusetts and Virginia, and at the campus level at the City University of New York and the University of California. Although the actions of these trustees have largely been decried within higher education, their policies may have resonated with the public at large.

The consistent trend among activist boards has been a move from relying upon financial accountability alone—which they still view as vitally important—to the creation of policies that hold institutions accountable for student outcomes as well. Historically, states

have relied upon institutions and their faculties to set grading, admissions, and graduation requirements for students. Today, however, states are taking advantage of the legal authority provided to them in these areas to change these policies, sometimes quite dramatically.

### **Admissions Standards**

Activist governing boards have consistently raised admissions standards at four-year colleges. In Massachusetts, the high school GPA required for admission has been increased nearly every year since 1995, and will be 3.0 at every four-year college in the state starting in Fall 2001. In addition, the percentage

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of students who may be exempted from these standards has been reduced; this year, only 10 percent of the entering class at any four-year college may be exempted from these standards. The increase in admissions standards at four-year schools was combined with a number of financial incentives to attend community colleges, including a waiver of tuition charges for low-income students.

Massachusetts is not the only state to toughen its admissions standards in recent years. Mississippi has found itself in deep trouble with a federal court over its new admissions standards, which are at least partly to blame for a 21.4 percent drop in black enrollment at the state's eight public colleges. In 1996, Oklahoma reaffirmed its high admissions standards after a bid by Oklahoma State University to increase the percentage of entering students exempt from the policy from 8 percent to 20 percent.

### **Remedial Education**

The City University of New York has been the scene of tremendous controversy over the past two years, largely the result of the system's move to eliminate remedial education from its eleven senior colleges by this January. The result of CUNY's policy, however, has been a spate of lawsuits that have postponed implementation of the plan. CUNY is facing litigation from the campus faculty union and a cohort of New York civil rights groups, including the NAACP and American Jewish Congress.

Again, this is hardly an isolated incident. California State University has a plan to limit remedial education to 10 percent of students by 2007; currently, more than 50 percent of its students need at least one remedial education course. In Massachusetts, the state board capped remedial education courses among entering

four-year college freshmen at 5 percent. In addition, both CSU chancellor Charles B. Reed and former Massachusetts board chairman James F. Carlin have suggested forcing their states' high schools to pay for remedial education at the college level.

### **Graduation Requirements**

A number of states have passed or are considering imposing additional graduation requirements to ensure that students are learning the skills necessary for public life and work. In California, Governor Gray Davis proposed this year to include community service as a graduation requirement. In 1998, the Massachusetts board, responding to poor performance by the state's prospective teachers on a new competency test, asked its institutions to create exit exams. In perhaps the most interesting development, California State University has committed itself to awarding undergraduate degrees based on demonstrated learning rather than credits accumulated over time. The move to demonstrated learning is being led by CSU's newest campus at Monterey Bay, which included demonstrated learning as a part of its innovative curriculum. This can be an exciting opportunity to

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improve student learning outcomes and to make important decisions about the knowledge and skills that should be required for graduation.

Even some community colleges have moved to increase student accountability. Since fall 1998, the City Colleges of Chicago have required students to earn at least a C in all of their core courses to earn an associate's degree. And at the Community College of Denver, students are required not only to earn a C in core courses but also to complete a capstone project that requires demonstrated learning, much like the CSU plan.

### **Implications**

States seem moderately concerned about the effect of these policies on underprepared students, but this has not stopped these programs from being implemented. A common rationale has been that these policies simply move underprepared students to community colleges, which have a mission tailored to their needs and can provide remedial work more efficiently and at a lower cost. As a result, student accountability policies have often been used in concert with other policies that

are designed to foster student transfer to four-year colleges, and in some cases, financial aid and tuition-setting policies that make community colleges more attractive.

This rationale is attractive in theory, particularly to state boards and legislatures, but is problematic in practice. When you control for educational attainment, there is no difference in the amount of money earned by students who begin their B.A. degrees at the community college level and go on to complete them at other colleges or universities. (Whitaker and Pascarella, 1994). Community college students, however, are about 15 percent less likely to complete a bachelor's degree than native university students, so their average earnings are lower.

From a policy standpoint, it seems clear that although maintaining access to higher education is important, we should be concerned about maintaining access to specific institutional levels as well. While community colleges may be the most appropriate place for many students, policymakers must be aware that those students are significantly less likely to earn bachelor's degrees. This will probably remain true despite aggressive efforts to increase student transfer, although these efforts are undoubtedly worthwhile. This has consequences not only for underprepared students but also for states, many of which see bachelor's degree attainment as a key component of future economic development. It is in the interests of both states and institutions to work together to find the appropriate balance between standards and access.

The more general trend of increasing activism among state boards and agencies has a number of consequences, particularly for faculty roles and responsibilities. Assessment of student knowledge and skills is traditionally a faculty prerogative, despite laws in many states that give oversight of these policies to state entities. As we have seen, some state boards are not satisfied that academic and admissions policies set by institutions and faculty are in the public's best interest. This form of accountability may be long overdue; nevertheless, faculty will always play the key role in ensuring student learning and achievement. States that ignore this fact will face insurmountable obstacles in their higher education development efforts.

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## In Memoriam: Laurence R. Marcus, 1947–1999

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The staff and friends of *On the Horizon* are deeply saddened by the sudden death of the periodical's political editor and author, Laurence Marcus. Larry's contributions to the column Political Trends and Events have appeared in *On the Horizon* since 1996. Always the consummate teacher and scholar, Larry had a keen mind and spirited insight that brought to all who read his column a clearer sense of the issues confronting us in higher education.

Born and brought up on the South Shore of Boston, Larry was an avid Red Sox fan. Some of his best stories centered around talking his way into Fenway Park as a youngster, when the fee for admission was beyond his means. Larry's interests were as diverse as food and cooking and leadership, educational policy and baseball. He was in many respects a Renaissance man.

Larry earned his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. After graduating in 1976, he took a post as assistant to the vice president for academic affairs at Richard Stockton College in New Jersey, which was the

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first step in a distinguished career in New Jersey higher education. His career included several assignments in the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, including special assistant to the chancellor, director of the Office for State Colleges, director of the Division of Faculty Development and Educational Policy, deputy assistant chancellor of institutional affairs, assistant chancellor for institutional and fiscal affairs, and finally assistant chancellor for academic and fiscal affairs. In 1994 Larry joined the faculty of the Educational