A Political Model of Higher Education Governance
and Policy Reform Adoption

IHELG Monograph

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Houston D. Davis, Ph.D.
Assistant V.P. for Academic Affairs & Assistant to the President
Austin Peay State University
(931) 221-7676
Fax: (931) 221-7676
davish@apsu.edu

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Introduction

Higher education governance has undergone a dynamic shift in its locus of control in the last forty years. Once governed locally by faculty and ceremonially by governing boards, many campuses now find themselves subject to heightened scrutiny at the state-level and in many cases under direct control by state government bodies (Graham, 1989). Governing and coordinating boards are now found in all fifty states, as governments have found it necessary to establish professional bodies to direct and shape the growing systems of higher education (Graham, 1989; Hairston, 1997). The relationships between these boards and the institutions have been further strained by the increasing involvement of elected officials in daily activities of the campuses. Elected officials have looked to the boards as a vehicle for delegated powers with intervention always an option if lawmakers deem it necessary (Hairston, 1997). This “hands-on” management arrangement has subjected board appointees to feel more allegiance to governors and legislators than to the institutions and students (Baliles, 1997). Presidents feel torn between the business perspective of board members and the established faculty culture, and the educational planning process is continually influenced by partisan politics (1997). All of these issues are further compounded by shrinking state resources to be placed in higher education due to increasing demands placed on state coffers. Charges of a lack of accountability have stepped up the demands on higher education leaders and fueled calls for postsecondary reform across the country.

In reaction to these growing pressures and concerns, many states, including Kentucky and Tennessee, have attempted postsecondary governance and fiscal reform efforts initiated through the deliberations and decisions of executive, blue-ribbon commissions. Since 1990 an estimated twenty-one states have established state-level governmental advisory groups with similar charges of bettering higher education in their respective states (Mills, 1999). Whether as a sensible
policy development tool or as the latest fad in government (Bennett, 1991; Kerr, 1983, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995), these commissions—drawn primarily from elected leaders, top higher education officials, and politically-connected citizens—shaped much of the public policy debate surrounding higher education in the last decade. With so many states instituting similar vehicles for change and professing comparable agendas and policy alternatives, one might expect replication of results. However, the most interesting and puzzling aspects of these forums are the different outcomes when political and educational officials make choices between alternatives. Agendas and alternatives entertained by these commissions have been faced with many challenges to actual policy adoption, including the powerful force of the status quo. Not only have barriers to approval been evident, a weak level of commitment to formal adoption and implementation has burdened once strong ideas with crippling handicaps.

This research examined state-level developments within higher education governance in the last decade by focusing on the policy development processes and outcomes of two executive advisory groups’ bids to shape public higher education policy. Similar issues were identified in each state’s agenda and alternatives phases, but the similarities ended at those two stages of the policy formation process. The Kentucky council’s reform recommendations met considerable challenge in the midst of legislative posturing and debate but were eventually accepted when associated resolutions, bills, and policy changes were presented for formal adoption. Tennessee’s council, on the other hand, not only suffered setbacks during internal deliberations, but saw very little of its work ascend into the larger public policy debate in the form of legislation or substantive policy changes. Those ideas that ultimately emerged from the group’s efforts were primarily marginalized, even during a hotly contested debate over state tax reform that had as a centerpiece the fiscal needs of K-12 and higher education. Kentucky, on the other
hand, adopted the recommendations of its council and began implementing immediate changes in the areas of governance structure, mission distinction, research commitment, academic program mix, and funding mechanisms.

Nationally, many similar issues have risen to the top of executive advisory commission agendas, but only a few states have been able to witness organizational change and implementation of the suggested reforms. Central to the research was an exploration of the external and internal factors influencing higher education policy and governance developments once policy alternatives are presented for acceptance and adoption. The proposed model of policy adoption made the assumption that all policy ideas upon becoming recognized as viable alternatives are heavily influenced by separate external and internal conditions. In other words, the political, economic, and cultural environment of a state and certain controlled internal factors (role of leadership, quality of work, etc.) have a profound effect upon a policy alternative’s adoption. If any change is possible, these internal and external policy determinants also influence whether the proposed change is to be a fundamental or incremental reform and will ultimately determine whether policy initiatives are adopted or rejected.

Goals of the Research

This study sought to better understand Tennessee and Kentucky’s processes and efforts in bringing higher education reform ideas to the agenda and their experiences in subsequent policy adoption attempts. Through historical analysis and comparative case study methods, exploration was done of the similarities and differences in Tennessee and Kentucky that helped or hindered adoption of policy alternatives (Macridis, 1955, as cited in Dye, 1966; Dye, 1966; Majchrzak, 1984; Yin, 1984). An explanatory model of higher education policy reform resulted from the
comparative study of the environment before, during, and after the deliberations of the special commissions. Primary to the goals of the research was identifying what happened to bring issues and problems to prominence on the agenda in each state, but most importantly was knowing how and why some proposed solutions persisted to adoption and subsequent implementation.

A comprehensive review of the literature surrounding political culture and change, executive advisory commissions, models of political reform, theories of organizational change, and higher education governance reform was completed. Ideas informing the case studies, as well as the framework for the policy adoption model, were drawn from several disciplines including political science, management, history, and education. Theoretical models of policy development, adoption, and implementation were explored in conceptualizing a political model of higher education reform adoption. Kingdon (1995) acknowledged four phases of public policy formation that served as the foundation of this research on policy development and adoption (Figure 1). These phases include agendas, alternatives, choice, and implementation and offered an excellent structure with which to begin theory building.

![Figure 1 - Public Policy Processes](image)


A modified version of the policy phases advanced in Kingdon's work and other policy phases models from political science and management were employed to help focus the study on the transition between the alternatives and choice (adoption) phases of policy development. As a form of conceptual framework or theory-in-development (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Creswell,
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1994), the proposed model (Figure 2) served as the springboard for the study and helped guide the research into measuring the impact of select external and internal factors on the policy adoption process. Much like Daugbjerg & Marsh (1998), the initial theory follows that “policy outcomes are not just a function of what occurs in the network; they are also strongly influenced by the economic, political, and ideological context within which the network operates” (p. 54). This conceptual model of policy adoption was challenged and subject to modification throughout the research as data analysis was conducted via content analysis, pattern-matching and explanation-building techniques native to qualitative case study methods (Yin, 1984; Creswell, 1994).

![Diagram of Proposed Model of Policy Reform Adoption]

*Figure 2 - Proposed Model of Policy Reform Adoption*

Along with in-depth analysis of archive materials and related media accounts, key players in the higher education reform environments in Tennessee and Kentucky were identified for involvement in this study. Interviews were conducted with higher education leaders, government officials, and citizens in the two research states who were intimately involved in the attempts at
policy and governance reforms. These key participants were asked about their perceptions of the problems, policy considerations, and political dynamics surrounding their state’s reform efforts. Contact was also made with leading scholars and policy officials in the field of higher education governance and public policy to explore a national perspective on higher education reform efforts. While these interviews with national players were not essential to the completion of the research, they provided richness to the study that enhances its ability to draw generalizations to efforts around the country. Archive documents, media records, and responses to all interviews were studied using content analysis, pattern-matching, and explanation-building techniques within the case study method (Yin, 1984; Neuman, 1997).

The interviews provided valuable insight into understanding not just how ideas got onto the agenda of each state but most importantly what kept them there and led to their eventual adoption or rejection. The knowledge gained from archive information, the interviews and the content analysis of reports from similar activities in other states permitted the development of a model of policy reform adoption specific to the higher education governance and policy domain. Those policy determinants that were crucial to adoption became part of an expanded model of political exchange surrounding alternatives and choices. The propositions made through the theoretical model of policy reform adoption were evaluated applying the case study data to the initial premise that internal leadership variables--along with external political, economic, and cultural factors--heavily influence any possibilities for change whether fundamental or incremental.
Theoretical Framework

Making decisions as individuals or within groups can be a difficult process. Because the decision-making process is sometimes difficult and drawn out, most people are oblivious to how and why decisions are made and remain frustrated with results (Horowitz, 1990). Most people do not take the time to understand why seemingly rational people manage to make such irrational decisions in organizational settings (Horowitz, 1990). As a result, Horowitz points out that an entire industry of consultants has emerged to analyze how we go about our decision making (1990).

Though the policy development phases presented by Kingdon (1995) have been specifically mentioned, this study was developed around several perspectives drawn from the ideas associated with a collection of models and theories of policy process and politics. A fine line exists between those issues claiming a spot on the agenda and those ideas that eventually become legitimate alternatives, but a much larger void exists between viable alternatives and their formal adoption. Though the researcher wanted to focus on the adoption phase of higher education reform, an analysis of policy formation could not fully be developed without understanding the full obstacle course that an idea must navigate on its way to enactment.

Within his research on agenda formation, Kingdon (1995) simplified the policy development process into (1) the setting of the agenda, (2) identification of alternatives, (3) an authoritative choice among those alternatives, and (4) the implementation of the decision. This policy continuum can also be understood through the theories of policy cycles and policy subsystems put forth by Lasswell, 1956, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Brewer, 1974, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Stakenas & Soifer, 1991; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Conlan, Beam, & Wrightson, 1995; and Bonser, McGregor, & Oster,
1996. To further develop the phase of choice or adoption, aspects of general systems theory (Stakenas & Soifer, 1991) and decision-making models (Forester, 1984, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Jones, 1994; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995) were applied.

The foundation of research into decision analysis is attributed to the work of von Neumann & Morgenstern (1953, as sited in Sarin, 1990). Their research was grounded in a rational approach to policy cycles depending on the identification of outcomes and logical paths to those desired ends. One of the first researchers to conduct systematic examinations of steps followed in decision-making was Simon (1959). Other authors followed with descriptions of the rational process of generating best choices from sets of alternatives (Feldman & Lindell, 1990). General interest in the logic of policy development began in the early sixties and has matured over the last thirty years into a substantial academic field (Lane, 1990). Public policy studies have grown from the realization that traditional political science methods were incomplete descriptions of activities of government (Gerston, 1997). Support has even increased for researchers who study policy development from inside the political arena (Browne, 1999). This insider perspective really allows the research to explore “who does what and why” within the policy process.

Policy analysis has been characterized as a field dominated by the idea that to solve a problem interested parties must not just treat the symptoms (Stone, 1988). Methods of public policy analysis strive to go beyond descriptive techniques to establish explanatory models of policy formation, adoption, and implementation. General topics that policy analysts consider are as follows: (1) what government does; (2) how decisions are put into practice; and (3) why some policy alternatives are pursued over others (Gerston, 1997). Since a policy issue can be described as a gap between present well-being and desired well-being (Stakenas & Soifer, 1991),
more needs to be understood about the problems, politics, and processes faced by leaders and policy reform advocates. Public policy studies and the models used by its practitioners have the capacity to identify the key actors, root causes of problems, possible alternatives, and necessary steps needed to close political and programmatic discrepancies. Much research has been done to understand better how issue definition, policy knowledge, and the timing of opportunity interact to earn agenda status (Milward & Laird, 1990, as cited in Jones, 1994). Guthrie & Koppich (1987) specify that the convergence of several factors impacts the development of public policy. Problem salience and policy decisions are shaped and characterized by value orientation, economic conditions, outside interests, proponents, strategy, and outcomes (1987).

Numerous models of public policy formation have been introduced through the literature in the last four decades (Lasswell, 1956; Brewer, 1974; Rose, 1984; Stakenas & Soifer, 1991; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Bonser, McGregor, & Oster, 1996). One advantage that models of public policy and political systems provide is an aid in theory building because it allows multiple case studies and comparative studies of the different stages of policy development (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Explanation of the how and why of public policy formation can be aided models that portray relationships between environmental factors and policy outcomes (Simon & Newell, 1956, as cited in Dye, 1966). Models are useful as long as they simplify political thinking (Dye, 1966). Appearing in the form of prose, diagrams, or mathematical equations, these social science tools should suggest conditions under which we can expect to see certain outcomes (1966). Treadway (1985) offers three steps to the development of models to study and explain public policy. Models used by the researcher should "present an abstracted notion of the policymaking process, employ a limited number of independent variables assumed to be
important to the explanation of public policy, and suggest relationships among the elements of the models” (1985, p. 12).

Dawson & Robinson (1963, as cited in Treadway, 1985) offered one of the first models of public policy employing external conditions, political dynamics, political process, and public policy development strategies. This model explored the relationship between these variables and their components in creating a positive public policy environment. Dye (1966) also used theoretical policy models in exploring relationships between socioeconomic variables and policy outcomes. In their research on policy modeling, Stakenas & Soifer (1991) propose five basic stages of policy formation and implementation. In their model of actual stages to policy development, the first stage to emerge is problem identification that is usually brought to bear by an issue illuminator (Cronbach, 1980, as cited in Stakenas & Soifer, 1991). This player is similar to the policy entrepreneur espoused through Kingdon's model of agenda formation (1995). Second in the Stakenas & Soifer model is the activity of policy development where gaps between current status and desired outcome are explored (1991). Policy adoption follows as alternatives are evaluated and negotiation between interested parties ensues. Fourth is the actual implementation of the policy or program with the fifth stage being a policy evaluation of the impact of the effort (1991).

Schattschneider (1960, as cited in Kingdon, 1995) spoke of the importance of decisions made and not made in building understanding of the patterns of public policy. These models are “determined not only by such final decisions as votes in legislatures…but also by the fact that some subjects and proposals emerge in the first place and others are never seriously considered” (Schattschneider 1960, as cited in Kingdon, 1995, p. 2). According to Kingdon, items “can be prominently on the agenda without subsequent passage of legislation...[and] passage does not
necessarily guarantee implementation according to legislative intent” (1995, p. 3). This perplexing network or course of political events serves as the basis for Kingdon’s research into the dynamics of the policy process. In general Kingdon characterizes the public policy process as people “recognizing problems, generating proposals for changes, and engaging in political activities” to see their ideas enacted (1995, p. 87).

Rose (1984) includes the concept of issue salience to his stages of policymaking and agenda building in American politics. Problems and concerned actors must address four steps – assessing salience, exploring alternatives, forming preferences, and taking action – to bring sources of power on board (1984). Kingdon (1995) employed a simplified model of public policy phases--agendas, alternatives, choice, and implementation--to better understand these interactions between individuals, groups, and ideas. Other policy analysts (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Bonser et al, 1996) have used similar models in studying policy formation but have included as a fifth stage evaluation of policies.

Relative to other policy domains, higher education studies boast very little literature on the political and economic processes that form and shape the enterprise. The higher education literature would do well to follow the lead of other policy sectors to better understand internal and external forces of change. A standing barrier to all policy sciences is the aspiration of the research to enter into areas that have traditionally been the exclusive domain of decision-makers (Dror, 1971). It is now recognized that the interaction of social science theory and empirical methods can work in higher education studies as it has in fields like industrial studies and health administration (Lane, 1990). Calls for reform in various policy sectors create the need for policy-making, and higher education has not escaped this attention.
Advisory commissions, as well as other policy research and planning mechanisms, are notorious for producing mounds of data and prose on a variety of topics. Berkowitz (1991) describes the staff work of commissions as involving activities that produce endless amounts of paperwork for the policy process. Debate has occurred in the literature as to the value of public policy analysis and research. Shulock (1999) addresses the question of why policy experts spend so much time producing reports and studies that have only a minimal chance of making it into the political debate and process. Her theory is that policy studies are merely evolving from a traditional problem-solving use to an alternative view of utility within the democratic process. Whereas policy analysis was once restricted to helping a decision-maker choose between competing policies, it now has greater productivity in helping to interpret issues, gauge public interest, and justify the actions (decisions) of policy makers (Shulock, 1999).

Rapid growth in participation in higher education in the late 1960’s has been cited as a chief reason for higher education’s acceptance and demand as a research field (1990). Currently, increasing governmental demands and shrinking fiscal resources are providing accountability pressures for better research into the policies and practices of the postsecondary sector. Because of little emphasis on public opinion variables, higher education does suffer a limitation in translating traditional policy studies to its problems (Dror, 1971). Likewise, it is difficult to transfer observations from higher education policy studies to all policy domains. Still, public policy analysis and higher education policy research find common ground in the desire to identify policy alternatives, strategy, and choices (Dror, 1971). The governance and policy domain of postsecondary education benefits from research and analysis that can enter the world of decision-makers and offer suggestions for how to make decisions and how to position themselves for better decision-making (Dror, 1971).
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In searching for explanations of higher education policy adoption and reform, one could look to those public choice theorists who say that public policy makers choose the best policies to promote electoral appeal (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Welfare economists might say that consideration is given to the optimal economic solution (1995). Regarding the welfare economist’s policy approach of optimal solutions, efficiencies also are difficult in postsecondary education and probably do not offer clear answers. For instance, certain core courses must be offered and taught regardless of whether the seats in the classroom are completely filled. Court-mandated programs and other student service initiatives are debatable as to their costs and benefits but seem to retain their worth based as much on symbolism as on substance. Decisions and changes in postsecondary policy must hinge on some other factors; these elusive policy determinants seem to be missing from the higher education policy development literature.

Higher education policy reform has to be built on something else. It is a stretch either way to say that higher education is an issue to the voting public or that it is built on models of efficiency. Short of tuition increases, the public really takes no notice of decisions made by higher education leaders. Especially in governance and policy matters, higher education has to ask itself: “Who really cares?” In other areas of policy analysis, the support of prominent groups spurs policy development (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Higher education does not share or benefit from powerful core constituencies that can be mobilized from a grassroots perspective. However this isolation is not a debilitating handicap to higher education policy development, as it and other important public policy initiatives exist, contrary to the sentiment of the general public (Edwards & Sharkansky, 1978). However, there must be environmental factors that influence the ascension of certain issues to agenda prominence. Once on these agendas and into
the realm of high-politics, policy scholars must seek a better understanding of how and why political variables align to allow or spur education reform (Guthrie & Koppich, 1993).

Educational policy theorists must also seek to understand the divide between incremental policy change and substantive change. Nord & Tucker (1987) explain the differences in levels of innovation as routine versus radical innovation. In their study of educational reform processes, Guthrie & Koppich (1993) describe education as a policy domain centered mostly around incremental change with few occurrences of what they term high politics. Weakened by the political and policy processes, reform attempts tend to take paths of least resistance (1993). Routine innovations, or incremental changes, involve minimal shifts and do not require disruptions of the system.

Though incremental shifts may not cause or inspire wholesale changes in an organization, Guthrie & Koppich (1993) point out that there are several ways to identify movement in educational systems that meet the definitions of reform. Changes in decision making, shifting of resources, changes in regulations, value adjustments, and creation of new coalitions are all ways that policy attempts can make forward progress without experiencing wholesale changes and systemic reform (Guthrie & Koppich, 1993). However, at times, internal and external conditions align and true educational reform does occur. Whether through obtaining new resources, power acquisition, or shifting responsibilities, operational and substantial reforms are achieved through actions of high politics (Guthrie & Koppich, 1993). There seems to be a lack of understanding of the environmental conditions making necessary these separate categories of incremental and substantive changes.

In their research on the politics of policy formation, Desaie, Holden, & Shelley (1998) charge that strong policy research must place “the processes and outcomes of policymaking
within appropriate political contexts” (p. 432). The events and decisions of yesterday drive higher education policy and governance decisions as much as they are spurred by conditions of today. Attempts at studying the policy processes of higher education reform must tie political events to the origins of the circumstances and decisions influencing change.

This research of higher education governance and policy reform in Tennessee and Kentucky goes right to the citizens, elected officials, and higher education professionals who were in the middle of the conversations, debates, and votes surrounding these crucial issues. In short, this study seeks to bridge the methods and literature of higher education administration, policy studies, and political science to better understand processes of policy adoption in the higher education domain. Unlike the single-state case studies of higher education governance and policy reform found in the literature, this research targets two economically and demographically similar states that had different reform outcomes and seeks an evidentiary basis for a model of reform development and adoption. With virtually no accumulation of literature on state level policy formation in the higher education literature, this multiple-state study establishes a theoretically framed model of policy adoption that can be tested by others within the higher education policy domain.

**Methodology**

Effective public policy studies cannot be conducted if the researcher simply relies upon official records of government as his/her data source (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Though policy studies are expected to be descriptive, quality work should strive to become explanatory in nature (1995). Quality academic studies within the field of political science and public policy tend to be thorough in coverage of possible determinants, policy instruments, and policy content
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(Gordon, Lewis, & Young, 1977, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Attempts to study just one event, without identifying similarities and differences in political data, cannot contribute to the development of an explanatory theory of politics (Dye, 1966). Records of laws, acts, resolutions, etc. are important sources of information to the researcher, but public policies are best understood by examining the choices made, potential choices, and choices removed from consideration (Howlett, 1986, as cited in Howlett & Ramesh, 1995).

Researching the history, events, and dynamics surrounding policy development requires a merging of several tools native to qualitative research – field research, historical-comparative research, and case study method. Like quantitative research methods, qualitative tools “collect and analyze empirical evidence to understand and explain social life” (Neuman, 1997, p. 327). Most commonly addressed through case study research, the how and why questions of policy reform adoption are explanatory in nature and deal with operational links over a period of time (Yin, 1984). Dye (1966) posits that the successful development of an explanatory model of public policy must employ comparative analysis and points out that states are excellent units of analysis because of the characteristics shared by all fifty entities operating within a federal system. The common institutional frameworks and constitutional authorities provide for patterns of institutional and cultural factors that are fairly constant (1966). Many of the policy decisions made by states are products of unique historical circumstances in those states, but similar conditions do exist and should be pursued (1966). Because of this uniformity, comparative case studies of state level policy formation can seek to compare variables against a common background to discover causal factors that account for variations (Macridis, 1955, as cited in Dye, 1966). Three qualitative methods – historical-comparative research, field research, and
comparative case study - were employed to study the history, process, and outcomes of governance reform efforts in Tennessee and Kentucky.

This study developed an explanatory model of higher education policy reform adoption based upon a comparative case study of the environment before, during, and after the deliberations of executive advisory commissions in Kentucky and Tennessee. Central to the goals of the research was identifying how and why some proposed reform items persisted to adoption and implementation in each state. Though an initial theory of higher education reform and policy adoption was proposed (Figure 2), this theory was more accurately described as a theory-in-development (Creswell, 1994). This mechanism takes the form of a conceptual framework explaining “the main dimensions to be studied and the presumed relationships among them” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 28). Case study research can both test or build theory and offers an excellent methodology for exploring conceptual frameworks involving multiple factors (Merriam, 1988). Through the method of grounded theory this conceptual framework of policy adoption is capable of being modified as information is gathered, patterns detected, and comparisons conducted (Creswell, 1994).

Using field research interviews, historical-comparative research, and case study methods, the higher education reform environments in Kentucky and Tennessee were analyzed to identify external and internal policy determinants that were crucial to formal adoption once viable alternatives were proposed. Content analysis, pattern-matching, and explanation-building techniques were used to gauge the importance of various influences on reform attempts and allowed the study to establish a chain of evidence leading to conclusions (Yin, 1984). The interviews were focused on the activities, decisions, and results of the executive advisory commissions in Tennessee and Kentucky that were charged with reforming the higher education
enterprise. Those key political, business, and educational leaders associated with the change efforts in each state were identified and contacted for interview to obtain their perceptions of the problems, politics, and policies that became the focus of attention in their state. For those agreeing to the interview, the researcher asked them to reflect upon the effects of the external factors in the reform environment and the influence (or non-influence) that leadership took in policy development, adoption, and implementation efforts. A reconstruction of the path to policy alternatives and the subsequent recommendations was explored to extract determinates of success or failure when these ideas and reform proposals reached higher politics. As was stated earlier, states serve as excellent units of analysis because of the similarities in structure and political authority. The research was fortunate to have two similar states that were conducting comparable policy studies at the same point in the 1990's. By focusing the research and evaluation of my policy adoption model on the same event in two states, the external validity of the study was increased (Yin, 1984).

This study's research design largely followed Majchrak's (1984) suggested methods for policy research and Yin's (1984) methods for comparative case study research. The protocol prescribed by these two works increased the reliability of the study and held the research accountable to relevant details rather than pointless information. Tying the variables to specific information sources strengthened the chain of evidence (Yin, 1984). The table on the next page (Table 2) shows the research strategy used to pull various sources of information into the theoretical model of higher education policy reform adoption. The goal of the research was to ascertain the effects of these factors on the attempts to reform higher education governance and policy in Kentucky and Tennessee.
To increase the construct validity of the research design, the researcher used several sources of evidence for data collection (Yin, 1984). In addition to the field interviews that were conducted, official documentation, press reports, archival records, and interviews were all used as general sources of information. The field research guidelines presented in Neuman (1997) shaped the interviews toward structural and contrast questions. Interviews provide research with the advantage of allowing informants an opportunity to provide historical information not available from other sources; however, interviews should not stand alone as the information undergoes a filtering process and the researchers presence may bias responses (Creswell, 1994). As noted earlier, the need for descriptive interview questions was minimized by an in-depth historical-comparative analysis of archive resources and documents surrounding higher education governance and policy development in each state.

<p>| Table 2 |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <strong>Variables To Be Explored</strong> | <strong>Information Sources</strong> | <strong>Kentucky</strong> | <strong>Tennessee</strong> |
| <strong>Fiscal Opportunities and Constraints</strong> | | | |
| • State Budget Documents | • State Budget Documents |
| • Economic &amp; Demographic Data from U.S. Census Bureau | • Economic &amp; Demographic Data from U.S. Census Bureau |
| • U.S. Department of Education &amp; SREB Publications | • U.S. Department of Education &amp; SREB Publications |
| • Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials | • Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials |
| <strong>Historical &amp; Cultural Considerations</strong> | | | |
| • Histories of Government and Economic Development in Kentucky | • Histories of Government and Economic Development in Tennessee |
| • Newspaper Accounts of Governance Developments | • Newspaper Accounts of Governance Developments |
| • Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials Involved with Past Developments | • Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials Involved with Past Developments |
| • Dissertation &amp; Articles on the History of Higher Education in Kentucky | • Dissertations and Articles on the History of Higher Education in Tennessee |
| • Reports of Other Higher Education Reform Panels | | | |</p>
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<td>Media Accounts of Meetings, Debates and Legislation</td>
<td>Media Accounts of Meetings &amp; Debates</td>
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<td>Correspondence and documents of Governor’s Council on Higher Education</td>
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<td>Interviews with Staff of Council</td>
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<td>Media Accounts of Activities</td>
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<tr>
<th>Quality of Proposals</th>
<th>Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials</th>
<th>Interviews with Elected &amp; Appointed Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Accounts of Activities</td>
<td>Media Accounts of Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with Staff of Council</td>
<td>Interviews with Staff of Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were focused in that the researcher followed a certain set of thematic questions with all participants in each state (Yin, 1984). Though time constraints were observed (approximately one hour per interview), the questions were open-ended enough to seek the facts but also gain opinions about certain events and conditions (Yin, 1984). The first couple of structural questions were standard to all interviews, but flow of conversation and other probes did change the order of questioning (Kingdon, 1995). Browne (1999) offers several guidelines for conducting policy research within the actual policy-maker’s domain. According to Browne, interviewers must do several things in order to build rapport and ensure quality data. First was allowing the respondent to express personal views and making sure that the study’s intentions are understood (1999). All of the initial questions were easy to answer and non-controversial. As
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Browne predicted (1999), after rapport was established, the harder and more sensitive questions could be and were addressed.

All interviews were conducted personally, and the researcher assured anonymity to all participants. Rather than audio taping the sessions, only notes were taken of the interviews (Creswell, 1994; Kingdon, 1995). This further strengthened the position of providing a non-threatening interview and, symbolically, demonstrated a commitment to an anonymous data collection and reporting process. To further increase reliability and construct validity, the researcher created a case study database of notes and event counts (Yin, 1984; Kingdon, 1995). Coding of questions concerning the salience of higher education issues and the importance of various influences on the process were done on a scale of “very prominent” to “never mentioned in interview” as done in Kingdon’s (1995) study of federal policy processes. Interview questions followed the logical pattern presented by Browne (1999) that supports issue driven analysis. Per Browne’s strategy, the interviews provided general impressions of the policy domain, enabled collection of data on specific issues, and discovered how and why each issue was addressed (1999). This attention to detail helped develop a clear chain of evidence leading to logical conclusions (Yin, 1984).

**Coding Data and Event Counts**

As noted earlier coding of data is very important to detecting themes and patterns within each case and across cases. Before making the decision to code data, the researcher must become very comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts (Creswell, 1994). One must be open to all possibilities and welcome contrary or alternative explanations for the findings (1994). The massive amounts of data that can result from case studies and field interviews can be reduced into certain patterns, categories, and themes (1994).
Tesch (1990) refers to these analytical tools as segmentation steps. These segmentation steps help focus the research and analysis as the tendency for most qualitative studies is to collect more data than is needed or can be managed (Creswell, 1994). Neuman (1997) proposes several strategies for coding and analysis in qualitative data settings. Open coding allows the researcher to locate major themes, terms, events, and dynamics within the interview data and other data sources. Axial coding is a second pass through the data that reflects the governing structure of the conceptual framework. During this pass, an expansion of themes and possible relationships begin to develop as codes begin to relate to one another (Neuman, 1997). Selective coding is a final step in comparing and contrasting themes within a case and across cases. The final step of data analysis involves several searches for possible relationships including pattern-matching and theory (or explanation) building (1997).

Qualitative case study research and historical document reviews both employ a form of content analysis in the examination of information (Merriam, 1998). Content analysis through counts and pattern matching provides a systematic procedure for describing and analyzing the data sources (1988). Thorough content analysis within the qualitative methods involves some level of establishing the strength and relation of categories of data (Weber, 1985; Merriam, 1988). In his study of policy processes, Kingdon (1995) not only went through content analysis exercises but also gauged the importance and attention given to various policy elements. Each interview conducted rated the influence attributed to various factors in developing the agenda and alternatives to be considered (1995). The following chart (Table 3) displays the matrix used to analyze all available data sources in this study.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Archive Documents</th>
<th>Media Accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Opportunities &amp; Constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical &amp; Cultural Considerations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Considerations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Policy Champion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Policy Entrepreneurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Proposals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steps Beyond “Event Counting”

Yin (1984) lists internal validity as a chief concern for explanatory studies because researchers must be careful in making inferences of causation. Qualitative methods are capable of illuminating complex processes and establishing predictable sequences, but the goal is not to seek causal associations but rather identify concepts and plausible relationships (Neuman, 1997). To increase internal validity, Yin suggests pattern-matching and explanation-building as methods for analyzing data obtained through comparative case study methods. Whether using either or both methods, the case study researcher should use their established theoretical propositions to focus attention on certain data (Yin, 1984). The research here used both pattern-matching and explanation-building techniques in developing a model of policy reform adoption by linking information back to my conceptual framework.

Pattern-matching compares the empirical pattern obtained through the research study with a predicted model (Yin, 1984). Common to qualitative methods, pattern theories represent a model of interconnected thoughts and observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The pattern could be related to either the dependent or independent variables being considered in the study, but the end goal is to build theory through inductive thinking (Creswell, 1994). Creswell (1994)
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suggests that the researcher go through several steps in following this inductive mode of qualitative research. The researcher should “gather information, ask questions, form categories of responses, look for patterns within the data, develop a theory, and compare patterns with other theories” (1994, p. 96). The researcher conducted this pattern-matching among interviews and documents within each state and between the two research states.

Repeated cycling through the data allowed the initial approximation of relationships and possible models of policy adoption. Another aspect of pattern-matching involves looking for patterned relations based upon preexisting theories (Creswell, 1994; Neuman, 1997). This analytic comparison moves the research toward establishing the factors which are common across cases and which factors seem to be different (1997).

The tool of explanation-building further analyzes the data by building an explanation through an iterative process (Yin, 1984). Causal links are discovered by following these steps: (1) making a proposition (usually the first being the conceptual framework); (2) comparing the findings of case one; (3) revising the proposed model; (4) comparing the findings of case two; and (5) making a final revision of the model (Yin, 1984). Yin characterizes this process as refining a set of ideas while considering alternatives to those ideas. Creswell (1994) supports the concept of explanation building in detecting these plausible or rival explanations within a case and across cases. Toward the method of grounded theory, explanation building allows this constant comparison of incidents with other incidents until categories emerge (1994).

Evidence Found to Support Model of Reform Adoption

All information gathered through interviews, archive materials, or press accounts was subjected to a coding procedure used by Kingdon (1995) in addition to traditional content
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analysis. The importance and attention given to various policy elements was noted through this analysis. Information gathered through interviews was coded on a scale of 3 (“very prominent”) to 0 (“never mentioned”) according to the prominence given to factors of influence by the interview subject. The sources of evidence found in archive documents or media accounts were coded as either 1 (“mentioned”) or 0 (“not mentioned”). A different coding scheme had to be used for these variables because there was no way to gauge the salience of one category relative to the others. The following table (Table 4) shows the mean scores in each of the research source categories. The score is shown for each of the six variable categories of my theoretical model of policy adoption. Scores for all individual sources of evidence are located in the appendix section (Appendix B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean Scores for External Variables</th>
<th>Mean Scores for Internal Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fiscal Opportunities &amp; Constraints</td>
<td>Historical &amp; Cultural Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>I - Total</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A - Total</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M - Total</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>I - Total</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A - Total</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M - Total</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From cross-case analysis of both states, the factor categories of “role of policy champion” and “political considerations” ranked prominently in terms of influence upon success or failure of the reform attempts. In Kentucky the overwhelming reason given in interviews for the reform success was Governor Paul Patton and his intense involvement in the campaign for reform. It was not surprising that the content analysis of all interviews, archive documents, and media
accounts showed that the involvement of a policy champion and the influence of political considerations were important to the eventual adoption of reforms. Tennessee’s story of political influence came from a different perspective, but with the same factor categories taking prominence. Tennessee interviews told the story of an executive advisory group with little desire to operate within the political sphere and even less support from the executive branch of government for the work that the Governor himself had asked them to do.

Before presentation of the dominant sources of influence in each state and the development of conclusions, it is advantageous to see how each of the six categories within the proposed reform model (Figure 2) were reflected within the various information sources used in the study.

*External Influences on Governance and Policy Reform Adoption*

The information in the following table (Table 5) represents how various external influences and/or determinants of policy adoption manifest themselves in the experiences with reform in Kentucky and Tennessee. This first-phase content analysis of factors within categories will later be merged with the salience statistics to determine the most powerful paths of influence on the agenda items and alternatives proposed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 5</strong></th>
<th><strong>External Influences on Adoption</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kentucky</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tennessee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiscal Opportunities and Constraints</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fiscal Opportunities and Constraints</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget surplus in 1996-97 provided incentive funds to campuses</td>
<td>Budget deficits made any improvement money tough to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprioritization of higher education in budget through cuts or carryover funding to other agencies</td>
<td>Higher education’s share of overall state appropriations had decreased in the 1990’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds from the surplus to use for projects and initiatives in key districts where votes were needed.</td>
<td>Tennessee’s revenue problems had recently brought calls for tax reform and a public backlash against proposed income and business tax solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Historical and Cultural Considerations</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior advisory groups work on higher education reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful UK System benefited from statewide allegiance to the flagship, its community colleges, and its agricultural centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current history of successful reform was evidenced in KERA and Workers’ Compensation Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHE and its Executive Director had been calling for reforms for several years and were very involved in all stages of Kentucky’s reform in 1996 and 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional universities’ disdain for the University of Kentucky and its network of community colleges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Political Considerations</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision makers and key opinion leaders in the House and Senate were on task force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive lobbying by Patton and his coalition of business and higher education leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK’s historically powerful coalitions did not hold up as the Farm Bureau was the only organization with clout to side with UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patton and his advisors treated this as a political issue from the start</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kentucky enjoyed a better fiscal situation during its reform attempt than Tennessee. The possibility of a budget surplus in Kentucky certainly provided the necessary improvement funds to provide incentives for institutional support of the proposals and potentially eased the impact of the reforms. Not only were the funds available to attract the campuses to the idea of change, but Governor Patton also had the available funds to use for projects and initiatives in key swing-vote
districts. Tennessee on the other hand was suffering at that time and continues to be saddled with threats of budget deficits. Improvement dollars are scarce and have mainly been prioritized to those operations of state government under court order or threat of court action.

The two states shared many of the same traits in terms of history of their systems of higher education and powerful presence of higher education institutions within the political culture of the state. Like the University of Kentucky System, the University of Tennessee System benefited from its high-profile sports (UK basketball and UT football), powerful alumni associations, and far-reaching networks of operational influence. In general, the UK and UT main campuses were seen as superior to the other universities of the state, and most of those universities had harbored bad feelings for years about their secondary status in the political hierarchy.

Each state also had relatively weak coordinating boards. The Kentucky Council on Higher Education and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission had struggled for the majority of their existence for a place at the table. Torn between the conflicting roles of "advocate for higher education" and "watchdog for the executive and legislative branches," each board routinely was whipsawed between competing interests. Kentucky's CHE differed from THEC though in that they supported the idea of governance reform realizing – as one former staff member stated – that the coordinating environment could not possibly get any worse. Both states had seen little in the way of higher education reform from the early 1970's forward, but Kentucky did have a basic foundation of reform ideas to build upon. Prior task force efforts had surfaced a number of proposals to strengthen higher education. CHE and other independent higher education advocacy groups had largely supported these task force groups, but the ideas had never been picked up by anyone with political clout. Supporting them had always
represented a vote for either adjustments or wholesale changes to the politically powerful University of Kentucky system.

As for political considerations that could be figured into the reform effort, the state of Tennessee had by far the worst environment for productive discourse. Shaky relationships between Governor Don Sundquist (R) and Democratic leaders in the House and Senate were made even worse by the political upheaval caused by the removal of Bryant Millsaps from the Executive Director role with THEC. In Kentucky, Governor Patton did benefit from being of the same party as the leadership of the General Assembly, but it was questionable how much that helped him. The vote on the final version of the reform package was mixed along party lines with most Senators and House members casting their votes according to historical allegiances. Patton reduced the impact of some political variables by placing several of the highest-ranking Senators and Representatives on the task force body that would shape his reforms. He had a core group of legislators and political opinion leaders involved from the outset. In many ways, Patton treated the higher education reform as a political issue right from the start. In Tennessee however the chair of the Governor’s Council chose to ignore the political paradigm in favor of treating the exercise as a rational process of determining effectiveness and efficiency. This inattention to the political dynamics surrounding higher education led the council to pursue reforms that were not desirable to actual policymakers.

*Internal Influences on Governance and Policy Reform Adoption*

Much like the earlier external variables chart, the following table (Table 6) attempts to highlight the main variables supporting the three internal factor categories involved in the proposed model of governance and policy reform adoption.
Table 6
Internal Influences on Adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kentucky</th>
<th>Tennessee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Policy Champion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patton had earned the respect of legislative leaders and business</td>
<td>Sundquist (nor anyone else) never stepped up to support the group and its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leaders with the Workers' Compensation Reform in Dec. 1996.</td>
<td>hopes to reform higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patton’s total involvement in the process sent a message that this was</td>
<td>Executive branch left the Council and, most notably, its Chairman to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the top priority of state government that year</td>
<td>in a vacuum oblivious to the politics and severely overestimating the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patton staked his legacy as Governor to whether or not he could get</td>
<td>personal power of the Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these reforms done for the betterment of the state of Kentucky</td>
<td>Governor’s non-involvement in his own executive advisory group sent a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poor message to the Council members, the campus leaders, and the leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Policy Entrepreneurs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Force report and Patton’s bill were aided by very public support</td>
<td>Bottorf was perceived as having an agenda by most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of two major higher education advocacy groups and Chamber leaders</td>
<td>and was seen as a very weak choice by leaders in the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 18 members of the Task Force were also the same people who would</td>
<td>Council was not stocked with opinion leaders or decision makers that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be instrumental in it passing the General Assembly</td>
<td>naturally were going to be for reform of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGuinness and the other consultants were hand picked by Patton and</td>
<td>The staff from Vanderbilt and their outside consultants were facing an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked directly alongside him</td>
<td>uphill battle in gaining any support from the General Assembly and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>campuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The press became a big proponent of the changes as the state’s two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>largest newspapers endorsed Patton’s plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Proposals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received a vote of confidence and some external validity from the</td>
<td>Partisan feelings about the executive initiative and a perceived bias on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prior advocacy and task force groups that had suggested similar</td>
<td>the part of the Vanderbilt associations hurt the perceptions of the drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reforms</td>
<td>and final report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patton played up the value of external consultants</td>
<td>General assembly felt that the THEC staff, the Comptrollers staff and/or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SREB were the appropriate research resources for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idea of governance reform had been recommended by prior task force groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bu but had never been seriously pursued. Governance proposals cast a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shadow over the whole task force effort and damaged perceptions of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>final report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted earlier in the study, the 1997 Kentucky Task Force on Postsecondary Education was one of several executive advisory boards and task force groups over the last twenty years that had arrived at similar plans for overhaul of the postsecondary education system. For the first time in those attempts though, higher education reform actually had a chance of survival because
of the economic development interests of Governor Patton and several key allies. He had earned the respect of legislative leaders and business interests during the workers' compensation reform effort and in late 1996 sent an early message that he was going to treat the higher education reform activities with the same hands-on approach. Declaring it the top priority of state government for 1997, Patton also publicly staked his legacy as Governor to the successful reform of the governance and fiscal system of postsecondary education.

Tennessee and its council effort certainly suffered in comparison to Kentucky's experience. Sundquist (nor any other high-ranking official) never stepped in to provide support to the group even when it began to falter and lose its sliver of credibility with the legislature. Throughout the Governor's Council tenure in Tennessee, the executive branch allowed the group to wander into a number of political pitfalls and with its non-involvement sent a message to the General Assembly and others that the Council was not a priority of the administration.

The two states had very different experiences with entities that could have been considered policy entrepreneurs. At a very local level, the chairman of the Tennessee council suffered from perceptions that he had a preconceived agenda for the group, and his choice of Vanderbilt staff and outside consultants placed undeserved accusations of bias on the Council. The Council membership was not stocked with opinion leaders and those who were for reform of the current system did not enjoy power within state government. Adding to the problems of the Council was the fact that business leaders nor other advocacy groups rallied behind their effort. Higher education reform and substantial improvement funding was just not high on the list of priorities from 1997-1999 when the Council wrapped up its work.

Kentucky and its pro-reform coalition enjoyed the public endorsements of two major higher education advocacy groups and had virtually all of the statewide business organizations
signed onto the cause. The eighteen members of the task force itself served an important role in gaining credibility for the ideas. Patton had wisely put high-ranking legislators on the group along with the six executive representatives so that immediate ownership of the plan could occur within the General Assembly. As the report began to take shape the press became a big proponent of the plan as well. Doing their own analysis of the situation, the Lexington Herald-Leader and Louisville Courier-Journal each endorsed Patton's plan and became quasi policy entrepreneurs.

The early drafts and final reports in each state met different fates as well. Kentucky's task force basically recommended some of the same changes that had been proposed by earlier reform committees. The endorsement by two independent higher education advocacy groups only served to give more external validity to the reform ideas. Early drafts of the Tennessee report also recommended familiar proposals for changes to governance; however, partisan fighting over the handling of the coordinating board in November of 1996 created substantial distrust of any recommendations for governance changes. Along with suspicious feelings toward the Bottorff-Vanderbilt combination, the governance proposals cast a shadow over the whole task force effort and damaged perceptions of the final report.

**Dominant Factors and Patterns of Influence**

**Kentucky**

Kentucky higher education reform benefited from a Governor who was willing to spend the political capital necessary and was determined to out-work the opposition. Because of the powerful historical and cultural elements associated with the institutions of higher education, Patton knew from the start that this was a political operation more than a rational decision about
the future of higher education. The Governor made a commitment to the political concerns from
the outset announcing that the Task Force on Postsecondary Education would do its work within
a set time frame. Upon completion of the study, recommendations would be written into a
reform bill and a special session of the legislature would be called in the spring of 1997 to
consider the higher education reform act.

Decision-makers were involved from the outset in Kentucky, as legislators who would
ultimately sit in judgement of the plan were prominent members of the Task Force. This
provided immediate boundaries on the feasibility of ideas, but more than anything, gave
ownership of the proposals to many that might not have sided with Patton in the special session.
Patton used sub-groups to bring institutional knowledge and lay-person perspective to the effort,
but the ultimate report and the legislation that it spawned were created by the forces that would
have to ensure the passage of the bill. The combination of strategic planning and Patton’s
resolve gave the reform package at least a chance against the politically powerful UK alliance.

With the declaration that this reform package was coming forward in short time, the
political establishment was able to prepare itself for a possible showdown. The University of
Kentucky network had stopped similar efforts in the past just by intimidating the proponents for
change. However, Patton knew how to mobilize his coalition and how to pursue the allegiance
of “fence-sitters” with available resources and future clout with the Governor. Patton’s
experience as a legislator probably helped him in working the bill through the special session and
countering the attacks from the UK coalition.

The political establishment may have resisted for awhile, but the culture of Kentucky was
primed for change. Years of activity by the Pritchard Commission and other study groups had
been preaching the ties between education and the economic future of Kentucky. These higher
education advocates and other business groups finally had their opportunity to be heard in the legislature. Because other tough issues had been dealt with within the decade, there was a foundation of knowledge that reform was possible if the state really wanted to take a step forward. On the heels of KERA and Patton’s workers’ compensation reforms, the higher education reform effort was just another in a string of successful reform efforts for the state of Kentucky.

Tennessee

Historical-cultural variables that handicapped the reforms included the lack of grass-roots support for higher education governance changes. The reform proponents also never took any time to understand how the Governor’s Council came to be in the first place. At no time in the Council’s early meetings were troubles between the Governor, the Legislature, and THEC addressed specifically. This neglect fueled suspicions that the Council was just an effort to deflect attention away from the politically charged removals and appointments at the higher education coordinating board. Not helping the poor perception of the Council, Governor Sundquist never made the group a priority, therefore allowing the effort to become a joke to some and a waste of money to others. Showing some concern for the direction that the group was going would have sent a message that he was serious about reform efforts. Otherwise, the message that was sent was one of an administration just hoping to get beyond the troubles with the Higher Education Commission.

From an operational standpoint, the Chairman and staff of the Council never realized the need to map the treacherous political terrain. Chairman Bottorff overestimated the Governor’s power and authority and underestimated the power of the governing boards and their allies in the General Assembly. Even if Sundquist had come to the rescue, he was not a Governor
characterized in the interviews as having natural coalitions in the General Assembly. Unlike Patton in Kentucky, Sundquist had never served in the state legislature and was characterized by many in interviews as being a novice at bargaining, negotiating, and forming coalitions; this despite a twelve year stint in the U.S House of Representatives.

The political environment and historical-cultural variables were never fully explored or addressed by those Council members pushing for a complete overhaul of higher education in Tennessee. Pressures associated with the Democratic leadership’s cool working relationship with Sundquist and the potential base of support that UT and TBR could mobilize created a hostile environment to any productive exercises by the Governor’s Council. Wandering without prudent leadership or any true sense of purpose, the entire Council effort became consumed by the governance debate. Without a powerful figure to play the role of protector and champion for the Council’s ideas, resistance from the higher education governing boards and their allies in the General Assembly killed any hopes for serious reforms, whether structural or fiscal.

Unanticipated Results

In Kentucky, there was a point at which the press became a major ally of the reform and took on a role as a “policy entrepreneur.” The major newspapers’ analysis and arguments for Patton’s plan became a very important piece of the overall campaign. The two papers along with other media outlets were actually listed among the groups on the Governor’s website providing endorsements for the plan. As expected in the proposed model of reform, public opinion was never really a major player in the adoption attempt. Though numerous polls were taken throughout the campaign for reform, interviews with actors on both sides of the very public
debate felt that ultimately the people of Kentucky were not moved to action on the higher education reform issue.

One piece included in the model was the part that fiscal conditions and available funds might play. At the outset, this was conceived as measuring the importance of improvement funding to moving a proposal forward. Though "improvement funds" were tied to the successful governance reform by Patton, some people interviewed in Kentucky thought that relative to other factors, the money was not an issue that pushed the reform over the top. According to them, the most important surplus money at Patton's side was the pool used to sway votes through new initiatives in key districts. This argument was based on the fact that the regional universities and Louisville would have been on board anyway, thus the money was not really needed to sway their allegiance. One legislator in Tennessee who was very close to state budget construction for education also did not feel that fiscal conditions impacted success or failure of the higher education reform proposals. He evidenced the fact that K-12 funding has continued to increase annually even though revenue is tight in Tennessee. If the state wanted higher education to be a priority, then it would become a priority to find the money within the revenues available. According to that legislator, even if the money had been available, the higher education reforms would not have flown in Tennessee. In essence the role of surplus funds or positive fiscal conditions was neither credited for making the deal in Kentucky nor blamed for killing the deal in Tennessee. Money was just another variable that had to be addressed.

In developing this study's model of policy adoption, the researcher made an assumption that high-politics only entered in at the point that the alternatives were presented by advisory groups to other deliberative bodies. Though it does not change the basic model, the research found that the same high-politics that the reforms went through in Kentucky were evident in
Tennessee. They were found in the “behind the scenes” activities that influenced which items stayed in the final report of the Council. The researcher also was struck by the fact that in Tennessee interviews, the quality of the proposals was not criticized. Most people interviewed felt that the governance ideas were practical but were just not politically feasible.

The biggest adjustment to the model is the way that it must be represented. In its early development, it was a type of flowchart through which alternatives passed with one or two of the factors becoming the major reason for the idea’s adoption. The model would be better portrayed as a representation of the window of opportunity that can develop for a policy item when policymakers account for and attend to all key variables.

Conclusions Drawn

This research study began with the goal of identifying how and why higher education governance and policy reforms persist to adoption. Through identification of variables influencing policy developments, the proposed model of policy adoption was analyzed to gauge the impact of external and internal forces on higher education reform attempts.

As noted earlier in the literature review, Howlett & Ramesh (1995) explored the political process surrounding public policy development and offered that the feasibility of proposals may carry as much importance as the desire for various reform ideas. This notion was very evident in each study-state as political feasibility shaped the eventual reform bill in Kentucky and halted any movement toward substantive change in Tennessee. Dye (1966) revealed that many public policy researchers take the political aspects to extremes and charge that policy outcomes are primarily linked to party affiliation and control of the Governor’s office. Due in part to the uniqueness of the higher education domain, this study found that commitments to systems and
individual institutions cut across party lines and were rooted in historical experiences and culture rather than polling data and partisan politics.

Another proposition of the theoretical model of policy adoption was the dynamic of accepting incremental changes when substantive reforms are not feasible. Supporting the propositions of Guthrie and Koppich (1993), this research found that even the face of failure to enact substantive reforms, the Tennessee Governor’s Council exercise at least helped move higher education onto the legislative agenda along with other salient issues. Denied attention for a decade, most higher education leaders in Tennessee had seen through this exercise an incremental adjustment in the enterprise’s priority level and had seen a better commitment on the part of the Governor and the Legislature to recognize the needs of higher education.

The role of the policy champion was a dominant factor in determining success or failure in Tennessee and Kentucky. Tennessee’s council found very little support for reform from the executive branch and soon realized that it was not a pressing issue on the legislative leadership’s agenda. Governor Patton however took Kentucky’s reform ideas and made them his personal and professional crusade. Kingdon (1995) discusses in his work that people in public policy circles watch for special signs of commitment from potential policy champions. More attention is paid when leaders go beyond mentioning reform ideas in routine speeches to a point where the leader is talking and acting as is he/she is prepared to expend some political capital on the issue (1995). Patton sent that special message and rallied many groups to his side. Governor Sundquist however sent just as powerful a message – but to the negative. His inaction and lack of involvement in his council’s deliberations sent a clear signal to most people that higher education reform was not truly a priority.
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As noted earlier in the study, the proposed model of policy reform adoption was treated as a working hypothesis of higher education governance and policy reform adoption. The model was theoretically constructed and the relationships between variables explored. Upon completion of the study the proposed model seemed to hold with some minor modifications in perception of certain variables and in the way that the model must be presented.

Two factor categories – historical-cultural factors and the role of policy entrepreneurs – had to be revisited and analyzed because of unanticipated results. The historical-cultural factors had initially involved the history of institutional and system development, influential figures from the past, culture of reform, etc. The researcher did not have the foresight to consider the ability to take advantage of fractures in the current system or culture as a powerful variable. Governor Patton benefited from the divide between the regional institutions and the University of Kentucky, but he also generated his own fracture within the higher education community when he pitted the UK research interests against the access interests of the community colleges. Internally, this allowed for a divide in loyalties and prevented the united front that UK and its allies hoped for.

Additions are also offered to those entities that could be considered policy entrepreneurs. Initially constituencies such as the press and the business community were considered a part of the political environment, but upon completion of the study it is realized that these groups can in some instances take on the role of policy entrepreneurs. The press and the business community became valuable allies of Patton during his push for reforms in Kentucky and became very instrumental in shaping opinions of the proposals. In the case of Tennessee, the business community never got involved with the push for restructuring or reprioritization of higher education and the press never took on the cause of defending the idea of change. The literature
(Kingdon, 1995 & McLendon & Peterson, 1999) had offered glimpses into the ability of such influential groups to invest support and resources in hopes of later returns. Based on this research, we can now consider them as potentially valuable policy entrepreneurs that should be considered by policy champions when promoting change.

![Figure 3 - Model of Higher Education Reform Adoption](image-url)

The hypothesized model of higher education governance and policy reform adoption presented earlier is accepted as an explanation for the dynamics influencing success or failure of higher education reform attempts. From the results of the research in each of the study states, the factor categories related to reform adoption are weighted as to their importance in shaping reforms (Figure 3). The research hypothesized that internal factors controlled by the reform advocates and the external conditions outside of their direct control combine to have a profound effect upon the fate of reform proposals. Though reform initiatives in Kentucky and Tennessee were effected by all six factor categories represented in the model of reform adoption, the
existence of a policy champion, the attention to political considerations, and acknowledgement of the significance of historical and cultural variables were of major importance.

**Implications for Scholarly Understanding**

Research into the development of postsecondary education policy and governance is missing from the higher education administration domain (Berry, 1994). There have been several studies in the last decade that have established a theoretical foundation for an extension of the literature into the environment surrounding governance and policy development (Horowitz, 1990; Berry, 1994; Koven, 1994; Marcus, 1997). This study is one of the first higher education policy studies to successfully enter the policy and high-politics arena and come away with empirical information about the impact of environmental variables on the adoption of reform proposals. This study also represents a marriage of several tools of public policy, political science, and public administration with higher education research. Higher education as a domain has largely escaped the analysis of political science and public policy. This study not only brings the collection of social science fields together but also offers a rare state-centered study to the policy development literature. Because of the relatively isolated situation of higher education, the policy development literature and methods are offered a glimpse into the process of reform adoption where polling data, winds of political opinion, and partisan voting become marginalized (Berry, 1994). Howlett & Ramesh (1995) called for similar studies such as this that explore choices made and not made within the construction of legislation and policy. Because this study chose to focus on process as well as results, it became important to isolate on individual state circumstances and the personalities involved (Berry, 1994).
Finally, to the higher education and general public policy literature is added a research study that placed a priority on substantiating proof of various influences on policy development. Browne (1999) and Berry (1994) each charge that the majority of policy studies possess very little proof of accurate observations and correct models because the researchers cannot get access to high-level policy makers. This research was designed with the goal of studying the historical events leading up to reform initiatives while understanding the current and past environment through the words and perceptions of those higher education leaders and public officials closest to the action.

Implications for Professional Practice

Kingdon described the policy process as involving collections of people “recognizing problems, generating proposals for changes, and engaging in political activities” to see their ideas enacted (1995, p.87). For both scholars and practitioners, the most difficult part of becoming involved in the process is being able to establish the lay of the land and understand the political dynamics going on around them. Several well-respected scholars and leaders in the higher education policy community have called on researchers to unveil factors that policy makers should consider (McGuinness, 1994; Callan and Davies, 1999). Mills (1999) is one of the first scholars to explore the increasingly prominent role that executive advisory groups are playing in shaping and writing policy. But for those that wish to become successful in promoting change and new ideas, the mystery of how and why higher education reforms happen should be explored. In many ways, this study adds to the broader public policy world a response from the higher education domain to Dye’s 1966 call for better convergence of theory and practice in all areas of public policy. Dye (1966) suggested that effective public policy studies
must point out where to look for explanations and suggest conditions under which policy makers should expect particular outcomes. This study analyzes theoretically grounded concepts in the actual policy making arena by going straight to the high-level officials involved in the creation and manipulation of policy proposals.

Recommendations and Summary

Central to the concerns of this study was a suspicion that policy development and governmental reform is not conducted in a vacuum of rationally controlled circumstances. Higher education reforms seem to avoid the court of public opinion, but they are still subject to several external tests of their strength and worth. Policy champions and entrepreneurs must recognize external and internal forces and respect the impact that these forces have on the matriculation of proposals into the arena of high-politics. Internal factors such as having in place a policy champion and high-quality policy entrepreneurs are crucial to higher education proposals gaining momentum toward reform adoption. Without the key people lined up to carry the load and protect the ideas from outside threats, reform initiatives will rarely move beyond becoming shelf material.

Less controlled than the internal factors, the external factors of fiscal opportunities, political considerations, and historical-cultural considerations become very important to reform operations and must be considered. Even in the situation in Kentucky where the proposals had the weight of a powerful Governor and his reform team behind them, reform was still not guaranteed because of the power of the factors in the external environment. Treated as a political battle from the start, the reform proponents understood the historical, fiscal, and cultural
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constraints and strategically planned to work within them instead of making overt attacks against the entire system.

In addition to practical insights pertaining to the higher education reform environment, this study also sought to bridge the methods and literature of higher education administration, policy studies, and political science to better understand processes of policy adoption in the higher education domain. The knowledge of how and why certain ideas persist to adoption offers valuable information to researchers and practitioners as they seek to gauge developments in postsecondary education reform. Unlike the single-state case studies of higher education governance and policy reform found in the literature, this research targets two economically and demographically similar states that had different reform outcomes and seeks an evidentiary basis for a model of reform development and adoption. With virtually no accumulation of literature on state level policy formation in the higher education literature, this multiple-state study establishes a theoretically framed model of policy adoption that can be tested by others within the higher education policy domain.
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References


