



States and Public Higher Education: Review of Prior Research and the Implications for Case Studies (DRAFT)

M I C H A E L T . N E T T L E S

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Introduction

Today, as we perceive this elemental paradox in the tensions between the academy and the state, it is useful to keep in mind its generic quality. For at heart we are dealing, I submit, with a dilemma we cannot rationally wish to resolve. The public interest would not . . . be served if the academy were to enjoy an untroubled immunity. Nor could the public interest be served by the academy's being subjected to an intimate surveillance . . . Whatever our current discomforts, because of a sense that the state is crowding us a bit, the underlying tension is benign . . . the academy is for the state a benign antibody and the state is the academy's legitimator, benefactor, and protector. Both perspectives are valid. May they remain in tension.¹

Stephen Bailey got his wish. Since 1974, the tensions between states and institutions of higher education have remained a dominant feature of the public higher education policy landscape. In many states, the tensions have increased over the last quarter-century as state policymakers call for colleges and universities to be more accountable, while during the same period, state appropriations for higher education have decreased. Institutions chafe under tightening budgets and the perceived encroachments on their autonomy. The tensions between states and higher education institutions take on a variety of forms, ranging from student financial aid policies and campus crime to faculty tenure and student access. Exacerbating these myriad tensions is the increasing competition higher education faces from other state functions, such as health care, criminal justice, and elementary and secondary education.²

This paper addresses another form of the tension between states and institutions: assessment, and its “alter ego,” accountability. Assessment and accountability are relatively recent phenomena in higher education; the need to assess institutions and to hold them accountable grew in correspondence to the explosion of government funding—at both the state and federal levels—for public higher education in the post-World War II era.³ As a president of a public university and later chancellor of a state university system board of regents in the 1950s and 1960s, John Millett was well positioned to comment on this new trend in higher education. “State boards of higher education are going to hear a great deal about quality in the next several years. We have talked about quality in public higher education in the past, but I believe it is fair to say that at the level of state government our necessary preoccupation in the 1960s and 1970s was with quantity rather than quality. Now state governments will be told that it is time to give renewed attention to the quality of our higher education endeavors.”⁴

With the large increases in state and federal funding for public higher education also came a wave of national reports that hailed the need for substantive educational reform. Among the organizations which produced such reports were the Association of American Colleges, the National Institute of Education, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.⁵ Balancing these criticisms with a call to action on assessment was a 1985 paper by Peter Ewell, who argued that state governments should get involved in the assessment of undergraduate education because of the states' significant financial investments in higher education and because successful higher education systems could facilitate the achievement of other state policy objectives.⁶ Among Ewell's recommendations to state policymakers who were developing assessment policies were to recognize and preserve institutional diversity; to distinguish funding incentives for improvement from ongoing institutional funding mechanisms; and to afford institutions discretion in achieving improvement but hold them accountable for regular demonstration of progress.⁷

The states, in the form of the National Governors Association, spoke out in 1986. In a report entitled *Time for Results*, the governors made their position clear. "The public has a right to know what it is getting for its expenditure of tax resources; the public has a right to know and understand the quality of undergraduate education that young people receive from publicly funded colleges and universities. They have a right to know that their resources are being wisely invested and committed."⁸

Thus by 1986 the stage was set and all of the players were assembled for the higher education policy drama that was about to unfold. The analogy between theatre and higher education policymaking has been drawn most eloquently by Bruce Johnstone, who has observed that "planning and decision-making [in higher education] are often exercised in a veritable cauldron of political theatre, posturing, and political agendas . . . Also cynical and ultimately injurious to the strategic planning process can be the purely political demand for a new strategic plan simply to discredit a current or past administration, or to take the credit for forcing the president or chancellor or governing board to do something rigorous and businesslike, with little regard for the output of the exercise. Thus, the theatre of strategic planning in the public sector."⁹

A more detailed chronological history of the evolution of the assessment movement at the levels of state government and the regional accrediting associations from 1986 to the present, and a review of the prior research on these topics can be found in Nettles et al.¹⁰ The history and literature review are useful for understanding the context of this paper, which essentially picks up where that report left off, and explores in greater detail the relationship between state-level assessment policies and institutional assessment practices. In particular, this paper offers a focused review of the literature on the role of the

state in the governance of higher education, the relationship between state regulation and institutional autonomy, and the effects of different state postsecondary governance structures on higher education policy. This literature provides an essential foundation for the next stage of Project 5.1 research. The literature review is followed by further synthesis that relates these broad topics to the more specific issues of assessment and accountability, and the implications that this prior research holds for the upcoming case studies.

Literature Review

In much of the scholarly literature, research on the role of the state in the governance of public higher education has focused on statewide boards of higher education. These boards are largely products of the last half-century: in 1940, a total of 33 states had no statewide board or structure for coordination of higher education, while by 1970, only two states lacked some kind of statewide governance structure.¹¹ Much of the early scholarly treatment of statewide higher education boards featured efforts to define and categorize the various types of statewide boards.¹² By the early 1970s, a widely accepted taxonomy for the governance structure of all 50 states had been developed: states with no coordinating structure; states in which institutions formed a voluntary association with varying degrees of coordinating activity; states with advisory coordinating agencies, which were state-mandated and gave advice on policy matters but did not supersede the authority of the institutional or system board; states with regulatory coordinating agencies with final approval on some policy matters; and states with consolidated governing boards.¹³

Increasingly fine-grained distinctions among statewide boards of higher education were offered by some scholars and practitioners. In particular, the distinction between coordinating boards and statewide governing boards was addressed by John Millett. “There is a fundamental difference between a state coordinating board of higher education and a statewide governing [board?] for institutions of higher education. The difference is essentially one of orientation: the state board of higher education is necessarily oriented toward state government. The statewide governing board is necessarily oriented toward state institutions of higher education. This difference is reflected in their activities as well as in the kinds of persons who are selected as their chief executive officer or professional administrator.”¹⁴

Millett goes on to elaborate on this difference between orientations. State coordinating boards, he argues, are more involved with those higher education policy issues that attract the interests of the governor and legislature, while governing boards are more

concerned with those policy issues that either have not been addressed by the governor and/or legislature or issues the institutions would rather not have addressed by legislation.¹⁵ Another key difference is perspective: a state board “is concerned with a state government point of view to provide adequately but not excessively for higher education . . . Governing boards, on the other hand, want all the support they can obtain, are very mindful of the unfilled needs they would like to meet, are convinced of the particular capacity of their institution and campuses to provide educational service to the state, and seek to advance the prestige and status of their particular institution.”¹⁶ Based on this observation by Millett, it is not unreasonable to see tensions not only between the state and the institutions, but also among the institutions themselves, as they compete for state support and public prestige.

Armed with this taxonomy, some scholars began the formidable task of researching the actions, decisions, and dynamics of these boards, and of evaluating the boards’ effectiveness. The task was made formidable by a number of issues. Included among these issues was the role of individual personalities. Explains Robert Berdahl, “To keep things in perspective, one should acknowledge that the success or failure of state boards will normally be more dependent on the role of personalities than on the issue of structure or powers.”¹⁷ Berdahl goes on to quote from Sam Gould at length, and Gould’s eloquent and insightful observations bear repeating:

“The more subtle personal contacts . . . are the warp and woof of the fabric of the relationship [between state and university] . . . such contacts defy rules and definitions and formulas . . . They are the true means by which the delicate balance of authority, responsibility, and interdependence existing between the university and state government is maintained, or, when matters go awry, is upset. They represent the interplay of personalities, the development of attitudes on the part of these personalities reflecting a clear understanding of respective roles and motivations, and most of all the creation of a climate of mutual trust and respect.”¹⁸

Another difficulty, perhaps related to the role of individual personalities, is the power and influence of a state board relative to the authority it was granted in its enabling legislation. “Some agencies have more power . . . because they are heavy on informal power, influence, and ‘credibility’ with state officials and the public . . . The web of informal relationships, communication, and respect among legislators and the state agency is extremely important and is often overlooked.”¹⁹

By the early 1980s, the literature on the role of the state in higher education policy had matured, and this maturity provided scholars a chance both to reflect on the development of the state role (and the corresponding state agencies), and to look ahead to the

future of the state's role. One critical observation, from a structural perspective, offered by Glenny and Schmidlein, addressed the potentially unchecked control many state governments could exert over institutions of higher education: "State legislatures and executive agencies can exercise virtually unlimited control over the public colleges and universities in their state."²⁰ The notable exceptions to this rule were those states where institutions and/or their boards were given special constitutional status, and thus (in theory) not as vulnerable to state intervention or control. Despite this potential in most states for unchecked intrusion into institutional affairs, the authors were not inclined to be fearful of the state's motives. "There are many ways in which states can intervene in higher education, and all of these usually are exercised to further legitimate state interests."²¹

Glenny and Schmidlein then delineate the major roles states play in higher education policy: governance, coordination, and administration; access; instruction; research; public service; general support (i.e., budgeting); and accountability (here the authors focused on the financial dimension of accountability, such as adherence to certain accounting procedures, auditing of accounts, and rules for purchasing).²² In each of these policy areas, the authors spelled out some of the possible implications of state control, including the state's ability to fix the number, distribution, and qualifications of admitted students; to eliminate academic program duplication; to require certain state-relevant research and development activity; and to use budgetary procedures or funding levels to enforce policy agendas.²³ Interestingly, and very significant to the second part of this paper, Glenny and Schmidlein reiterate the findings from earlier research indicating that political staff are more important than politicians. Multiple research projects revealed that "in most states, state agency staffs involved with higher education have far more direct influence on policy and specific courses of action than do governors and legislators. Exceptions generally occur when an issue reaches high political salience."²⁴

Given these potential areas of greater state involvement in higher education and the possible implications of such involvement, Glenny and Schmidlein then turn to a discussion about the future, and the trends and issues that they expected would influence state roles and functions from 1985 to 2005. Economically speaking, a growing competition for state funds, the rising cost of higher education (relative to the cost of living), and an inability to increase productivity all were highlighted; in the social sphere, trends toward declining public support for higher education and growing suspicion about its socioeconomic benefits were predicted.²⁵ As for the effect these trends would have, Glenny and Schmidlein expected states to scrutinize institutions and hold them more accountable, certainly in comparison to other competitors for shrinking state funds. "The anticipation of fiscal stringency is causing state governments to examine the productivity of higher education and its economic benefits . . .

The growing familiarity of the public with higher education, together with its diminished role as a conveyor of social and economic status, no doubt will adversely its funding competition with other state programs."²⁶ This was precisely the reality of state policy when examined by Zumeta twelve years later.²⁷

Fortuitously, Glenny had the chance to revisit this topic in a more expansive sense in a 1985 paper for the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEOs). A little more than a quarter-century after writing his landmark *Autonomy of Public Colleges*, Glenny examined the modern concept of state coordination of higher education, and concluded that "[O]rganizations and procedures for conducting coordination continue in a dynamic state. The less power the agency has, the more dynamic the operational milieu. The accelerating trend in the nation is for more centralization of public higher education."²⁸

Reviewing more than forty years' worth of state coordination, Glenny argues that state legislators use coordination to "try to bring order to the inevitable chaos of institutional parochialism in pursuing self-interests . . . All state leaders want outstanding institutions, thoroughly educated students, well-conducted research, and continued development of new knowledge. They believe these ends are better achieved through coordination and planning than by allowing each institution, at will, to create new centers, add new programs, and adjust admission standards and tuition as if such independent actions in the aggregate promote the best interests of the state."²⁹

As part of his review, Glenny comments on the relative strengths and weaknesses of state coordination. His general conclusion is that "[C]oordination has been effective . . . As one examines the four major functions of coordination—planning, budgeting, program review, and policy analysis—the record is clear."³⁰ On the subject of budgeting, Glenny foreshadows the rise of performance funding, advising states that given the success of objective formula funding, in contrast to a more subjective, political process, "supplementing formula budgeting with 'quality funding' should be done cautiously to prevent political power rather than academic merit from again becoming determinative."³¹

Among the weaknesses Glenny sees in statewide coordination is an unwillingness on the part of coordinating boards and staffs "to involve faculty members and administrators from the institutions in a full and open manner that leads to better and more acceptable policy recommendations."³² On the other hand, Glenny also notes a communications gap between coordinating boards and state legislators. There are "[P]oor continuing contacts with legislators and their staffs on matters of importance, both during sessions and between them, thus failing to overcome the legislative view of the agency

as one closely tied to the governor and his budget office.”³³ In a sense, Glenny envisions the coordinating boards as inhabiting a “no-man’s land” between administrators and faculty on one hand and legislators on the other, and struggling to establish consistent, effective communication with either. This breakdown in communication is a major impediment to the ultimate success of coordination. “By whatever agency performed, the most successful coordination involves widespread participation by faculty and administrators of the coordinated organizations, experts and lay people from the public and representatives of organizations interested in education.”³⁴

From his perspective in 1985, Glenny looks ahead to issues coordinating agencies would face in the late 1980s and beyond. One, in particular, deserves mention in this paper: the measurement of educational progress. “Some states have adopted assessment exams at the postsecondary level. Some states apply similar tests to students and even to the instructors in teacher education programs . . . Though the results of applying such devices are mixed, the pressure will increasingly be on higher education to measure educational progress for college programs of all kinds. This is an area of public policy requiring coordination, at least among all the public institutions.”³⁵

Later in the 1980s, the literature shifted again, this time from description, review, and evaluation to prediction and the correlation of governance characteristics with postsecondary education policy behaviors. The pioneer in this field was James Hearn, who in 1996 co-authored a study of state tuition and student financial aid policies in all 50 states.³⁶ Among the findings from this study were statistically significant relationships between a variety of variables—including the geographic region in which a state is located, social and economic resources (e.g., state population, average disposable income, and high school graduation rate), and postsecondary governance structures—and the type of tuition and student financial aid policies at the state level.³⁷

Preceding the study of states’ tuition and financial aid policies was a similar analysis done by Hearn and Griswold on the relationship between state-level centralization and postsecondary education policy innovations.³⁸ In the study, a “policy innovation” was defined as a “qualitatively distinct action, not changes at the margins to existing structures and processes.”³⁹ One of the policy innovations included in the study was mandatory student assessment; Hearn and Griswold found that states with relatively centralized governance structures were found to be more likely than other states to impose mandatory student assessment policies.⁴⁰ The other policy innovations (the dependent variables) were whether “states required tests for teaching assistants, offered a tax-exempt college savings bond, offered a pre-paid college tuition plan, restricted or taxed college businesses, made vandalism of animal-research facilities a crime, allowed non-traditional paths for certification of K-12 teachers, and required that high school teachers not be education majors.”⁴¹

In outlining the conceptual framework for the study, the authors describe the setting in which states and institutions of higher education found themselves in the 1990s. “[T]he context for postsecondary education in this era is arguably one both producing and calling for substantive policy change. Resources are extraordinar[il]y tight, and higher education often represents the single largest item of discretionary spending in a state’s budget. As a consequence, colleges are under increased scrutiny by the public and legislators. In many states, this context has led directly to substantive, novel policy action on a wide variety of fronts. For example, policymakers concerned over the quality of postsecondary graduates in their states imposed new outcome assessment programs on their public institutions in the 1980s.”⁴²

The authors also attempt to describe the roles of various players in the postsecondary education policy domain, acknowledging that governing and coordinating bodies are “only sometimes the originators or the driving forces behind breakaway innovations in postsecondary policy.”⁴³ Among the roles postsecondary governance officials can play in the policy process are “mediators, negotiators, analysts, ‘fine tuners,’ and facilitators.”⁴⁴ Governing and coordinating bodies “serve as active participants in policy debates, as significant agents in implementing policy, and, more generally, as important actors in postsecondary policy contexts . . . It is no exaggeration to suggest that governance agencies can and often do help propel or block innovations. They therefore must be viewed as potentially critical actors in a state’s consideration of change in the postsecondary arena.”⁴⁵

Ultimately, Hearn and Griswold choose Kingdon’s “policy stream” framework as a means of conceptualizing their discussion of the postsecondary education policy process. “In keeping with Kingdon’s view, we see governance arrangements not as ultimately determining forces in rationally organized political systems, but rather as potentially influential forces among a welter of potentially influential forces.”⁴⁶ Kingdon’s study of policy at the federal government level is a landmark in the political science and policy analysis fields.⁴⁷ Among his findings are insights that have profound implications for state postsecondary education policy analysis, such as his conclusion that the federal government is an “organized anarchy,” and that “[S]eparate streams run through the organization, each with a life of its own. These streams are coupled at critical junctures, and that coupling produces the greatest agenda change.”⁴⁸ Kingdon enumerates three “families” of processes in agenda-setting at the federal level—problems, policies, and politics—and three major process “streams”—problem recognition, formation and refining of policy proposals, and politics.⁴⁹ Kingdon’s detailing of these streams is worth quoting at length.

“First, various problems come to capture the attention of people in and around government . . . Second, there is a policy community of specialists—bureaucrats, people in the planning and evaluation and in the budget offices, [Capitol] Hill staffers, academics, interest groups, researchers—which concentrates on generating proposals. They each have their pet ideas or axes to grind; they float their ideas up and the ideas bubble around in these policy communities. In a selection process, some ideas or proposals are taken seriously and others are discarded . . . Third, the political stream is composed of things like swings of national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration, shifts in partisan or ideological distributions in Congress, and interest group pressure campaigns . . . Each of the actors and processes can operate either as an impetus or as a constraint.”⁵⁰

Given this description of an ever-changing policy landscape, Hearn and Griswold point out that “it is rare for a given body or agency or interest to be able to claim a consistently preordained superior level of power in public policy debates.”⁵¹ The relevance of Kingdon’s examination of the federal level policy process lies in its possible application as a theoretical framework for considering the state-level assessment policy process and its streams.

Hearn and Griswold’s basic hypothesis is that “policy innovation in postsecondary education will be associated with several interrelated factors: a state’s size, region, educational development, and socioeconomic development, in addition to its postsecondary governance arrangement.”⁵² The authors found that the results were mixed, but two broad themes emerged. “First, governance structures are the most influential in the core educational activities of states’ postsecondary enterprise: teaching, research, and the preparation of citizens and workers. Statewide governing boards and strong coordinating boards are positively associated with innovation in academic areas, *such as the assessment of undergraduates* . . . A second theme in the findings for governance arrangements is the striking absence of systematic differences in innovation patterns between states with consolidated governing boards and states with strong coordinating boards.”⁵³ (Emphasis added.)

Isolating results from the multiple regression analysis conducted by Hearn and Griswold allows for a fuller picture of the relationships between the independent variables they considered and the development of a mandatory state-level assessment policy. Larger states (in terms of population) were more “innovative” in academic policy innovations, but the difference between large and small states in requiring student assessment dropped out when confounding factors were controlled for in the regressions.⁵⁴ Along other dimensions, states in the southeast region of the U.S. (Ala-

bama, Florida, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia) were most likely to require assessment. The percentage of a state's population with at least a high school education also had a positive relationship with a mandated assessment policy. None of the other independent variables, including postsecondary enrollment and wealth, was significant at the p .15 level.⁵⁵

Hearn and Griswold conclude their study by raising a number of issues for future study, including the need to "identify successful and unsuccessful innovations, or hostile and friendly innovations, and relate these systematically to different kinds of state governance arrangements."⁵⁶ The authors also echo the advice of Robert Berdahl when they stress the importance of individuals in the policy process: "There can be no question that individuals play an important role in postsecondary reform as well. For example, a number of southern governors have been quite influential in developing assessment and teacher education reforms in their states. These individual efforts deserve consideration in serious analyses of innovation in postsecondary education."⁵⁷ Hearn and Griswold further suggest that there is a "chicken and egg" dilemma here: does centralization produce innovation, or does innovation somehow bring about centralization? Finally, the authors recommend adding other contextual factors into the state policy analysis, such as regional associations, the size of governing or coordinating boards, the size of related professional staffs, the number of institutions under the control of a state board, and the mix of public and private institutions in a particular state.⁵⁸

Another natural direction for research on the state role in higher education is toward an examination of the relationship between state regulation and institutional autonomy. While this has been a concern of scholars dating back to Glenny and his first book on the subject, appropriately entitled *The Autonomy of Public Colleges*, since then more empirical attempts have been made to understand this vital ramification of state governance.

Volkwein begins his 1987 article on the subject of state regulation and campus autonomy with a brief review of the various conceptualizations of institutional autonomy. Berdahl distinguished between procedural and substantive autonomy; procedural autonomy is largely administrative in nature, while substantive autonomy addresses academic matters.⁵⁹ Both the Carnegie Foundation, in their report on the governance of American higher education,⁶⁰ and Levy, in his analysis of the role of government in higher education in Mexico,⁶¹ differentiated among three types of autonomy: academic, financial, and personnel, which are self-explanatory.

Based on his research from the mid-1980s, and using these three types of autonomy, Volkwein developed a continuum of centralization on which he placed all 50 states. In the academic dimension, his continuum runs from centralized, which he compared to a European ministry model of academic administration, to independent, which he compared to a free market model. In the financial dimension, his continuum runs from centralized (state agency) to decentralized (state controlled and state aided) to independent, or corporate model. As of 1983, Volkwein ranked no state as independent in either the academic or financial realms.⁶²

Summarizing the existing literature on state regulation, Volkwein highlights six main themes: (1) the amount of regulation has grown over the last forty years; (2) regulation varies widely from state to state; (3) greater regulation is seen as a disincentive to good campus management; (4) state regulation is being criticized, especially in states with more centralized arrangements; (5) in general, universities' relationships with state governments have remained fairly static; and (6) recent changes as of the mid-1980s have been more deregulatory in nature.⁶³

Volkwein then proceeds to a review of the literature on the various factors that lead to state regulation of higher education, dividing them into socioeconomic and political factors. Socioeconomically, Volkwein hypothesizes that "to the extent that state regulation of public universities is a 'policy outcome,' the relative amounts of tax capacity and effort, urbanization, industrialization, population characteristics, and education levels in each state should be associated with university fiscal and academic autonomy."⁶⁴ In the political vein, Volkwein highlights the roles of governors, legislatures, political parties, and governance structures. Based on his review of the literature, he finds that governors are "increasingly viewed as a dominant figure in public higher education . . . governors rarely intervene in regulatory policy issues but, instead, are likely to allow them to be handled by other state officers. . . [G]overnors were likely to intervene directly when there was a strong relationship between an institution's programs and the political interests of the governor."⁶⁵ There was also a consensus in the literature reviewed by Volkwein that legislatures and their staffs have a significant influence on education policy, although the nature of that influence was not detailed. As regards political parties, Volkwein reports that the "more a state is characterized by a pattern of elected Democrats and by a large number of government employees, the more likely it is to be active in educational policy."⁶⁶ Finally, Volkwein reviewed much of the literature (Berdahl, Millett) discussed earlier in this paper, which pointed to a relationship between governance structure and higher education policy.

In his own research study, Volkwein used multiple regressions to explore and quantify the relationships between various state characteristics and the three types of state regu-

lation—academic, financial, and personnel. In terms of academic regulation, the most relevant for the purposes of this paper, Volkwein found six state characteristics that were significantly correlated with academic regulation: expenditures per capita for higher education, population density, public enrollment in higher education per thousand, Democratic Party strength, number of government employees, and the ratio of private to public universities.⁶⁷ Of these, expenditures per capita and public enrollment per thousand were found to be negatively correlated with the amount of state regulation on academic issues. Overall, Volkwein’s data revealed “neither consistent nor strong correlations between the amount of state regulation, on the one hand, and the major economic, social, and political variables, on the other. The low relationships suggest that regulatory controls may perhaps be more idiosyncratic, and therefore more easily changed, than commonly believed by many in higher education.”⁶⁸

Volkwein revisited this topic in a 1997 article that sought to show how the landscape of state regulation of higher education had changed from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.⁶⁹ The authors found that generally speaking, “a significant number of states have delegated increased authority to their university campuses since the early 1980s.”⁷⁰ This was the trend across all three areas of regulation—academic, financial, and personnel. Looking again at whether certain socioeconomic and political characteristics of states resulted in greater state regulation of higher education, Volkwein and Malik reached essentially the same conclusion Volkwein had a decade earlier: “We find modest, but hardly dramatic, evidence of a relationship between a state’s characteristics and the administrative controls it imposes on public universities.”⁷¹

Synthesis of Literature: Questions and Issues for the State Case Studies

This review of the scholarly literature addressed the role of the state in the governance of public higher education. One important manifestation of that role, which is also the focus of Project 5.1, is state-level assessment policy. At least one of the studies reviewed (Hearn and Griswold) made explicit reference to assessment of undergraduates as an example of postsecondary education policy innovation; the remainder of the literature has important implications for the case study of state assessment policies and practices. This synthesis will enumerate and explain these implications as a means of informing the development of the state case study research protocols.

There are four broad categories of issues that emerge from the literature, each with its own set of implications. These categories are process, personality, context, and, for want of a better word, concerns. In terms of process, some of the older literature on statewide governance, particularly Millett, makes it clear that the orientation of state

postsecondary education governance structures is an important factor to consider when analyzing any state policy, including assessment. What is the political orientation of governing and coordinating boards in each of the case study states? Does Millett's observation—that governing boards are oriented toward institutions and coordinating boards are oriented toward the state government—still hold true? If so, what intervening or mediating effects do these bodies have on the creation and implementation of assessment policies? To what extent do these bodies serve the political agendas of governors, legislators, institutional administrators, and faculty, vis-à-vis assessment? Is one kind of governance structure more likely to have a positive influence on the nature and extent of assessment requirements imposed on institutions?

Another critical element of process is communications, among all groups involved in the postsecondary education policy arena. Glenny observed an unwillingness on the part of some coordinating boards and staffs to communicate with administrators and faculty and make them more equal partners in the policy process. Is this occurring with the assessment policy process? Does the communications gap work in the other direction, i.e., between boards and legislators? Can the communications process be seen as a triangle, with the legislature as one point, coordinating/governing boards as another point, and institutions as the third point? If so, which lines of communications are open and which are closed? Does a lack of communications result in confusion and/or resentment over the perceived intrusiveness of state-mandated assessment requirements at the institutional level?

Finally, there is the possible application of Kingdon's "policy stream" model as a way of understanding the state assessment policy process. In his analysis of the federal policy process, Kingdon saw three "streams"—problems, policies, and politics. Do these same "streams" run through the landscape of state assessment policy for public higher education? If so, where are the crucial junctures of these streams, and how does the coupling of these streams produce changes in a state's assessment agenda? What we can learn about the assessment policy process by looking at it from this perspective, and how might this perspective contribute to the creation of a policy model for improvement?

Beyond process there is personality. Discussions of the role of personalities in the assessment policy arena go back at least as far as Berdahl (1974), who suggested that the ultimate success or failure of state governance structures depended more on personalities than on other considerations. Miller (1970) also stressed the importance of individual personalities and "the web" of personal relationships, and reminded researchers that these relationships are largely neglected in most analyses. Personality is, by its nature, a difficult thing to quantify, and it will prove a daunting task to trace the influence of this nebulous factor on the development of assessment policy in public higher

education. But using the case study approach and semistructured interviews with the key persons in state higher education policymaking, at least some progress can be made toward understanding how personality impacts policy.

Providing the backdrop for both process and personality are the contexts—social, economic, and political—and, of course, these various contexts interact with one another. Glenny and Schmidlein (1983) predicted that higher education would increasingly compete with other state activities for state funds; in his review of state budgets and policy developments, Zumeta (1995) confirmed that this was the reality in many states. In short, the economic context for higher education has been a troubled one, and has resulted in greater demands for accountability and for evidence that state investment in higher education is justified. From this angle, state-level assessment policies were inevitable. Socially, Glenny and Schmidlein also pointed to the diminishing public trust and confidence in higher education, leading to a chillier political climate for colleges and universities in many state legislatures. As Howard Bowen observed in his 1977 book, *An Investment in Learning*, even then the American public was less deferential to higher education and increasingly doubtful that the public investment in higher learning produced a return that was sufficiently public or sufficiently good. This unfortunate trend of public skepticism about higher education has continued to the present day.

A more systematic analysis of the various contexts in which state higher education policy operates was presented by Hearn and Griswold (1994), who measured the correlation between a variety of socioeconomic and political characteristics of a state and its tendency to engage in higher education policy innovations, including assessment. While they found little evidence of a correlation between many characteristics and assessment, there were some—location in the southeastern region of the U.S. and percentage of the population with at least a high school education—that proved statistically significant. Clearly, discovering why these characteristics are significant is an important task; equally important is understanding why other state characteristics, such as postsecondary wealth and enrollment, are not significantly correlated. Why are certain characteristics predictive of a state assessment policy and others not? If we know that certain characteristics have an effect, then the next logical question becomes “*what effect?*” Is there a regional effect in the southeast? Is this effect partially the result of individual personalities, such as governors, as Berdahl proposes? Are there substantial or interesting differences between assessment policies in the southeast compared with those in other regions of the country?

While Volkwein’s results (1987)—demonstrating a correlation between a variety of noteworthy characteristics and the amount of academic regulation in states—address the subject of academic regulation more broadly, state-mandated assessment policies

serve very neatly as examples of academic regulation. What relationship, if any, exists between characteristics such as expenditures per capita for higher education and the ratio of private to public institutions, and a state's tendency to require assessment? In other words, can Volkwein's findings be extrapolated from the general to the specific (from academic regulation to assessment)? If not, what makes assessment different from other types of state regulation?

Finally, there are other concerns raised by a reading of the state governance literature related to assessment. Glenny (1985) argued that state legislators knew what they wanted in terms of higher education, and that their desires were compatible with the wants and needs of institutions. Is this true for assessment? When state legislators approve an assessment requirement for institutions, do they really know what it is they want this requirement to accomplish? Are some state legislators interested in assessment only as a tool of accountability? What happens when the interests of legislatures and universities collide? Does assessment promote a legitimate state interest? What balance should be struck between a state's interest in accountability and an institution's interest in autonomy?

Hearn and Griswold (1994) named the imposition of state-mandated assessment requirements as one of their postsecondary education policy innovations, which they defined as "qualitatively distinct actions, not changes at the margins to existing structures and processes." Is assessment an innovation by this definition? Are some states using existing structures and processes to achieve assessment? If so, what degree of innovation is lost? Project 5.3 is looking closely at reforms and innovations in postsecondary education; this discussion of assessment as innovation will provide a good intersection between the research efforts of Projects 5.1 and 5.3.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what is the nature of the tension between state-mandated assessment and institutional autonomy? Understanding how state regulation impacted campus autonomy was one of Volkwein's chief concerns (1987). However we envision autonomy—distinguishing between procedural and substantive autonomy, as Berdahl (1971) did, or among academic, financial, and personnel autonomies, as Levy (1980) did—there can be little question that state assessment policies have some impact on institutional autonomy. This is perhaps the single largest source of controversy surrounding assessment, and it will likely remain the most pressing concern of faculty. Exploring this tension between state and institution will provide a valuable point of convergence between Projects 5.1 and 5.2.

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