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**Funding The Flagships: Governance,
Politics and Identity
In State Support For Public
Research Universities**

**IHELG Monograph
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**Funding the flagships: Governance, politics and identity in state
support for public research universities**

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Public flagship universities play vitally important roles in the economic, social, and cultural development of the United States. Flagship universities refer to mature public institutions that were typically the first to be established in their states. In some cases, states have more than one flagship university, with one institution designated as the land-grant campus historically focused on agriculture and mechanical arts, and the other concentrating on classical education and other professions (e.g., Purdue University and Indiana University in Indiana). Overall, flagship universities are widely viewed as the leading higher education institutions in the U.S. due to their size, scope and preeminence of research and graduate programs (Berdahl, 1998).

Flagship institutions receive a significant amount of taxpayer funds—state and federal—to support their teaching, research and outreach activities. State support for these institutions, in real dollars, has increased almost every year over the last three decades (Thelin, 2004). However, between 1979 and 2000, the average state appropriations at state flagship institutions, as a share of revenues, fell from 42 percent to 31 percent. During this period, only ten flagship institutions had increases in the share of their revenues coming from state appropriations (Rizzo & Ehrenberg, 2004). These changes in revenue patterns are of concern to many higher education leaders. As one flagship CEO declared, “the compact between states and public research universities has withered, leaving public research institutions in a purgatory of insufficient resources and declining competitiveness” (Yudof, 2002, p. B24). Flagship university leaders across the country are increasingly uneasy about the future of state support for their campuses.

Purpose and Research Questions

In recent years, research has emerged to help leaders and policymakers understand state-level factors that predict levels of state support for higher education. These studies have been valuable in shedding light on how economic, demographic, governance, and political variables, along with state and federal policies, influence levels of state appropriations for colleges and universities (e.g., Hovey, 1999; Kane, Orzag & Gunter, 2003; Lowry, 2001; Toutkoushian & Hollis, 1998; Rizzo, 2006; Hossler, Lund, Ramin, Westfall, & Irish 1997; Archibald & Feldman, 2006; McLendon, Hearn & Mokher, 2006; Tandberg, 2008; Alexander, 2001; Baldwin, 2006).

While this body of work has made significant contributions to the literature, few studies have considered how institutional history, context, strategies, and structures might accompany state-level variables in explaining levels of state support for a campus. More research is needed to understand the extent to which institutional-level factors contribute to state-level variables in painting the overall picture about state support for a campus.

The purpose of this study is to examine state and institutional level factors that explain differences in state appropriations for public flagship universities. At the state level, I investigate how state-level economic, demographic, and political and cultural variables impact appropriations for colleges and universities. At the institutional level, I examine the impact of institutional history, contexts, strategies, and structures in state funding decisions for flagship campuses. The primary research question guiding this study is: “What is the relationship between state level variables (economic, demographic, governance, political, and cultural) and institutional level variables (campus history,

contexts, strategies, structures) in explaining differences in levels of state appropriations for public flagship universities?”

Literature and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is anchored in the organizational theory literature at both the state and institutional level, and examines the research question through rational, political, and cultural perspectives. I have employed this theoretical framework in past studies to help me unpack the complex relationship between states and institutions in funding higher education (see Weerts, 2008; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Weerts 2002). The current study is unique, however, and builds upon these prior analyses in two important ways. First, this study investigates differences in appropriations for research universities *between* and *among* states as opposed to inequities in funding *within* states (see Weerts, 2008). Second, past work has examined differences in levels of appropriations for research universities among states (Weerts, 2002; Weerts & Ronca, 2006), however these studies only investigate data within a snapshot in time. The current study investigates this issue through a 20 year time horizon.

Rational perspectives

At the state level, a rational or data driven indicator predicting levels of state support for higher education is the forecast or current status of a state’s economy. A number of studies suggest that unemployment rate, per capita income rate, availability of state revenues, and tax capacity are key factors in determining the level at which the state will fund its public universities (Rizzo, 2006; Toutkoushian, 2006; Lowry, 2001; Layzell

& Lyddon, 1990, Hoenack & Pierro, 1990; Strathman, 1994; McLendon, et al., 2006). Similarly, demographic trend data can provide rational arguments for where states should invest in education in the future (Blumenstyk, 1988). For example, the growth or decline of state's population may have positive or negative effects on state appropriations (Toutkoushian & Hollis, 1998; Toutkoushian, 2006).

One rational method used by states to equitably distribute funds to institutions is through funding formulas. These formulas provide allotment of appropriations based on enrollment, faculty salaries, research expenditures, and other factors unique to their mission (McKeown & Layzell, 1994; Leslie & Ramey, 1986). However, budget formulas are inherently political, and thus, may have the unintended effect of perpetuating inequities in a system (McKeown, 1996)

At the campus level, institutional leaders may employ rational strategies to increase their prospects for state appropriations. Rational theorists suggest that organizational leaders choose optimum strategies to compete with other resource-dependent entities given regulators, competitors, and barriers (Child, 1973). For example, campus leaders may explicitly link their missions/programs to foster state economic development as a way to improve state tax capacity. This strategy was especially effective for institutions seeking state support during the 1980s (Hines, Hickrod, & Pruyne, 1989). Fundraising is another rational strategy to raise taxpayer support for a campus since some state matching fund programs leverage private giving. One study supports this hypothesis, showing a positive connection to state support and private giving (Weerts & Ronca, 2006) while another found that private giving was

negatively associated with state appropriations, suggesting that private gifts replace taxpayer support (Rizzo, 2006).

Political perspectives

Campus appropriations may be determined by powerful actors who control funding decisions. For example, a committee chairperson may use his or her position of power to affect appropriations for a particular institution or program (Hovey, 1999). Overall, politicians may act on behalf of institutions based on loyalties or self interests (e.g., alumni of an institution; institution resides in legislator's district). Behavior of politicians might also be understood by party lines. For instance, a recent study suggests that higher education funding is repressed when republicans control the legislature and governor's office (McLendon, et al. 2006). Another found that states most likely to cut higher education are politically competitive, multiparty states and have limited gubernatorial power (Rizzo, 2006)

The power of individual actors in the appropriations process may be tempered by the governance structure of higher education in the state. Some studies suggest that institutions governed by consolidated governing boards are likely to receive higher levels of state appropriations than those governed under coordinating structures. The rationale is that consolidated boards better mitigate competition between campuses and may promote a more unified strategy to support all institutions (Lowry, 2001; Weerts & Ronca, 2006). In some cases, campuses may develop political coalitions that bring benefits to institutions. For example, in the 1990s, colleges and universities in Virginia formed a

successful partnership with the Virginia Business Council resulting in increased state appropriations (Trombley, 1997).

Power and politics also relates to the presence and strength of competitors. Higher education has been crowded out by powerful competing agencies such as K-12 education, Medicaid, and corrections over the last two decades (Hovey, 1999; Jenny & Arbak, 2004; Schuh, 1993; Kane, Orszag & Gunter, 2003; Toutkoushian & Hollis, 1998, Weerts & Ronca, 2006). Colleges have been especially vulnerable for funding cuts in states where courts have mandated reforms in K-12 schools (Rizzo, 2006). In the same vein, institutions may also crowd out support for one another. For example, states that have multiple flagship institutions may see more competition for scarce dollars compared to those where one institution enjoys status as the state's undisputed flagship university (J. Hearn, personal communication, June 13, 2007).

Cultural perspectives

Decisions about state support for higher education also mirror the state's culture. Some cultural theories suggest that paradigms are developed over time and eventually embedded within the general belief systems of decision makers or the public at large (Morgan, 2006). This may be understood through baseline budgeting practices that provide incremental increases in appropriations from year to year. The best predictor of higher education appropriations in a given year relates to the previous year's appropriation (Hossler, et al., 1997), which suggests that appropriations may simply be a reflection of historical investment in a campus.

One cultural theory advanced by March (1981), obligatory action, suggests that decision-making behavior can be viewed as contractual, implicit agreements to act appropriately in return for being treated appropriately. A past study found that increases in appropriations for flagship campuses during the 1990s were associated with campus commitment to public service and outreach. In these cases, states acted appropriately (supported institutions) in return for being treated appropriately (state needs were met). The study suggests that flagship campuses that received greater support during the 1990s had developed positive perceptions about their work with state officials and the public at large (Weerts, 2002).

Finally, cultural perspectives may underscore the fact that some states simply value certain kinds of institutions more than others. For example, states that have historically relied on private institutions to educate their citizens feel less of an obligation to fund public higher education (Layzell & Lyddon, 1990). This theory might be extended to individual campuses, as legislators may feel more or less inclined to support certain campuses due to their histories and symbolic standing in the state.

Methodology

The preceding theoretical framework illustrates that variables predicting state appropriations for flagship institutions are complex, and thus, difficult to quantify and measure. One way to examine these complexities is to identify unique cases in which appropriations for a campus have varied, and then seek to explain reasons behind this variation. As McLendon (2003) suggests, comparative case studies can provide important insights that cannot be gleaned from analysis of statistical models. McLendon

contends that cases which deserve analysis are those that appear as an outlier over a long time frame.

Guided by McLendon's rationale, this study examines outliers (institutions) from a recent longitudinal study of state appropriations (Weerts & Ronca, 2007) to understand why certain flagship institutions have received higher or lower levels of state appropriations than expected since 1985. Specifically, a sequential mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) is employed in which the results from the longitudinal analysis (quantitative) are used to inform the development of a case study analysis (qualitative). The findings from both phases are used to address the research question in this study.

In this section, I begin by briefly summarizing the results of the quantitative phase of the study which derived the outlier case studies for the present analysis. A full explanation of the quantitative phase is found in Weerts & Ronca (2007). Briefly, we specified a mixed effects time series model to describe the annual changes in state support for public higher education since 1985. The dependent variable used is the natural log of total state and local appropriations received by each institution in each year from 1985 to 2004. The independent variables were drawn from 23 predictors identified in the literature as most important to explaining levels of state support for higher education. These variables represent broad constructs of state fiscal health, demographic factors, competing state priorities, state political climate, and institutional characteristics. Random effects were used to model the nested structure of the data collected on over 1,000 institutions in each of the 50 United States.

The best fitting model revealed that a number of variables are important to explaining differences in support for colleges and universities between 1985 and 2005. Specifically, appropriations for higher education were negatively associated with increases in unemployment, per capita income, state spending on K-12 education, health care, corrections, and court mandated K-12 reform. Increases were associated with high voter participation, republican governors, and increased number of public universities in a state. Finally, it was found that appropriations are likely to be strongest and most stable for community colleges and less so for research institutions.

We partitioned the residual variance of the model into its component parts so as to better understand the sources of unexplained variation in state funding. From this analysis of residuals, we identified outlier institutions—colleges and universities by Carnegie class—that were not well fit by the model (higher or lower than predicted appropriations). Table 1 illustrates the top five outliers within the class of research extensive universities which inform the present study.

| Table 1: Typology of state appropriation levels by institutional type (data years: 1985-2005) | | |
|--|---|--|
| | Higher than expected appropriations | Lower than expected appropriations |
| Research Universities Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive (E) | <u>Doctoral/Research Extensive</u> 1) SUNY- Stony Brook 2) SUNY- Buffalo 3) Northern Illinois University 4) University of Maryland-College Park 5) University of Connecticut | <u>Doctoral/Research Extensive</u> 1) Virginia Commonwealth 2) University of Oregon 3) University of Virginia 4) UMASS-Amherst 5) University of Mississippi |
| Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2002). <i>The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2000 Edition</i> . Menlo Park: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. | | |

Table 1 suggests that there are some important variables that were not captured in our statistical model that might be illuminated through qualitative methodology. The remainder of this paper will investigate reasons why the University of Maryland-College Park (UMD) and the University of Connecticut (UCONN) fall in the higher than expected appropriations category, while UMASS-Amherst (UMASS) and the University of Virginia (UVA) fall into the lower than expected group. These universities were selected for analysis for two reasons. First, these institutions all share characteristics as public flagship universities as discussed by Berdahl (1998), and thus, are germane to the present analysis. Second, the geography of these institutions suggests that rich contextual differences may exist across institutions in close proximity to one another. Specifically, the top lower and higher than expected supported flagship institutions are located within a short drive of each other (distance between UVA and UMD= 130 miles; distance between UCONN and UMASS= 65 miles). An analysis of these four institutions promises to provide useful insights in relation to the research question.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews and document review were the primary methods of data collection for my case study analysis (Yin, 2001). I interviewed relevant stakeholders including campus lobbyists, boards of trustee staff, governance system executives, state legislators, budget officers, and the gubernatorial representatives that could speak to a 20 year history for each of the campuses. Snowball sampling (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992) was used to identify the most informed individuals. The interview protocol, guided by my theoretical framework, appears in appendix A. Fifty-two interviews were conducted from December

2007- March 2009 (mostly via the phone). Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of the data. So not to bias responses, I did not reveal to participants about where their representative institutions appeared on table 1 until after the interview.

In addition to interviews, I reviewed documents including speeches from university executives or state representatives, annual reports, campus and governing board documents, state policy studies, news clippings, and related written materials. These documents were collected in March 2008 via a visit to campus archives. The coding procedure suggested by Bogdan & Bicklen (1992) was used to categorize, record, and interpret the data.

Findings and Discussion

The following sections outline the main themes that emerged from my examination of each of the four cases. Following a discussion of these themes, I discuss their contributions to theory, practice and future research.

UMASS-Amherst: Lower than expected appropriations ¹

A number of factors contribute to UMASS-Amherst receiving lower than expected support in our model. First, Massachusetts is home to a world class system of private higher education institutions and struggling public system (Bastedo, 2005). Due to the strength of private higher education, public higher education has never enjoyed a prominent place in the educational system in the Massachusetts. As a result, the Commonwealth ranks near the bottom on measures of state financial commitment to higher education.

¹ Portions of this analysis appear in Weerts (2008).

Adding to these financial challenges, higher education governance in Massachusetts has had a turbulent past. Since the 1960s, Massachusetts has undergone numerous reorganizations, reforms, and changes in leadership. UMASS-Amherst, as a flagship institution, has seemingly not fared well in this process. For example, in 1989 the Saxon Commission was assembled to examine how UMASS could bolster its political and financial support to achieve its ambition of becoming a nationally recognized university system (Bastedo, 2005). The result of the Commission was that all public universities in the Commonwealth were organized under the University of Massachusetts. Thus, in 1991, two new institutions from the eastern part of the state—Lowell and Dartmouth, were added to the existing system of Amherst (the flagship), Boston, and Worcester (medical campus). Today, the UMASS System consists of 5 campuses: Amherst, Boston, Worcester, Lowell, and Dartmouth.

Interviewees explained that power struggles exist on the board which result in eastern campuses (e.g., Boston, Lowell) receiving more than their share of support while Amherst (in the west) receives less than its share. UMASS board members are selected by the governor and many of these appointees reside in the powerful eastern part of the state (Boston metropolitan area). Past studies have shown that strong political gulf between eastern and western side of the state (Wittaker, 1989) which may impact board level decisions about funding particular campuses. Fueling these political issues, interviewees reported that UMASS-Lowell and UMASS-Boston are much more engaged on issues of regional concern (economic and social) as compared to UMASS-Amherst. Thus, Amherst further suffers from perceptions that it is less responsive to the needs of the state. Supporting these notions, our prior analysis found that both Boston and Lowell

have received higher than expected appropriations over a 20 year period (Weerts & Ronca, 2007).

Furthermore, funding allocation decisions at UMASS are guided by a historic distribution model considering past levels of operating expenses of each campus. Some interviewees suggest that this inherited budgeting framework has simply formalized poor funding for Amherst. In addition, it is suggested that the current funding model treats all the institutions in the system the same, and does not recognize Amherst as the flagship.

One interviewee explained:

“The formula does not recognize that there is a difference in missions of the different campuses... The funding that goes to the different campuses does not recognize that per student costs at UMASS Amherst should be higher. Now, it takes into account, all right, the difference in terms of discipline, i.e. engineering is different in funding than enrollment in education, but at the same time, it doesn't recognize the fact that we're dealing with a Research I at Amherst.”

Attempts to push UMASS-Amherst into the top tier of research universities have been unsuccessful. Interviewees explained that John Lombardi, former president of UMASS-Amherst, was ousted because he pushed too hard for Amherst to distinguish itself as the flagship.

For several reasons, the concept of UMASS-Amherst as a flagship is not firmly embedded in the psyche of Massachusetts political leaders and the public. First, unlike other land grant colleges in other states, the mechanical arts provision of the act was provided by a private institution, MIT. This structural artifact has hindered institution's identity as a comprehensive flagship. Second, given the dominance of surrounding private institutions, UMASS-Amherst has historically not been a first choice for students attending higher education in the Commonwealth. As a result, many graduates who

obtained positions of leadership in public office are alumni of private colleges. Third, the fact that UMASS-Amherst does not have a law school is also noteworthy, as many state lawmakers in Massachusetts have law degrees from private institutions.

Fourth, the institution resides in the “geographical and political boondocks” as one interviewee described it. Its location in the far western part of the state has hindered its ability to get the attention of lawmakers and public. Finally, state officials and the public have a mixed assessment of the institution’s contribution to the state’s economic and social well being. Some provided high marks for the campus especially in the area of technology transfer and economic development, while others cited that Amherst’s outreach efforts are somewhat unknown to the public. The combination of geography, politics, and low visibility of outreach and engagement with the state suggests that UMASS-Amherst has few allies in state government. Summarizing my analysis, UMASS-Amherst may fall in the “lower than expected” category due to 1) the dominance of private research universities in the Commonwealth which overshadow its identity as the state flagship, 2) the lack of visibility and political support (board and state level) as a result of geography, 3) mixed public perceptions about its contribution to the state, and 4) a funding formula structure which does not recognize its flagship status.

University of Virginia: Lower than expected appropriations

Like Massachusetts, Virginia is among the top states in per capita income. However, income distribution is widely imbalanced with the greatest concentration of wealth in Northern Virginia and significant poverty in southwest Virginia. As a whole,

Virginia is fiscally conservative and remains a low tax state. Consequently, public tuition in Virginia is relatively high.

Virginia has many strong public institutions with their own unique histories, traditions, and culture. Among the most prominent of these institutions is “Mr. Jefferson’s University,” the University of Virginia, established by Thomas Jefferson in 1825. UVA has been called a “public ivy” and has a long history of private support. Its endowment is one of the largest among universities in the country, exceeding \$4 billion in 2008. UVA shares its status as a flagship university with Virginia Tech, the state’s land-grant university located in Blacksburg. While both institutions are highly regarded, interviewees declared that UVA is sometimes viewed as being elitist due to its wealth, selectivity, and national and international prominence. Alternatively, Virginia Tech is more often seen as being more connected to the state through its robust outreach and extension programs.

Over the last three decades, Governor Mark Warner was considered the most supportive of higher education as compared to Governors Gilmore, Wilder and Allen. And Senators John Chichester and the late Hunter Andrews were strong advocates of higher education. However, the story of higher education in Virginia is less about partisan politics, and more about independence. That is, unlike other states that have vacillated between centralization, control, and decentralization of higher education, Virginia has historically maintained independent institutions with no centralized governing board. In the 1970s, a study to determine whether Virginia should adopt a single consolidated system resoundingly rejected the notion of such a system and,

instead, endorsed institutional autonomy. The State Council of Higher Education of Virginia (SCHEV) has been the coordinating board since 1956.

Changes in state appropriations for UVA in the last 20 years have been impacted by changes in SCHEV policies. Gordon Davies, executive director of SCHEV between 1977 and 1997, set up funding guidelines for each of the institutions referred to as Appendix M. Through Appendix M, peer groups were established to estimate, among other areas, competitiveness of faculty salaries by discipline and student credit hours. One administrator explained how peers were selected, “These were not *aspirational* peers, these were *actual* peers. UVA, for instance, might have wanted Berkeley, Michigan, and Illinois, and we might have agreed to Illinois, but not to Michigan and Berkeley. We said no, they are just out of your league.” Although UVA didn’t receive funding in line with aspirational peers, UVA administrators generally supported Appendix M because it gave them stability in funding. However, Appendix M was abandoned in 1990 with the onset of an economic recession. This had the effect of intensifying political gamesmanship, and negatively impacted support for UVA:

“We did very well financially under that scheme [Appendix M]. We always used to say that as long as they stick to the formulas, the University [UVA] will do okay. What happened in 1990 with a really substantial recession was that they basically threw the Appendix M guidelines out the window, and we spent at least a decade following that with no funding guidelines whatsoever. Everything that the institutions received was based on kind of an initiative-type basis. You kind of came up with a program and you presented that to the governor and then the legislature, and if they liked it, they funded it.”

Some interviewees described post-Appendix M as a “free for all” with each Virginia institution making their case to the legislature. It was not until 2001, four years after the forced departure of Davies, that funding guidelines returned with the adoption of the Base Adequacy Formula. In the interim, however, institutions such as George Mason

University (GMU) and James Madison University (JMU) located in Northern Virginia accelerated their prominence. Under the leadership of former president, George Johnson, GMU was especially successful in its efforts to become a top research university. Johnson's primary strategy was to create an institution that was responsive to regional economic and social issues. His emphasis on engaging the region paid off. One interviewee explained, "George Mason just went great guns. What happened was, all the people who were legislators in northern Virginia were UVA graduates.... What was true was that they may have been UVA graduates but, by God, they answered to the voters of northern Virginia. They were putting their money into George Mason."

After the fall of Appendix M, UVA embarked on the privatization of three of its professional schools, relinquishing their claim on state support. Remaining state appropriations were spread throughout the other schools and colleges. Tuition rose to private market rates for professional schools, and the new president John Casteen, inaugurated in 1990, focused almost exclusively on becoming a "privately funded public university." While lobbying was still important to the university, UVA's local delegation held little power in the legislature, and increasingly, fewer UVA graduates were entering the legislature. One UVA administrator explained:

"I think he [Casteen] concluded fairly early on that the state was going to be a withering resource and we couldn't expect it to come back. It's not going to continue to be a strong vehicle for supporting university, so he moved hard, and aggressively, on the private fund raising for us. Our first big campaign topped out in 2000 at a little over a billion and a half. Then we immediately went into the planning for the next one, which is a three billion dollar campaign."

Just as important, the abolition of Appendix M also gave rise to the Higher Education Restructuring Act which was adopted in 2005. In this plan, the wealthiest universities in Virginia (UVA, William and Mary, Virginia Tech) gave up a certain

amount of their claim of state support in exchange for tuition autonomy and the freedom from significant regulation (see Couturier, 2006).

Over the years, UVA's strategic movements have affirmed its identity as a "privately funded public flagship." And while Virginia statutes declare that legislators cannot take into account endowment when making decisions about funding UVA, the reality is that the institution's wealth is hard to ignore. "It's like un-ringing a bell or telling the jury to disregard somebody's dramatic testimony" said one interviewee. "People keep it in mind even when they're not supposed to keep it in mind." Added to this issue is the large number of out-of-state students that attend UVA. These students receive no general fund support, and instead, help subsidize Virginians who attend the university. The effect is that the general fund percentage per student is lower for UVA compared to other institutions.

My analysis suggests that UVA may fall into the "lower than expected support" category due to several reasons. First, the independent nature of public higher education in Virginia has allowed politics to shape funding for higher education. Although UVA is viewed proudly as a flagship, no special designation has secured this status or prevented other universities to rise in their standing as research universities. Institutions in Northern Virginia have made significant gains due to the powerful delegation of the region. In addition, UVA has made a strategic decision to focus on privatizing its programs instead of aggressively seeking state support. While the institution has been successful in this strategy, it perpetuates the view among legislators that "UVA can take care of itself."

University of Connecticut: Higher than expected appropriations

Connecticut is a high tax, wealthy, well educated state that has historically relied on the strong private institutions to educate its residents. The campuses of UCONN include the main campus at Storrs, and smaller, “feeder” campuses at Avery Point, Stamford, Harford, Torrington, and Waterbury. For most of its history, UCONN, a land grant institution, was not a point of pride for Connecticut legislators or the public at large. Interviewees explained that the main campus at Storrs was “built on the cheap” with old GI Bill construction, and by 1990s, was extremely rundown. At that time, faculty morale was low due to overall neglect of the campus, and the institution was largely viewed by prospective students as a “backup school” to the more prominent private institutions in the region.

Changes in governance in Connecticut paved the way for UCONN to eventually ascend in its status as a strongly supported flagship university. Over time, Connecticut operated a variety of structures to coordinate the activities of UCONN, the Connecticut State University System, and the Community College System. Most relevant this study, the CT Board of Governors for Higher Education was stripped of its heavy regulatory role in the mid-1980s, resulting in weakened authority. And in this context, UCONN was granted more flexibility through block grants in the 1990s, ensuring its independence in funding allocation decisions. During this period, the campus continued to receive slow, but steady support from the state at a level of 5 percent of annual growth, reflecting levels required by the collective bargaining agreement. This steady growth distinguishes UCONN from other institutions that have wider fluctuations in funding patterns.

Like other states, generous tax support for UCONN in the early to mid- 1990s was unlikely due to a difficult recession that plagued the nation. Furthermore, new CT Governor, John Rowland, was elected in 1994 on a platform to reduce taxes and bonding for public projects. The state senate at the time was controlled by republicans who shared the governor's agenda. Cognizant of these issues, former UCONN president, Harry Hartley, was not inclined to push an aggressive agenda for increased spending for the university at this time.

Against these odds, UCONN experienced an unprecedented surge in support that bolstered its prominence as a flagship university. Specifically, two separate bonding bills totaling \$2.2 billion (UCONN 2000; 21st Century UCONN) were passed in 1995 and 2002 to rebuild the institution and launch it into the upper echelon of flagship universities. Peter Buchannan, past president of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "UCONN 2000's approval is a benchmark for public higher education in this country. No other state has taken such a decisive action to strengthen its flagship university" (New York Times, 1995).

Several factors contributed to the surge in state support for UCONN during this period. First, former Speaker of the House, UCONN Law School alum, and avid UCONN basketball fan, Tom Ritter (D) is crediting with having the vision to do something "big" for UCONN. At a time when partisan politics was particularly intense (e.g., Contract with America), supporting UCONN was seen as having bi-partisan appeal. With help from Rep Denise Merrill (D), advancement and state relations staff at UCONN, the UCONN alumni association, and the faculty union, Ritter launched a

sophisticated campaign to make UCONN a world class flagship institution. The key messages of the campaign were that the physical plant at Storrs was embarrassing to the state and leading to “brain drain” of the best and brightest CT students. A rebuilt UCONN was touted as essential to helping the state get back on its feet again economically, and a reward for top CT students who desired to stay in the state. Furthermore, the bonding measure was viewed as feasible since it would put people to work and stimulate the faltering economy, while having long term effects of building the competitiveness of the state.

Fortuitously, UCONN athletics was extremely successful during this time which roused the spirit and pride of alumni, legislators, and Connecticut residents. In 1995, the UCONN men’s and women’s basketball team both ranked #1 in the country, an unprecedented event in the history of the NCAA. Because Connecticut has no professional sports franchise, the UCONN Huskies are viewed as the state’s primary team. The excitement generated by UCONN basketball provided opportunities to push the message of the university as a top flagship. Head men’s basketball coach, Jim Calhoun, was an important spokesperson for UCONN 2000 who said in highly publicized legislative hearings, “Never should it be said that the basketball team is better than the institution.” The fervor of “Huskymania” was fully leveraged, spurring a bandwagon effect among the legislature and a fiscally conservative governor.

Despite the Governor’s intention to curb state spending, UCONN 2000 took on a life of its own and was unable to be squelched. As one Connecticut administrator put it, “The Governor could choose to step in front of the train or be the engineer.” Citing the importance of UCONN to the state’s economy, Governor Rowland signed the law

authorizing 1 billion for spending for UCONN on “Husky Day.” Given the popularity of the initiative and evidence of UCONN’s rising academic stature, the Governor championed a next round of capital funding totaling \$1.2 billion called 21st Century UCONN. New UCONN president, Phillip Austin, was instrumental in moving this agenda forward and the initiative sailed smoothly through the legislature. Passage was easy because the Governor essentially stole a democratic issue—education—which ensured that there would be little opposition to the bill.

An important factor related to the rise in support for UCONN was that the coordinating board or other public institutions did not stand in the way of its ambitions. As stated earlier, the Board of Governors had very little power during this time, and played virtually no role in supporting or impeding the progress of the university. Simply put, the board stood by and watched while UCONN assembled a powerful coalition to advance its interests. Equally important is that the other higher education institutions in Connecticut—the Connecticut State University System and CT Community Colleges—did not oppose UCONN’s efforts. UCONN administrators convinced colleagues who led neighboring institutions that supporting UCONN 2000 would mean that “all boats would rise.” UCONN leaders pledged their support for these institutions in future bond measures, and as advertised, major bills supporting capital projects for these institutions were also passed in later years.

Today, UCONN enjoys a state of the art physical campus and is home to many distinguished programs. While private higher education is still prominent in the region, UCONN has become a university of “first choice” for many students in Connecticut. The institution’s homepage proudly touts its status as “the top ranked public university in

New England.” My analysis suggests that UCONN falls in the “higher than expected” appropriations category due to its 1) history of steady operating support, 2) strong political base of alumni legislators and other stakeholders, 3) limited oversight from the governing board, and 4) limited competition from other state institutions. Furthermore, through the venue of athletics, UCONN has captured the public’s attention and has been able to leverage this into taxpayer support.

University of Maryland-College Park: Higher than expected appropriations

Like Massachusetts and Connecticut, Maryland is a high per capita income state with a long tradition of supporting private colleges and universities. Institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and Loyola College predated public higher education in Maryland, and have been viewed as the preferred institutions to provide higher education to state students. Also, like UMASS-Amherst and UCONN, College Park is an 1862 land grant institution that for much of its history was viewed as the “safety school” for Maryland students. One long-time College Park administrator explained, “The campus was historically viewed as kind of second rate I’d say by Maryland and there was an inferiority complex on the faculty and staff on the campus.” Because of the perception that College Park had not reached the level of quality of other public flagships in nearby states, top Maryland students often left to attend more prominent flagships in neighboring states.

During the 1980s, leaders in the Maryland legislature began to express a desire to elevate the reputation of College Park to that of its neighboring flagships (e.g., Chapel Hill). Subsequently, state leaders commissioned a series of studies on public higher

education funding, autonomy, and accountability. Prior to 1988, public higher education in Maryland was governed by four boards with relatively weak coordination. According to one report, “There was a sense that individual institutions had failed to adopt differentiated missions and were trying to be all things to all. The University of Maryland at College Park had not achieved world-class status as a research university” (Task Force, 1998). At that time, Maryland ranked around 40th among the 50 states in its support for higher education.

Considering recommendations from one study (Hoblitzell Commission) and former College Park Chancellor, John Toll, Governor William Schaefer created the University System of Maryland in 1988. The new system joined the 6 institutions in the State University College System and 5 universities of the University of Maryland into a unified structure governed by a single board (University of Maryland System). The new “Maryland Charter for Higher Education” specified institutional roles and responsibilities for each institution. At that time, College Park was given a clear mandate to become a world-class flagship institution. Chapter 246 of the Laws of Maryland 1988, 10-209 states:

The University of Maryland System shall:

- 1) Maintain and enhance the College Park Campus as the State’s flagship campus with programs and faculty nationally and internationally recognized for excellence in research and the advancement of knowledge.
- 2) Provide the College Park campus with the level of operations funding and facilities necessary to place it among the upper echelon of its peer institutions.

The new law maintained that funding guidelines for College Park would reflect that of the weighted average of ten peers, including five “aspirational” peers, on a per student basis. By including aspirational peers as a funding benchmark, College Park succeeded in gaining significant increases in state support over the past two decades.

Maryland Senate President, Mike Miller (D), was a critical player in advancing College Park's status and funding. Miller is an alumnus of College Park and has been a powerful advocate for the campus since joining the senate in 1975. For example, during the late 1990s, Miller and other College Park supporters became restless with fluctuations in annual funding and lack of management flexibility for College Park. Subsequently, the Larsen Commission was established to reexamine coordination, funding, and governance of higher education with the implicit agenda to remove College Park from the system (it was believed that the campus would have more success in retaining support if it was independent). While restructuring on this scale did not pass, the Larsen report resulted in more funding for College Park (and other campuses), strengthened autonomy and authority for institutional presidents and boards of visitors, and gave additional management flexibility from fiscal and bureaucratic controls (Task Force, 1998).

The College Park campus has also benefited from its location since it resides in the vicinity of a vibrant economic corridor in a powerful legislative district. The area is home to a robust technology industry and many federal labs. When explaining the institution's rise in prominence, one interviewee said:

“Part of it had to do with state economic demographics, and population demographics. You go south towards Prince Georges County where we're located... there was no higher education institution in that entire area. You had a lot of wealthy educated people building and growing communities in Montgomery county that were looking for a place for their sons and daughters to go. Some of the most influential legislators in building this law [1988 restructuring bill] were from that area. An important message used to build up College Park was to keep the 'best and brightest' in Maryland.”

Along with legislative leaders, former Governor Parris Glendening (previously a College Park professor) and campus presidents John Toll, William Kirwan, and current president C. Daniel Mote, are credited with building up the campus over the past 20 years.

Today, College Park is a selective “first choice” for Maryland students. The institution has secured significant increases in research funding, enhanced quality of programs, and increased capacity for private fundraising. Considering the transformation of College Park, the campus may be in the “higher than expected appropriations” category for three reasons. First, the 1988 legislation was critical to elevating the stature of College Park in the system. Although funding targets were not made every year, significant gains were made over the 20 year period and the legislation prevented other campuses from drifting toward major research university status. Second, the institution has had strong campus leaders and political advocates that have been vigilant in ensuring that College Park would retain its status as the premiere flagship. Finally, College Park enjoys a strategic location near government and high technology industry which has helped leverage political support for the campus over the last 20 years.

Conclusions and implications for theory, practice and future research

This study began with a broad research question about the relationship between state level variables (economic, demographic, governance, political, and cultural) and institutional level variables (campus history, contexts, strategies, structures) in explaining differences in state appropriations for flagship universities. In this final section, I discuss the contributions of my study for theory, practice, and future research. I acknowledge that I am limited by my analysis of four institutions, and concede that more research is needed to make broad conclusions that are generalizable among many flagship universities.

Rational, political, and cultural factors—at the state and institutional level—all play a role in explaining differences in levels of support for the four flagship universities in my study. From a rational perspective, flagship institutions either benefit or suffer from structures or laws which affirm or fail to affirm their status in the state. For example, College Park, by law is designated as the flagship institution, whereas Amherst and UVA have no such designation. Furthermore, College Park’s special status allows it to be compared to *aspirational* peers. Again, UVA and Amherst have not been granted this opportunity. The loss of Appendix M in Virginia was especially detrimental to UVA and suggests that funding guidelines are important in creating equitable systems. An important implication of my study is that securing legal status as a flagship may help ensure that funding for these institutions is more in line with their peers. Just as important, this policy can prevent “striving” institutions from encroaching on this status. Without this designation, flagships are vulnerable to being treated similarly to other public campuses.

Political perspectives are vitally important in the context of this study. For example, in Massachusetts, board and regional politics have thwarted funding for Amherst, since the power base is in the far eastern side of the state. Meanwhile, UMASS-Boston and Lowell have benefited from their proximity to this base. Similarly, political power in Virginia is concentrated in the northern part of the state, which has benefited striving institutions such as George Mason University. Furthermore, in both Virginia and Massachusetts, interviewees reported that competing campuses (Lowell and Boston in MA; George Mason in VA) are more engaged on issues of regional concern as compared to their sister flagships. These findings support other studies (e.g., Weerts & Ronca,

2006) suggesting that public engagement can build political support for a campus, and may translate into additional funding opportunities.

Conversely, UCONN and College Park have enjoyed powerful alumni in the legislature, sit in politically powerful districts, and have had less opposition from competing institutions. In the case of UCONN, a weak governing board helped the institution create its own future. Alternatively, at College Park, a stronger governing board helped it rise in status as the state's designated flagship. These findings suggest that political context is more important than board structure in understanding overall state support for a campus. As for overall implications from this political lens, leaders of flagships should consider ways in which they can best serve residents in powerful districts and become more engaged on important state-wide issues. Doing so may help build political support for the institution, no matter the physical location of the campus.

Cultural perspectives, as seen through the domain of public perceptions, emerged as essential to understanding state support for flagships. On one hand, both College Park and UCONN were historically viewed as "second rate" institutions, and eventually rallied political support to become first class flagships. In both cases, especially UCONN due to basketball success, there was a sense of excitement about creating a world class university. Advocates for these campuses successfully argued that doing so would yield benefits to everyone (e.g., keep the best and brightest in the state). On the other hand, the public in Massachusetts has seemingly never had the political will to raise the stature of UMASS-Amherst. Advocates of the campus have never been able to successfully link to the future of the Commonwealth to the future of Amherst as a top flagship. Finally, UVA is unique in that it has always been highly regarded as a flagship, but due its ability to

raise its own money, it is viewed as being able to “take care of itself.” One lesson from these cases is that it may be easier to rally public and legislative support to make an average university great (e.g. UCONN, College Park), than to keep a great university great (UVA).

The findings of my study have important implications for future research. Most important, additional case study research is needed to verify whether themes emerging from this study are salient in other states and regions. In addition, future scholars might attempt to quantify the themes from this study for testing in large quantitative databases. For example, a dummy variable could be used to indicate whether an institution has been designated flagship status, and if funding is commensurate with this status. My study suggests that this designation may be significant in explaining levels of support. In addition, a simple variable measuring the proximity of the campus, in miles, to the state’s largest metro area, or state capital may be instructive to examine the impact of campus location in appropriations. Similarly, a variable measuring power of alumni or local representatives in the legislature would be useful to include in a model.

Finally, this study shows that public perceptions and community engagement are important to consider in the context of state support for higher education. Thus, future quantitative models might include measures of public perceptions of higher education. These data are often collected by State Higher Education Executive Offices, and in some cases, by individual institutions. Using this data, one could create a score indicating public perceptions about the campus and whether these perceptions are associated with levels of state appropriations. By considering one or more of these new measures,

scholars and policymakers might paint a clearer picture about the complex issue of state support for higher education.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

OPENING QUESTION:

“From your perspective, what has happened in State X or on campus that best tells the story about the level of state support that Institution X has received since the mid-1980s?”

Thematic areas from conceptual framework

Rational perspectives

How have economic conditions in State X influenced state appropriations for institution X, and higher education in general, during the past 20 years?

To what extent have demographic factors such as overall state population, enrollment levels, and participation rates impacted state appropriations for state institutions, including campus X, during the past 20 years?

Describe the mission and primary initiatives of institution X over the past 20 years.

What economic development initiatives has institution X employed during this period, and to what extent is the institution perceived as meeting regional economic needs?

Please discuss campus enrollment trends over the past 20 years and what explains these trends.

What competitive strategies have institution X employed to garner state appropriations?

What role, if any, has fundraising played in determining levels of state support for institution X?

Political perspectives:

Describe the politics of the budgeting process within State X, and explain how it affects appropriations for higher education, and Institution X, in particular.

To what extent has the Governor’s office affected the level of appropriations for institution X, and higher education in general over the past 20 years? Historically, how important have Governors been in planning for the future of higher education in your state?

Describe the political climate surrounding legislative support for Institution X. To what extent has this climate, or the actions of individual legislators, influenced the level of appropriations during the past two decades?

What priority is given to higher education in your state, in particular Institution X, compared to other competing state agencies or programs such as corrections, K-12 schools, etc?

What has been the impact of campus leadership on forging political support for institution X?

What political alliances, if any, have institution X forged with public/private organizations in the state? What has been its impact?

Describe the relationship between the state, Institution X, and the system or board that governs it. In your opinion, does the governance structure of higher education in your state affect the level of appropriations allocated to Institution X? If so, in what way?

Within this governance structure, how does the method in which state appropriations are allocated influence the level of appropriations for Institution X?

Cultural perspectives

Historically, to what degree has the state supported Institution X and higher education?

Describe the current level of citizens' collective value accorded to Institution X. What significant events or historical precedents may have shaped citizen's attitudes toward this institution?

Historically, how has the legislature treated Institution X? What degree of autonomy or flexibility (e.g. tuition) has been afforded to Institution X since its existence?

What campus behaviors or initiatives may explain public or legislative support or non-support for the campus (i.e., community engagement initiatives, high profile "fall outs" with legislators, etc.)

To what extent has university relations activities been successful in garnering state support for institution X? (i.e., campus visibility and public messages).