REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR
AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A Study of Factors that have Contributed to Mission Change in Public Colleges and Universities

September 23, 2003

A SCHEV REPORT

STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA
ADVANCING VIRGINA THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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September 23, 2003

To: The Honorable Mark R. Warner
Governor of Virginia

Senator John H. Chichester
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Delegate Vincent F. Callahan, Jr.
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Members of the General Assembly of Virginia

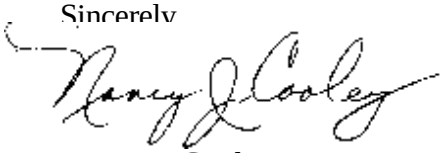
The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) is pleased to submit the attached report entitled "A Study of Factors that have Contributed to Mission Change in Public Colleges and Universities." This study was required by *Subsection I.1 of Item 166, #2C of the Appropriation Act of 2003-2004.*

> **The State Council shall conduct a study of the factors contributing to changes over time in the mission of Virginia's public institutions of higher education and shall report its findings, along with any recommendations for strengthening the current mission review process, to the Governor and chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees by October 1, 2003.**

The report was approved by the State Council at its September 17, 2003 meeting.

Thank you for this opportunity to study this central issue in Virginia higher education. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me or the staff member who led this study, Alan Edwards (804.225.3189; alanedwards@schev.edu).

Sincerely



Nancy J. Cooley
Acting Executive Director

Enclosure

PREFACE

Subsection I.1 of Item 166, #2C of the Appropriation Act of 2003-2004 stipulates:

> *The State Council shall conduct a study of the factors contributing to changes over time in the mission of Virginia's public institutions of higher education and shall report its findings, along with any recommendations for strengthening the current mission review process, to the Governor and chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees by October 1, 2003.*

Toward this end, the staff of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) initiated this research project in the summer of 2003. Under the direction of executive director Phyllis Palmiero and academic-affairs director Nancy Cooley, a preliminary research plan and study outline were constructed by academic-affairs associate Alan Edwards and consultant/faculty member Dorothy Finnegan. These initial steps were presented to the Council's Academic Affairs Committee at its July 16, 2003, meeting.

Having found little relevant or helpful previous research literature, Drs. Edwards and Finnegan spent July and early August interviewing institutional personnel—from presidents to faculty members—and reviewing historical and current institutional and SCHEV documents to gain a better understanding of mission change and its associated factors. Once the data collection was complete, efforts were made to discuss the study and the preliminary findings with key legislators. The final report was prepared in August and September and was formally adopted by the State Council at its meeting on September 17, 2003.

The State Council would like to acknowledge the institutional personnel who participated in the information gathering process (some during their vacations) and especially the institutional staff members who arranged and scheduled the interviews, provided on-site logistical support and often assembled the various requested documentation and materials. Within SCHEV, Dr. Edwards would like to acknowledge the contributions of staff members Lee Ann Rung and Darlene Derricott in facilitating his meetings with institutional and legislative representatives. Dr. Finnegan would like to acknowledge graduate student Heather Griffith for her transcription of taped interviews and graduate assistant Kathryn Abdel-Salam for compiling the myriad definitions of mission from the administrative interviews.

This study found little evidence of significant, recent change in the core missions of Virginia's public colleges and universities. In these times of unprecedented social, economic, demographic and technological change, public institutions' missions have formulated, and continue to devise evolutionary adaptations and/or strategic adjustments that represent purposeful and beneficial (to students, the institutions and the Commonwealth) responses to new realities in public colleges' and universities' external environments and programmatic and service niches. The study also offers a set of general recommendations aimed at placing and centering the issue of mission within future discussions of new higher education proposals and initiatives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The missions of public colleges and universities, and changes therein, are matters of interest and discussion across the nation and within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Philosophical and economic concerns are being expressed regarding perceived trends toward increased homogeneity across, and comprehensiveness within, public institutions of higher education. And as resources have become increasingly scarce, attention to the significance of mission and its components has steadily risen.

Via the Appropriation Act of 2003-2004, the Virginia General Assembly required the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to conduct this study of factors that have contributed to mission change in the Commonwealth's public colleges and universities. Toward this end, national research literature was reviewed, institutional personnel and legislative representatives were interviewed, and archival and current state- and institutional-level documents and publications were analyzed. From this information, a preliminary list of factors was developed. These factors were then grouped and classified, resulting in three categories of general elements that lead to specific institutional actions regarding mission. Finally, the complexities and inter-relationships among the elements and between the elements and the possible institutional actions were described.

The preliminary list of factors contained numerous, rather commonsensical items (e.g., presidential leadership/ambition; need for resources; demographic changes; and labor market changes) that added little in-and-of themselves to a fuller understanding of the mission-change issue. A more extensive list of factors was gleaned from the interviews with institutional administrators. When grouped, this extended list of factors yielded three categories of factors related to mission change: context, (change) agent roles, and catalysts. In various combinations, these categories of factors were seen as contributing to institutional mission-related actions.

Overall, this research finds that Virginia's public colleges and universities have, for the most part, maintained their public purposes and their core missions, especially over the past decade. That which appears superficially to be "mission creep" or "mission drift" is usually strategic mission adjustment and/or evolutionary mission adaptation to new realities in institutions' external environments. This study's specific conclusions include:

I. The factors that contribute to mission change are generally external factors that are difficult to avoid or ignore. Historically, external catalysts and agents drove changes in the core missions of Virginia's public colleges and universities. Even today, in situations in which initiatives to enhance and focus institutional missions originate internally, these efforts most often represent reasoned institutional responses to new and emerging environmental realities.

II. Modification of mission is much more common than change in core mission. Very little mission change or significant institutional transformation has occurred since the mid-1990s. Recent modifications have taken the forms of mission articulation, enhancement, focus, adjustment and adaptation while maintaining institutions' core activities, purposes and values.

III. Overall, mission modification by Virginia's public colleges and universities has been purposeful, responsive and beneficial. In recent years, that which has been perceived as mission creep or drift has generally been much more purposeful and responsive—to social, public and economic needs—yet reflective of institutional mission and type.

IV. The decentralization of the policy process and procedures has impacted state-level approval of mission changes.

A. The role of SCHEV as a gatekeeper in relation to public institutions' missions, and changes therein, has become less overt. SCHEV has not published specific policies and procedures regarding mission-change or statement-change proposals in decades, and no longer requires that mission statements be submitted with other requisite documents.

B. The General Assembly and SCHEV represent dual pathways to academic and/or organizational modifications that can eventually result in incremental or cumulative changes in central elements of public institutions' missions. Singular approvals of new academic activities, organizational structures, and/or physical facilities have culminated over time in the *de-facto* approval of change(s) in mission.

V. Public colleges and universities are supportive of coordinated mission review. Those in leadership positions within Virginia's public colleges and universities are supportive of, and willing to participate in, state-level coordination efforts that would support the diversity of the system and lessen competition between the institutions.

VI. Virginia's public colleges and universities are becoming more reflective and responsive within their own niches, and thus, more diverse. While more institutions may be offering similar degree programs, they are doing so largely within their missions via different methods and perspectives and for different reasons and goals. The evolution of Virginia's diverse system of public higher education has resulted in a collection of institutional missions that addresses a significant range of the social and economic needs of the Commonwealth and its citizens.

The findings and conclusions of this study indicate that drastic measures to address mission change are not necessary. That which is most warranted is a concerted effort on the

part of the General Assembly, the State Council and the public colleges and universities to give due and proper consideration to the issue of institutional mission during discussion and consideration of all institutional issues. This study's specific recommendations include:

Recommendation 1: The General Assembly should consider the cumulative ramifications of its decisions when it acts on matters pertaining to individual public colleges and universities. These legislative decisions and actions can subvert SCHEV's coordinating role and mission review responsibility. Moreover, the legislature should remember that, via the passage of one new initiative for a campus, it might be opening a door for the institution to pursue a new mission direction or future mission expansion in support or fulfillment of the new initiative.

Recommendation 2: In collaboration with the General Assembly, the State Council of Higher Education should consider mission impact in all of its deliberations and/or actions on institutional matters (e.g., academic program proposals; organizational changes). SCHEV should require that institutions' mission statements—and any proposed changes therein—be included with, or incorporated into, institutions' strategic plans and strategic plan updates, which must be submitted to SCHEV on four-year cycles (updates two years after plans). Further, SCHEV should require institutions to project any potential impact of proposed changes on their approved missions.

Recommendation 3: The State Council of Higher Education should provide an unambiguous articulation of its coordination function to its multiple constituencies and partners in the policy arena. Its provision of system-level information and analysis enables constituents to better perceive and understand the diversity of Virginia's public institutions and system. For public colleges and universities, the availability of such information and analysis enhances their ability to know and project—in their formal mission statements as well as their plans and publications—how and where they provide unique service to the Commonwealth. The public institutions may then be better able to participate in an active and reflective manner in the maintenance of the diversity of the system.

Recommendation 4: The State Council and the public institutions should work together to better demonstrate (and advocate for) the institutional diversity within Virginia's system of public higher education. Individual institutional missions as articulated by their professionals are clear and distinct. Efforts should assist institutions to communicate their unique contributions to the Commonwealth to external constituents. Although the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness (ROIE) provide considerable useful information to multiple constituencies, the organization and presentation of the information contained in the ROIE can lead to inaccurate comparisons and conclusions that cloud the differences between and among Virginia's public colleges and universities.

Recommendation 5: Virginia's public colleges and universities should continue to be vigilant in their efforts to match their activities to their core missions; their

individual efforts to be "market smart" at the institutional level should not preclude the Commonwealth's need that they be "mission centered" at the system level.

Recommendation 6: The public colleges and universities should also extend the social and economic forecasting that they conduct at the institutional level to the state/system level in a collaborative, coordinated manner.

Through their dual commitment to quality and the Commonwealth, Virginia's public colleges and universities constitute a coordinated system of public higher education that is envied across the country and around the world. Two major reasons for this high regard and stature are: (1) SCHEV's adherence to its Code mandate to "preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions;" and (2) institutions' individual and collective responsibility to their missions and their constituencies. Only through working together to better understand and articulate the individual institutional missions as part of a unified system-wide mission can the General Assembly, SCHEV and Virginia's public colleges and universities best serve and advance the interests of the institutions, the system and the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCTION

National Context

Public colleges' and universities' missions, and changes therein, are matters of national interest and discussion. This attention is not surprising given that:

> The existence of postsecondary institutions with unique and differentiated missions serves states' needs by improving efficiency and effectiveness—goals that are becoming more important in the current era of scarce resources. Multiple types of public (and private) postsecondary institutions within a state, including large and small colleges and universities as well as special-focus colleges, provide diverse educational opportunities for students. States with diverse higher education systems can improve the chances that (a) students will be able to pursue higher education in the most appropriate environment; (b) their large comprehensive universities will continue to meet their economic and research needs; and (c) in-state students will stay in the state for college, thus increasing the chance that they will also remain in the state as productive, tax-paying citizens after graduation.[1]

Increasingly in recent years, trepidation has been expressed about changes in colleges and universities and in their missions. Some of this concern focuses on the loss of diversity among institutions as they appear to become more similar and the tendency for institutions to grow to huge proportions.[2] These perceived trends are thought to result in losses of diversity in institutional types, structures, curricula, pedagogies and enrollments—in total, a loss of differentiation in public institutions' missions. Other concerns have been expressed about broad philosophical issues such as the loss of public purpose in public higher education.[3] To some, public institutions appear to be acting in their own self-interests and, ultimately, to the detriment of their states' interests. These concerns also carry with them economic issues—perceptions that public colleges and universities are establishing activities and facilities that are redundant and duplicative in form and number, as well as unnecessary and inefficient in cost and purpose, for their states.

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[1] Morphew, Christopher C. 2002. "A rose by any other name: Which colleges became universities." Review of Higher Education 25, 2 (Winter). p. 209.

[2] Gumport, Patricia et al. 1997. Trends in United States higher education from massification to post massification. Stanford, CA: National Center for Postsecondary Improvement.

[3] Zemsky, Robert. May 30, 2003. "Have we lost the 'public' in higher education?" The Chronicle of Higher Education 49, 38. p. B7.

While these concerns are real, public colleges and universities hotly contest the assumptions and perceptions on which they are based. Instead, these institutions claim that, after a century (for many) of being Ivory Towers that were isolated from "the real world," they have become—in the course of only a few decades—very active (proactive and reactive) and committed partners in their states and communities, attuned and responsive to new and changing realities.

Virginia Context

At the turn of the 21st Century, the Commonwealth of Virginia, not unlike most states, was seeking new and better ways to be (more) efficient, effective, and accountable to its citizens. The state revenues available to support public activities were being reduced as the automobile (property) tax was being phased out. After September 11, 2001, Virginia, like most of the country, felt the tight grip of an economic recession. As the state's financial woes increased, various voices emerged.

Political leadership began to voice concern about the Commonwealth's public colleges and universities. Those voices, admonishing public institutions for attempting to be "all things to all people" and for operating off-campus sites "in one another's backyards," symbolized the requirement and obligation to provide efficient public services within the context of reduced state funds. With consternation and displeasure, legislators and policy makers expressed their perceptions that Virginia's research universities were becoming more alike (loss of curricular diversity); that Virginia's comprehensive colleges and universities were attempting to become research universities (loss of degree-level diversity); and that locally/regionally focused institutions were becoming state/national institutions with increasingly selective admission criteria/standards (loss of service diversity). At the individual level, some related that the average high school graduate was experiencing increasing difficulty in gaining admission to one of Virginia's public four-year institutions. At the state level, some asserted that the system of public higher education in the Commonwealth was out of control.

During this same time, Virginia's public institutions struggled to cope with two conflicting realities. Like all state government agencies, they contended with significant and multiple state funding rescissions that reduced budgets. With little hope for reinstatement of lost funding, and even less hope for new resources, the institutions calculated responses to the state's expectation that they would accommodate a significant increase in projected enrollment demand.

Simultaneously, elected and appointed officials urged the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) to "do something" about the individual and collective actions taken by the public colleges and universities. In response, the public institutions beseeched SCHEV not to (further) "tie their hands" by limiting their ability to respond to changing social, economic, demographic and technological realities and needs. As a coordinating body with little authority to undo what had already been done, SCHEV

undertook a series of studies—the "Condition of …" reports (on research, funding and transfer)—to ascertain the facts and to inform the emerging and ongoing policy discussions.

Ultimately, the Commonwealth's governing officials focused many of their concerns into one—institutional mission. From their perspective, in light of budgetary exigencies, public colleges and universities needed to be concentrating more on their missions and reducing "extraneous" activities. Likewise, to address the enrollment issues, institutions needed to return to their missions to ensure the diverse pathways to higher education for Virginians. Mission became the center of the concerns.

Background, Relevant Literature and Resources

Background. This study resulted from, and began within the context of, the legislative concerns and institutional reactions described above. The initial part of the charge from the legislature was to conduct a study of the factors that influence mission change. Thus, this study began with a review of relevant literature. Little was found. Although considerable research exists on organizational change, the research on mission and mission change tends to be split between big-picture discussions (of the importance of mission and of broad national trends in higher education) and case-study snapshots (of individual institutions that changed their missions or of higher-education governing board structures redefining one or more institutions' missions within their systems). Our reviews and searches yielded little in-depth discussion of mission change, especially at the state level and/or within a state with a coordinating-board structure like Virginia.

Relevant Literature. Contemporary scholarship on institutional missions is posing many of the same questions expressed in the national and state-level concerns. Earlier this year, Zemsky questioned whether the "public" purposes and goals of American higher education have been lost,[4] while Arnone detailed the power of the prestige factor in driving "wannabes" (public, research universities seeking rankings on 'best' and 'top' lists) to expand their research focus, expenditures and missions.[5] Previously, Selingo had described comprehensive state colleges as looking like "lesser versions of their states' flagship universities" and as experiencing problems that were arising from their "grandiose ambitions to be all things to all people."[6] In 1999, Slaughter and Leslie were almost lone voices bucking the trend of perceived homogeneity of higher education institutions when they projected, in both their worst- and best-case scenarios, that the future would hold greater institutional differentiation, especially among research universities.[7]

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[4] Zemsky, Robert. (2003). Have we lost the 'public' in higher education? Chronicle of Higher Education, 49, 38 (May 30), p. B7.

[5] Arnone, Michael. (2003). The wannabes. Chronicle of Higher Education, 49, 17 (Jan. 3), p. A18.

[6] Selingo, Jeffrey. (2000). Facing new missions and rivals, state colleges seek a makeover: Can the undistinguished middle child of public higher education find a fresh identity? Chronicle of Higher Education, 47, 12 (November 17), p. A40.

[7] Slaughter, Sheila & Leslie, Larry. (1999). Academic capitalism: Politics, policies, and the entrepreneurial university. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. pps. 242-245.

Resources. Given the dearth of relevant literature on the subject of change in the missions of public institutions, we set about collecting our own data. Two strategies were employed. We posted a question about experiences with mission change to the State Higher Education Executive Officers' (SHEEO) electronic listserv. This query yielded 10 responses; four came from states with coordinating-board structures like Virginia. Not surprisingly, we learned that states with governing-board structures reported little mission change, with two states reporting recent and/or current legislative moratoria on such changes. Coordinating-board states tended to report statutory and/or agency policies and procedures related directly or indirectly to institutional missions and mission change. From this effort, we were able to gain a contextual understanding of "mission" as a state-level issue and of Virginia's relation to other states on the issue.

In an effort to get to the heart of the Virginia story and to balance the weight of the national and state perceptions and concerns, our second strategy was to interview personnel from Virginia's public colleges and universities. We met with administrators and faculty at the 15 four-year institutions and with selected personnel from Richard Bland College and the Virginia Community College System. During the interviews, we gathering their thoughts and perceptions about and experience with mission and mission change—both within their institutions and in general. We also collected institutional information and documents. This combined strategy yielded a considerable amount of descriptive, qualitative information, as well as much-needed context and history. From the cumulative import of all the information and data gathered, we were able to construct a preliminary list of contributing mission-change factors and, ultimately, a rich and reasoned discussion of the elements that have impacted the missions of Virginia's public colleges and universities. This process is delineated in the next section, followed by our conclusions and recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Overview: Mission and Mission Change

Through the past two decades, following the recessions of the 1970s and the initial calls for academic strategic planning in the early 1980s,[8] prescriptions for the value, nature, and function of mission statements seem to appear at the drop of a hat. Recent advice, however, has been clear. General, trite, clichéd, and/or "platitudinous" institutional mission statements no longer work.[9] As resources become increasingly scarce, attention to the significance of the mission rises. Focus permits resources to be directed to core activities rather than dispersed across central and peripheral activities alike, which often results in diminished, mediocre, and inadequate programs.[10]

The generalized mission statements permitted latitude, however. They enabled administrators and faculty alike to devise new curricula, programs and degrees to attract more matriculates. They facilitated institutional expansion from dedicated undergraduate instruction to a new market niche that glittered with potential additional resources from graduate education. With an academic labor market favoring the institutions, the number of research-trained faculty proportionately enlarged across almost all existing types of institutions. And these faculty welcomed the extension into graduate work. So, across the United States, former teachers colleges grew master's programs. Colleges with limited master's programs extended the variety and then added doctoral programs. The institutions thus became more complex and instead of remaining colleges, they announced (or requested) the change in name and classification to university.

Although the topic of institutional or mission "drift" is often bandied about, the concept lacks a single definition. Few scholars have discussed, much less researched, the extent or nature of the mobility of colleges and universities from one organizational sector to another[11] or from one mission focus (such as liberal arts) to another (comprehensive or professional).[12] How much "drift" constitutes a mission change?

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[8] Keller, George. (1983). Academic strategy: The management revolution in American higher education. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

[9] Leslie, David, & Fretwell, L. (1996). Wise moves in hard times: creating and managing resilient colleges and universities. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 55.

[10] Tierney, William G. (2002). Mission and vision statements: an essential first step. In Field guide to academic leadership edited by Robert M. Diamond & Bronwyn E. Adam. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 49-58.

[11] Aldersley, S.F. (1995). "Upward drift" is alive and well: Research/doctoral model is still attractive to institutions. Change, 27 (4), 16-20; Morphew, Christopher C. (2002). "A rose by any other name": Which colleges became universities. The Review of Higher Education, *25* (2), 207-223.

[12] Breneman, David (1990). Are we losing our liberal arts colleges? College Board Review, summer; Gilbert, Joan (1995). The liberal arts college – is it really an endangered species? Change, 27 (5), 36-38.

Common sense permits most people with experience in post-secondary education to devise a quick list of factors that might influence, entice, or cause an institution to drift from one sector to another (see Figure 1). A need for *increased resources* often comes to mind quickly. *Presidential leadership* (or ambition) is credited or blamed almost as much.

Miscellaneous Factors Influencing Mission Change

- Presidential Vision (or Ambition)
- Governing Board Leadership
- Stimulus from Legislators
- Demographic Changes
- Institutional Competition for Students, Faculty
- Faculty Ambition
- Resource Requirements
- Changing Social and Economic Demands and Needs
- Availability of New Technologies
- Institutional and System-wide Strategic Planning Initiatives
- Public or Private Funding Sources with Strings Attached
- Shifts in Knowledge Conventions and Production
- Capital Construction
- Student Age Group Demands
- Efficiency
- Consolidation
- Historical Development of Post-secondary Education

Figure 1. Miscellaneous Factors Involved in Mission Change

Obviously, since the mid-1960s, *demography* has played a major role in the expansion of the size as well as the curricular offerings of most institutions. Not only did the sheer size of the Baby Boomer generation stretch the current instructional and seating capacity, but the rise in the age group participation rates pushed higher education beyond its imagined limits. As the 1970s unfolded, though, institutional shifts emerged from economic factors. The tail end of the Boomers, facing a *constricted labor market*, demanded practical professional baccalaureate degrees instead of the traditional liberal arts.

The above factors, as well as the list in the figure that follows, do not approach the complexity of the issue. Often "broad change strategies are presented as uniform, universal, and

applicable."[13] But one size does not fit all. As Trowler argues, activity and structure must be viewed as separate parts of the process of policy change. The policy process is "any course of action (or inaction) related to the selection of goals, the definition of values, or the allocation of resources."[14] Structure includes a host of elements: internal organizational rules, lines of authority, roles, external relationships between or among organizations, the historical nature of an education system, and the larger socio-economic environment in which organizations operate. In other words, structure provides the context in which process occurs.

Factors and Categories of Mission Change

We based the questions in our interviews on factors suggested in current research and were able then to add additional factors that the Virginia university and college administrators related to us when they described what their institutions have been experiencing and have accomplished in the recent past. The enlarged list of factors fall into three different categories: context, agent roles, and catalysts. When individual factors from each of the three categories interact, certain actions on the part of the institutions tend to be taken. Thus, the process of change, or as we see it, modification of mission, becomes very complicated. In order to appreciate the complex interactions of factors, each of the categories are discussed briefly.

Context. Although other factors may exist, we found that *context* includes four primary components: historical development of higher education, organizational culture, the post-secondary prestige culture, and the socio-economic environment (see Figure 2). Each *context* component includes specific factors that relate specifically to the Virginia story of higher education and mission.

Historically, Virginia institutions reflected late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments in higher education as well as later significant alterations in mission and function. By the 1920s, the Commonwealth supported a university, a liberal arts college, two segregated land grant institutions, and three normal schools. The normal schools transformed into baccalaureate colleges when teaching became a profession.

Over the subsequent decades, the pressure of returning WWII veterans with scholarship money, the post-war vision of social mobility, and the promise of the Great Society prompted more and more Commonwealth citizens to seek higher education. Thus, as the older institutions matured during the mid-years of the century, requirements for additional educational resources in other

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[13] Kezar, Adrianna & Eckel, Peter D. (2002). The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education: universal principles or culturally responsive concepts? The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 73, No. 4 (July/August), 435.

[14] Codd, J. (1988). The construction and deconstruction of education policy documents. Journal of Education Policy, 3 (3), 235-47, as quoted in Trowler, Paul R. (2002). Introduction: Higher education policy, institutional change. In Higher education policy and institutional change: Intentions and outcomes in turbulent environments, edited by Paul R. Trowler. The Society for Research into Higher Education. Buckingham, England: SRHE and Open University Press, 3.

regions arose. Virginia's answer was to create branch campuses. The University of Virginia sponsored extension work in the southwestern (Wise) and northern (Fairfax) parts of the state, while The College of William and Mary established branches in Newport News, Norfolk, and Richmond. Once the community college system was established in the 1960s, the branches were freed to develop curricula above the lower division.

Figure 2. Context

Second, agencies and entities of the Commonwealth (i.e., the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, SCHEV) possess *organizational culture* that changes with new administrations and new appointments. Virginia sustains a state cultural heritage based on its history as a primary colony and through its view of the rights and obligations of its citizens and officials, but the culture is always modified by the personalities, values, and agendas of its leaders and the interest networks that form at any particular time. Likewise, each post-secondary institution maintains a distinctive culture, even though policies and programs are modified by its leaders and members as time goes on. The diversity of institutional cultures within the Commonwealth is striking.

Third, context includes the *prestige culture of post-secondary education*. Indeed, since the late nineteenth century when the university model emerged, eminence began to flow from the advancement of knowledge, and resources were directed to the universities as the practical nature of research and development proved its value. The quest for prestige has increased along with the competition for students, faculty, and other resources. Since their inception in the early 1980s, college rankings have not only become a national past time, but have served as a stick or a carrot

for some administrators and institutions. In addition, within the Commonwealth, a status hierarchy that provides privilege is believed by some to exist and to influence the distribution of rewards.

Finally, the *socio-economic environment* in which Virginia, its citizens, and its institutions participate is in constant flux as knowledge and technological advances modify business, industry, and health practice. Institutions of higher learning are challenged increasingly to meet the needs of, and help lead Virginians to participate fully in, this emerging world of the information age. On one hand, the Commonwealth must participate in the global economic development, but it must also enable its citizens to participate successfully within their local economy. And Virginia is composed of very different geographic, social, and economic regions. A system of institutions composed of diversified missions that address the variety of civic and economic needs is thus most appropriate.

Agent Roles. Although our list undoubtedly does not exhaust all of the potential roles that agents of change can perform, the stories told during our interviews point to a variety of activities related to change. Agents have served and continue to operate *as gatekeepers, regulators, advocates, campaigners, and champions.*

SCHEV and the General Assembly, as a result of their legislative or constitutional authority, have both served at times as gatekeepers and as regulators permitting, prescribing, or prohibiting change either formally or informally. During some eras, some professionals within the institutions feel that the gates were unevenly tended—open for some institutions and closed for others. In other periods, equity was considered the norm. Advocates, who may enjoy power, but not necessarily authority, arise from a variety of places. Whether governing board members, significant donors, or business and industry partners, advocates furnish influence and provide resources to enable change.

An interesting role, perhaps not unique to Virginia but certainly important in its institutional history, has been the campaigners. As mentioned above, on at least two occasions, small groups of locals petitioned the existing institutions to extend their educational resources to populations in the Commonwealth who were under-served. Finally, every institution boasts its own champion(s). Administrators in every institution praised the vision of at least one president who developed pivotal characteristics that led directly to the institution's current state of success.

Catalysts. A catalyst is a substance that, although not affected itself, by its very presence effects change in another substance. Within the narratives of the administrators of the Commonwealth's colleges and universities, we identified six catalysts: *opportunities, challenges, instruments, impediments, obstacles, and dictates*.

Examples of each of these catalysts undoubtedly could be debated within the individual institutions as well as across the institutions. What appears to be an opportunity for one person might be an impediment to another. A challenge for one is an obstacle for someone else. For one institution, the development of the technology industry in its locale presents an opportunity. For

another, the lack of industry becomes a challenge. Impediments, possibly seen as roadblocks, can be used to muster the troops to action. Obstacles require the means to circumvent. Dictates by their very nature are perhaps not technically catalysts, but they require institutional action nonetheless.

Mission Actions by Institutions. Across the board, the administrators generally do not feel that the missions of their institutions have changed significantly for quite some time. According to Aldersley, much of the shifting of Virginia institutions from one Carnegie Classification to another—at least into and within the doctoral-granting sector—occurred prior to 1987 and up to 1994.[15] With perhaps one or two exceptions, the doctoral institutions have been stable in their classification since then. From our interviews, we collected a large list of nouns that they use to explain their mission actions.

The list perhaps can best be described as points on a continuum, some of which may seem to be splitting hairs. At one end, the mission—as a statement of values—is *translated* into more contemporary language, but no alterations have been made. Missions can be *adapted*, slightly modifying the words and perhaps meaning to better fit current standards. Again, though, modification is minimal and not substantive. The *articulation* of a mission is explained as the process of expressing the core values more accurately, more deliberately.

Focusing and *elaborating* missions are located in the middle. The former occurs when the institution chooses to elevate certain core elements to a more central position; the latter refers to extending the core to include more existing elements.

At the other end of the continuum are found *initiation, promotion, and responsiveness*. Again, from presidents to institutional researchers, almost all feel that their institutional mission has not changed, but certain catalysts have provided the push to address new situations. Each time, however, the actions fit the range of values and activities spelled out in the mission. New alliances with industry in a research university are oriented to theoretical research and design for results that are eminently practical; most importantly, they mesh with the doctoral nature of the institution. New alliances with industry in a comprehensive university are just as effective but their nature parallels baccalaureate and master's-level of instruction offered by the institution. Thus, students in both institutions benefit by the alliances, and the institution remains true to its mission.

The Interaction of the Categories

Change does not occur in a vacuum, nor does it happen without an individual or group of individuals performing in some manner and influenced to change by some medium or mechanism. The permutations, however, that may occur as a result of interactions among the numerous factors

[15] Aldersley, Op.cit.

contained in the categories of agent role, context, and catalyst generate a variety of potential actions that may be undertaken. An appreciation of the complexity of these interactions appears to us to be crucial in understanding the issue of mission and mission change within the Commonwealth's system of public higher education. These complex interactions have facilitated and enhanced the diversity within the Virginia system.

Each of the universities and colleges has its own unique histories, leaders, relationships with state agencies, and catalysts. Rather than trying to explain each one, we present three characteristic interactions as examples. Described below is the interplay between three types of *agents*—"Lemonade Champions," "Access Campaigners" and "Economic Champions"—in various *contexts* and in the presence of various *catalysts* that have combined in different ways at different points in time to spur institutional (mission) actions.

Lemonade Champions. One agent role that must be played out within a public system is that of regulator. However, the manner in which regulations (policy and procedures) are applied tends to limit or expand possibilities for the regulated organization. One characteristic pattern of interaction that we found can be called the Lemonade Champions. Handed lemons, these champions have chosen to produce a viable product.

Suppressed by either a regulatory agency or by society, several Commonwealth institutions were placed into a situation in which their academic doors revolved for a steady stream of students. Rather than the desired effect of open access, the institutions became tied to a pattern of low retention and high student turnover, which foreclosed the potential to project an accurate portrait of human, fiscal, and physical resources. Planning becomes impossible within this situation.

By carefully projecting not merely the needs of their locale but also of the Commonwealth, and by creating alliances with local interest and power groups, the lemonade makers have articulated (or are in the process of articulating) the components of their mission to build a dynamic institution that serves their students as well as the public.

Access Campaigners. From the historical context of the mid-twentieth century until today, certain groups of citizens have lacked access to higher education. The reasons involve class, geography, ethnicity, and gender, but also the tradition (and expense) of collegiate residential living. Although adult education channels have existed through much of the twentieth century, most operated within the for-profit arena and were located in urban areas. Thus, rural adults often had less opportunity to learn and grow after compulsory education ceased. In parts of the Commonwealth, severe geography, historic economic deprivation, and cultural norms also foreclosed extended educational opportunities for many youth and adults alike.

Access campaigners in several instances perceived not merely the need for educational opportunities but envisioned alternative futures for their areas. As crusaders, they sought sponsorship from existing institutions in order to establish local educational sites. This pattern,

established in the late 1950s in Virginia, has been extended to contemporary days in that institutions have established centers to facilitate the delivery of education to citizens who still experience economic and social obstacles.

Economic Champions. Virginia has been, until recently, curiously rural even as it has always abutted the nation's capital and served a primary governmental role during the secession. More recently, as the northern industrial states continue to rust, the Commonwealth has attracted a healthy share of the latest national migration. Where once tobacco dried in the southern sun, peanuts grew in their shells, and cows grazed contentedly, housing developments have sprung up almost overnight. Cities and counties as well as new bedroom communities are bursting with new inhabitants. The economy that worked even as late as the early 1990s has far been surpassed on a global level, however, through research and development.

The Economic Champions serve the Commonwealth as economic-drivers, assisting existing enterprises, spawning new technological ventures, and initiating local projects into their regions. As employment possibilities expand, the social and economic mood brightens and success seems to be breeding more success. The modes by which these Economic Champions are operating differ depending upon the institution, its mission and values, its resources, and its locale. Some focus on a level that is global, high-tech, and interdisciplinary; others unite institutional and local resources to develop educational leisure enterprises that celebrate the Commonwealth's heritage while creating employment and generating new sources of revenue for the locale.

Even though these three examples combine the actions of several institutions, if drawn out, each institution has its own unique historical and contemporary approach to modern life and to its own existence and its role as a part of the Commonwealth's system. If nothing else, it appears from the research we conducted that our public institutions continuously have the common good of the Commonwealth on their minds.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Modern American society is ever changing. In recent decades, the rate of social, economic, technological and demographic change in the U.S. has been increasing. As a result, the structures, processes and curricular contents of American colleges and universities have been evolving in new and multiple directions. Never before have institutions of higher education—especially public institutions—faced so many competing challenges and opportunities (many of which are a direct result of their success in extending access and expanding knowledge).[16]

This study indicates that Virginia's public colleges and universities have responded well to these contemporary challenges and opportunities, while resisting, to a great extent, real changes in their core missions. Since the mid-1990s, our public institutions have kept their core missions rather constant and consistent, while occasionally adjusting and/or adapting either: (1) the "what" (the various academic subcomponents) of their overall missions; (2) the "how" (the various structural, processual and/or pedagogical means) of achieving their overall missions; or (3) the "for whom" (the various levels of admission selectivity and/or enrollment totals) of their overall missions in order to meet the needs of the world/nation/state, their regional/local areas and their students. In the process, they have worked to overcome both the unique and the common challenges that they individually and collectively face, and to maximize opportunities to better position themselves—and the Commonwealth—for the future.

The sections below are intended to expand on these general conclusions and to offer recommendations aimed at maintaining "mission" as a primary focus in all discussions—both institutional and state-level—of change and/or changes in Virginia's public colleges and universities.

Conclusions

As published in institutional catalogues and documents, colleges' and universities' mission statements often fail to reflect the fullness and distinctiveness of institutions' missions in much the same way that obituaries fail to capture the richness and meaning of people's lives. The whole is more than the sum—for an individual institution and for the Commonwealth's system of public higher education.

In many states, including Virginia, concern has been expressed about "mission creep" and "mission drift." Such concerns are usually reflective of perceptions that colleges and universities are deliberately becoming more comprehensive (individually) and more homogenous (collectively) in both curriculum and overall mission. For state governments

[16] National Center for Postsecondary Improvement. (October 2002). "Beyond dead reckoning: Research priorities for redirecting American higher education." p. 2.

and taxpayers, this perception reflects a concern that public institutions are acting out of self-interest and individual purpose at the expense of states' interests and public objectives. This study has found that, even though public colleges and universities resemble most public entities in their tendency to add "new things" while failing to delete "old things," Virginia's public colleges and universities have, for the most part, maintained their public purposes and their core missions. That which appears superficially to be "creep" or "drift" is usually strategic mission adjustment and/or evolutionary mission adaptation to changing realities.

As a descriptor of mission change, the term "creep" is an interesting word choice. It carries multiple connotations (i.e., for institutional personnel, "creep" is a derogatory assumption; for elected and appointed officials, "creep" is a disapproving judgment). Its definition and use in applied physics and material science/engineering may carry the connotation closest to higher-education reality; in these fields of science, "creep" refers to the process of an entity responding to stress placed upon it by yielding and reforming itself (e.g., a once-flat credit card taking on permanently the curved shape of a man's hip-pocket-worn wallet).[17] In this sense, "creep" may be ultimately the appropriate descriptor of colleges' and universities' mission-related responses to new realities and changing environments.

Beyond the broad deductions above, this study generated specific conclusions regarding: mission change and the understanding thereof; various levels of mission-change authority and the problems therein; and the diversity of Virginia's public institutions and its system of public higher education:

I. **The factors that contribute to mission change are generally <u>external</u> factors that are difficult to avoid or ignore.** Historically, external catalysts and agents drove changes in the core missions of Virginia's public colleges and universities. Even today, in situations in which initiatives to enhance and focus institutional missions originate internally, these efforts most often represent reasoned institutional responses to new and emerging environmental realities.

II. **<u>Modification</u> of mission is much more common than change in core mission.** Very little mission change or significant institutional transformation has occurred since the mid-1990s. Recent modifications have taken the forms of mission articulation, enhancement, focus, adjustment and adaptation while maintaining institutions' core activities, purposes and values.

III. **Overall, mission modification by Virginia's public colleges and universities has been <u>purposeful, responsive and beneficial</u>.** In recent years, that which has been perceived as mission "creep" or "drift" has generally been much more purposeful and responsive—to social, public and economic needs—yet reflective of institutional mission and type.

[17] An administrator at one of Virginia's public research universities provided the physics/engineering definition of "creep" during an interview about institutional mission change.

IV. **The <u>decentralization of the policy process</u> and procedures has impacted state-level approval of mission changes.**

A. The role of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) as a gatekeeper in relation to public institutions' missions, and changes therein, has become less overt. SCHEV has not published specific policies and procedures regarding mission-change or statement-change proposals in decades, and no longer requires that mission statements be submitted with other requisite documents.

B. The General Assembly and SCHEV represent dual pathways to academic and/or organizational modifications that can eventually result in incremental or cumulative changes in central elements of public institutions' missions. Singular approvals of new academic activities, organizational structures, and/or physical facilities have culminated over time in the *de-facto* approval of change(s) in mission.

V. **Public colleges and universities are supportive of <u>coordinated mission review</u>.** Those in leadership positions within Virginia's public colleges and universities are supportive of, and willing to participate in, state-level coordination efforts that would support the diversity of the system and lessen competition between the institutions.

VI. **Virginia's public colleges and universities are becoming more reflective and responsive within their own niches, and thus, <u>more diverse</u>.** While more institutions may be offering similar degree programs, they are doing so largely within their missions via different methods and perspectives and for different reasons and goals. The evolution of Virginia's diverse system of public higher education has resulted in a collection of institutional missions that addresses a significant range of the social and economic needs of the Commonwealth and its citizens.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The legislative directive for this study requests recommendations for strengthening the current mission review policy. The findings and conclusions herein indicate that drastic measures to address mission change—such as the imposition of mission-change moratoria mandated by some state legislatures[18]—are not necessary. What is warranted is a concerted effort on the part of the General Assembly, the State Council and the public colleges and universities to give proper consideration to the issue of institutional mission during discussion and consideration of all institutional issues.

[18] These moratoria have occurred in "governing board" states, such as Georgia and Utah, rather than in "coordinating board" states like Virginia.

Recommendation 1: The General Assembly should consider the cumulative ramifications of its decisions when it acts on matters pertaining to individual public colleges and universities. These legislative decisions and actions can subvert SCHEV's coordinating role and mission review responsibility. Moreover, the legislature should remember that, via the passage of one new initiative for a campus, it might be opening a door for the institution to pursue a new mission direction or future mission expansion in support or fulfillment of the new initiative.

Recommendation 2: In collaboration with the General Assembly, the State Council of Higher Education should incorporate consideration of mission impact into all of its deliberations and/or actions on institutional matters (e.g., academic program proposals; organizational changes). SCHEV should require that institutions' mission statements—and any proposed changes therein—be included with, or incorporated into, institutions' strategic plans and strategic plan updates, which must be submitted to SCHEV on four-year cycles (updates two years after plans). Further, SCHEV should require institutions to project any potential impact of proposed changes on their approved missions.

Recommendation 3: The State Council of Higher Education should provide an unambiguous articulation of its coordination function to its multiple constituencies and partners in the policy arena. Its provision of system-level information and analysis enables constituents to better perceive and understand the diversity of Virginia's public institutions and system. For public colleges and universities, the availability of such information and analysis enhances their ability to know and project—in their formal mission statements as well as their plans and publications—how and where they provide unique service to the Commonwealth. The public institutions may then be better able to participate in an active and reflective manner in the maintenance of the diversity of the system.

Recommendation 4: The State Council and the public institutions should work together to better demonstrate (and advocate for) the institutional diversity within Virginia's system of public higher education. Individual institutional missions as articulated by their professionals are clear and distinct. Efforts should assist institutions to communicate their unique contributions to the Commonwealth to external constituents. Although the Reports of Institutional Effectiveness (ROIE) provide considerable useful information to multiple constituencies, the organization and presentation of the information contained in the ROIE can lead to inaccurate comparisons and conclusions that cloud the differences between and among Virginia's public colleges and universities.

Recommendation 5: Virginia's public colleges and universities should continue to be vigilant in their efforts to match their activities to their core missions; their individual efforts to be "market smart" at the institutional level should not preclude the Commonwealth's need that they be "mission centered" at the system level.

> Recommendation 6: The public colleges and universities should also extend the social and economic forecasting that they conduct at the institutional level to the state/system level in a collaborative, coordinated manner.

In the Code of Virginia, the list of statutory duties for the State Council of Higher Education (see § 23-9.6:1) concludes:

> *In carrying out its duties and responsibilities, the Council, insofar as practicable, shall preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions.*

Through their individuality, their traditions and their dual commitment to quality and the Commonwealth, Virginia's public colleges and universities constitute a coordinated system of public higher education that is envied across the country and around the world. Two major reasons for this high regard and stature are: (1) SCHEV's adherence to the above mandate; and (2) institutions' individual and collective responsibility to their missions and their constituencies. Only through working together to better understand and articulate the individual institutional missions as part of a unified system-wide mission can the General Assembly, SCHEV and Virginia's public colleges and universities best serve and advance the interests of the institutions, the system and the Commonwealth.

APPENDIX:
LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

Appropriation Act of 2003-2004
Item 166, #2C
Subsection I.1:

> "The State Council shall conduct a study of the factors contributing to changes over time in the mission of Virginia's public institutions of higher education and shall report its findings, along with any recommendations for strengthening the current mission review process, to the Governor and chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees by October 1, 2003."

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