Florida’s new “K–20” Model
An intensely political battle is waged over controversial kindergarten-through-graduate-school governance structure

By William Trombly
Senior Editor
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

ON THE 15TH FLOOR of the Florida Education Center, across the street from the state capitol, half of the Florida State University System offices are empty. The chancellor has resigned, along with several other top system administrators. The security guard in the lobby did not know that the ten-campus system, and its Board of Regents, were housed in the building, perhaps because soon they will not be.

On July 1, the regents will disappear and the state university will become part of a “seamless” education system, from kindergarten through graduate school, to be run by a seven-member “super board.” There will be a Commissioner of Education, sometimes referred to as the “education czar,” and three deputy commissioners—one for the state’s 3,500 public schools, a second for its 28 community colleges and a third for the ten university campuses.

A single board, made up of seven appointees of Governor Jeb Bush will oversee all of Florida education and its three million students.

expected to sign it into law.

Although all levels of education in the state will be affected eventually, the most immediate impact will be felt by the university system, with its 240,000 students, 13,600 faculty members and $5 billion budget.

Instead of a statewide Board of Regents, there will be separate, 11-member governing boards for each campus. These trustees, as well as the seven members of the super board will be appointed by the governor, greatly increasing his influence over higher education. Members of the super board and the local boards will serve four-year terms and can be dismissed by the governor “for cause.”

The job of education commissioner or “czar” changes from an elected to an

continued on page 14

Changes at “Oxford on the Pacific”
UC Santa Cruz turns to engineering and technology

By Kay Mills
SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF California established its campus among the redwoods at Santa Cruz in the 1960s as an experimental alternative to the megagrowth—the big, impersonal campuses like Berkeley or UCLA. Today, looking at UC Santa Cruz 36 years along, an outsider would say the campus is undergoing delayed growing pains as it tries to develop a presence in Silicon Valley, expand its engineering school, and double its graduate program even as undergraduate enrollment pressures increase.

But insiders here would say that there has been a rolling reassessment almost since day one—about engineering, about the role of the distinctive residential colleges, about the “narrative evaluation” system in lieu of traditional letter grades. UC Santa Cruz always has been experimental, said Manuel Pastor, himself a Santa Cruz graduate and now professor of Latin American and Latino studies. “The question now is, What’s experimental?”

Debate over changing the grading system occupied much of the faculty Academic Senate’s time last year. This year the ongoing reassessment is focusing more on the proposed Silicon Valley center. UC Santa Cruz Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood has put her considerable energy behind giving UC a presence in an area that is producing cutting-edge technological change.

The dream moved a giant step forward last October when the University of California and NASA formally announced a partnership to create a research and development campus at Moffett Field near San Jose. Santa Cruz is the lead UC campus involved in the planning. Greenwood and others are excited about the possibilities for everything from nanotechnology (the extreme miniaturization of technology) and labor market studies (especially among the large Latino population), to recruitment of more first-generation college students who otherwise might not consider UC.

But some faculty members are concerned about planning for the center. They want to know who would teach there, whether a “UC-quality education” can be offered without considerable subsidies from programs on the Santa Cruz campus, and how many students, especially undergraduates, such a campus might realistically accommodate.

The UC Santa Cruz Academic Senate voted in March to ask the administration

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In This Issue

Student Eryn Ramsey (left) and instructor Liz Kaz in a dental hygiene class at Rio Salado College, an entrepreneurial arm of the Maricopa Community College District, in Phoenix, Arizona. (See page 7.)
The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is reviewing the data and methodology to be used in the next edition of the state-by-state report card—Measuring Up 2002—and invites suggestions for improvements.

The Center has commissioned a special committee, headed by David Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, to guide the review. Other committee members include Margaret Miller, of the University of Virginia; Richard Wagner, former executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education; Emerson Elliott, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education; Dennis Jones and Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems; and Susan Hodges Moore, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. The review begins immediately.

Suggestions should be sent to Patrick M. Callan or Joni E. Finney at the National Center, 152 North Third Street, Suite 705, San Jose, CA, 95112; phone: (408) 271-2699; fax: (408) 271-2697; e-mail: center@highereducation.org.
Editor:

On behalf of DeVry, thank you for profiling our institution in the winter issue of National CrossTalk. We appreciate the thorough effort made by the writer, Alexander Russo, in researching and examining various facts of our institution, as he talked with numerous faculty, staff, students and educational experts in order to understand DeVry.

In his profile of our school, Alexander accurately described DeVry as an institution that has been successful in providing technology education with an emphasis on the needs of students. As a multi-faceted educational system, our goal is to provide high-quality, career-oriented bachelor's degree programs in business and technology to a diverse student population.

Regarding Alexander's characterization of DeVry's 70-year history as a “roller coaster ride,” however, I must disagree. Since our founding as a single campus in 1931, DeVry has slowly and consistently evolved into an international higher education system, recognized as a leader in business and technology-based education. The expansion of our campus locations, curricula, degree offerings and delivery methods has been very deliberate, designed to meet the needs of students and employers. Our success, best measured by the success of our students, has grown dramatically over the past 70 years.

The article also referenced a student lawsuit recently filed by three former DeVry students who allege that DeVry graduates do not have appropriate skills for employability in the computer information systems field. Given that this class-action student complaint represents the opinions of only three of the institution’s more than 200,000 graduates, we believe that the lawsuit was overemphasized in the article. Lawsuits that represent students’ complaints are no longer unusual in higher education, and many colleges and universities find themselves having to respond to similar complaints.

Sharon Thomas Parrott
Vice President of External Relations and Student Finance, DeVry, Inc.
to work with its relevant committees on the timeline for producing and putting into effect a comprehensive academic plan for the new center. Part of the hope for a "mutual agreement" would include the chance for the full senate "to express its support for that plan before it is implemented," a polite way of reminding the administration of the faculty role in shared governance.

To understand better this debate about where UC Santa Cruz is going, one first must know where it has been. Clark Kerr, president of the UC system when it added three new campuses (in San Diego, Irvine and on the Cowell Ranch overlooking Monterey Bay at Santa Cruz), and Dean McHenry, the first UC Santa Cruz chancellor, had roomed together as graduate students at Stanford. They argued about the merits of small colleges like Swarthmore, where Kerr had done his undergraduate work, and large institutions like UCLA, which McHenry had attended. "We would always end up after our discussions and disputes saying, Would it not be nice someday to combine the advantages of the big campus providing the library, the research facilities, the cultural programs, and the small campus intimacy among students and among faculty members?" Kerr later said.

At Santa Cruz, they tried to do just that. The heart of their plan was concentration on undergraduate studies, and the heart of that emphasis was the residential colleges.

Each college would have from 250 to 1,000 students, with faculty members drawn from many fields. Each college was—and still is—headed by a provost, a tenured faculty member. Each college had its own classrooms, dining hall and residential dormitories. The colleges offered some courses, as did academic departments—then (but no longer) called boards of studies. The original plan envisioned 15 to 20 colleges and as many as 27,500 students. The emphasis would be on the social sciences and humanities but there also would be professional schools, such as engineering.

For its first few years, UC Santa Cruz was the place to be. But as Harry Berger, Jr., retired professor of English literature who was one of the original faculty members, said, "Dreams are just that, dreams." The UC Board of Regents fired Kerr in 1967, McHenry retired in 1974, the baby boom leveled off, voters in 1978 passed Proposition 13 that curtailed state revenue and thus spending, and neither Governors Ronald Reagan nor Jerry Brown was a great pal of the university. By 1975, enrollment was 5,500; it grew by fewer than 900 students over the next decade. The town of Santa Cruz, once an ardent suitor of the campus, grew cold to plans for its growth.

Veteran faculty sing the praises of those early students. They were bright, willing to take academic risks, delighted to be free of "grade grubbing," and engaging to teach. One retired math professor remembers that UC Santa Cruz was attracting the best students in California, with seven times as many applicants as could be admitted. But long hair and love beads, protests and pot soon reigned on many campuses across the country, Santa Cruz not least among them. Rightly or wrongly, UC Santa Cruz soon was perceived as eccentric, odd, out of step, as many students looked at college as their ticket to better jobs rather than to development of inquiring minds. That, and several murders in the area in the early '70s, caused many parents to send their children elsewhere.

The media had flocked to tell the campus story—Time magazine called it "Oxford on the Pacific"—so the faculty never had to work hard to project its view of this experiment. When the story started to change, people committed to the dream were flummoxed. "The caricature of this place was not this place," said Todd Newberry, retired biology professor. If he had it to do over, he said, he would leap at the chance again to be one of the founding faculty members. "But I would be much more robust about telling the world what we were doing." Changes that began to occur at UC Santa Cruz were reflecting a national trend, "but our intention was to take cognizance of national trends but not to follow them, to show better ways."

Another early faculty member was Stanley Williamson, who was teaching chemistry at UC Berkeley when Kerr and McHenry began to put together the nucleus of people for UC Santa Cruz. Williamson participated in those early planning discussions. Many of his graduate school classmates, he said, have had top industry and academic jobs but "none of them has had the chance to start something from scratch" like UC Santa Cruz. "When I came here, there was not a beaker on this campus."

Retired now but still teaching occasionally, Williamson is optimistic about UC Santa Cruz' future in the Silicon Valley. "It's going to do both of us a lot of good. It's a drag that it's 40 miles away and that there's an impossible mountain in between. But other than that I see an all-win situation, especially since the state is red hot to fund it, and not red hot to fund a lot these days."

Reassessment at UC Santa Cruz accelerated in the late 1970s after McHenry retired. There were several short-term chancellors, then Robert Sinshheimer arrived as chancellor from Cal Tech, where he had chaired the biology department. Sinshheimer saw flaws in the residential college system—what some call the "Nah-ah's Ark Principle" of having two biologists, two historians, and so forth. He moved faculty pay, hiring and tenure decisions to the departments and set about a program of "normalization."

"Everyone felt, rightly or wrongly, that Sinshheimer was brought in to shape us up," Todd Newberry said. "No one was tending to the image. We never attempted to sell the place as truly alternative in the best sense of the word. Once UC Santa Cruz saw its image problem, it apologized," he added. "The campus made a headlong dive for respectability instead of sticking by what I thought we did very well."

"We weren't really as foolish as people thought," said John Dizikes, who taught history for 35 years at UC Santa Cruz. The first administrators and faculty didn't think they were recreating a college at Oxford or the Harvard houses but something that partook of elements at those places to provide "a serious, intense learning experience" in the sciences as well as the humanities. "The audacious aspect was to do it within a state university system, especially a very big one," Dizikes said.

Newer faculty and the current chancellor think the original UC Santa Cruz colleges were not a sustainable vision. "The implications of the residential colleges were never financially costed out," said Greenwood. It wasn't possible to hire people college-by-college instead of through academic departments and maintain faculty credibility. "Kerr and McHenry had the philosophy right but, in my view, they had the financing wrong."

As one professor said, the same small college faculty lacked expertise to hire a physicist, a psychologist and a poet.

Fast forward to today. UC Santa Cruz is...
opening two new colleges, the first since 1972. College Nine admitted its first students last fall, with more expected once additional housing is completed this fall. College Ten is expected to open next year. An advisory group, convened to examine the state of the colleges, reported last fall that they are still effective units for organizing services for students and helping them develop a sense of place at the university. But “their profile as academic units has declined as the college curricula have been reduced and faculty affiliation with colleges has become of less significance.”

UC Santa Cruz has been directed by the UC president to enroll 16,900 students by 2010 to help absorb an anticipated growth of 63,000 students statewide. Its enrollment this academic year is 12,124. The campus’ long-range development plan, negotiated with the city of Santa Cruz, calls for 15,000 students. Even that number seems too high for some in the city and in Santa Cruz County who already complain about campus-generated traffic and the tight housing market. UC Santa Cruz administrators hope to accommodate some of the extra students at the Silicon Valley center, but no one knows how many because the academic plan has not been drawn up. Expansion of summer school is also under consideration.

If people know one thing about UC Santa Cruz, usually it is that they haven’t given grades in the past. Instead, students have received “narrative evaluations.” These written assessments discuss how well a student performed, whether he or she participated in class, how writing skills may have improved, what material was mastered, and where there were weaknesses.

This system is evolving, too. For several years students have been able to receive letter grades if they wish and, thus, grade point averages that some consider necessary for admission to graduate schools, especially professional schools such as law or medicine. After more debate, the faculty voted last year to start a mandatory letter-grade system for freshmen entering this fall. Narrative evaluations will continue as well.

Senior lecturer Carol Freeman, who heads the UC Santa Cruz writing program, chairs the Academic Senate Committee on Educational Policy, through which much of the grading discussion flowed. She likes the narrative evaluations herself and hopes the university can maintain both systems. “We don’t know yet what effect this latest change will have,” she admitted. For their part, students “vociferously and, I would add, very intelligently supported maintaining narrative evaluations,” she added.

Many undergraduates found UC Santa Cruz attractive because of the narrative evaluations and see the latest move as another step away from them. Whitney Owens, a senior from Chico, California, who is majoring in history, plans to go to graduate school in a year or so and is not worried that having only narrative evaluations will make her less appealing to admissions committees. “To the contrary, they’ll have a better view of what kind of student I am,” Owens said, adding that she has never once taken a UC Santa Cruz course for grades. “I’m quite upset that they’ve instituted mandatory grades. I think students will be hurt by that.”

One element of the early days that has survived is the core course for freshmen. It may not be as freewheeling as the famed “chicken course” taught by Cowell College’s first provost, historian Page Smith, and biologist Charles Daniel, in which students examined the evolution of the chicken set against a historical perspective. But it still places freshmen in small seminars in their residential college with the same reading list throughout their college. For example, Stevenson College’s theme this past winter was “self and society,” for which students read Machiavelli and Shakespeare, the Seneca Falls convention’s declaration on women’s rights, and Nigerian Nobel laureate Chinua Achebe, among others. If events in the early ’60s had turned out differently, there might be no need to establish a UC presence in the Silicon Valley because it might already exist. One of the two proposed sites for the new campus was in Santa Clara County, now popularly known as Silicon Valley, the incubator of the computer revolution. However, the UC regents made their site visit on a hot day. They found the redwoods and sea breezes along the Pacific Ocean in Santa Cruz much more inviting.

But Chancellor Greenwood and many others at UC Santa Cruz are optimistic that UC soon will have its billboard on US 101, the freeway across the heart of high-tech land. “The research capacity should have already been in the Silicon Valley,” Greenwood said. “This is the heart of the new economy.”

Greenwood, a biologist, has been the chancellor at Santa Cruz since 1996. A Vassar College graduate, she earned her Ph.D. at Rockefeller University. She taught at Vassar and UC Davis before holding several administrative posts at that campus, followed by 18 months as associate director for science at the Office of Science and Technology during the Clinton Administration.

The idea for a Silicon Valley center obviously did not spring up fully formed moments before the announcement of the NASA link. A millennium committee, established by the chancellor to guide UC Santa Cruz into the new century, touted the idea of forming more partnerships outside Santa Cruz but still within the campus’ designated region of service, which includes Santa Clara County. Silicon Valley had a great deal to offer, the committee said, in terms of technology, business organization and changing demographics.

As the university became more serious about the proposal, it identified a preferred site at NASA Ames, received $1.1 million from the state for planning, and named R. Michael Tanner as the regional center’s interim director. Tanner, a computer sciences professor, had previously served as UC Santa Cruz’ academic vice chancellor and executive vice chancellor. NASA, which will work with the UC system on research in astrophysics, biotechnology, nanotechnology and information technology at the research park, also committed itself to making 25 of that park’s 213 acres available to UC Santa Cruz.

Tanner said the center still faces the challenge of pulling everything together—an environmental impact report, a master plan for buildings and an estimate of accompanying capital expenses, an academic plan and an operating budget. The environmental impact report and the master plan for the center should go to the UC Regents for consideration this fall, Tanner said.

The Academic Senate Committee on Planning and Budget raised some of the faculty’s concerns about the Silicon Valley center in reports last year and this, urging in late January that the senate be “proactive,” and “set deadlines for the actions we expect of our administration at this critical moment in the development of UC Santa Cruz.”

In February the Academic Senate considered two resolutions through which it

### Reassessment at UC Santa Cruz

#### Santa Cruz accelerated in the late 1970s.

Chancellor Robert Sinheimer saw flaws in the residential college system, and set about a program of “normalization.”

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<th>UC Santa Cruz by the Numbers</th>
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<td><strong>Enrollment (fall 2000)</strong></td>
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<td>Undergraduate: 11,047</td>
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<td>Graduate: 1,077</td>
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<td><strong>Undergraduate enrollment by race, ethnicity (fall 2000)</strong></td>
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<td>White—55 percent; Asian American—12 percent; Chicano—9 percent; Latino—4 percent; Filipino American—3 percent; African American—2 percent; American Indian—1 percent; other minorities—2 percent; not stated—12 percent</td>
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<td><strong>Number of faculty</strong></td>
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<td>466 ladder rank</td>
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<td>486 lecturers</td>
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<td><strong>Number of doctoral programs</strong></td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Annual operating budget (2000-2001)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>$340 million</td>
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<td><strong>Average SAT scores of entering freshmen (fall 2000)</strong></td>
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<td>1145 (570 verbal, 575 math)</td>
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<td><strong>Median family income of entering freshmen (1999)</strong></td>
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<td>$70,000</td>
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<td><strong>Source:</strong> UC Santa Cruz</td>
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Narrative Evaluations

WHEN UC SANTA CRUZ opened its doors in 1965, it was one of few American universities to give students narrative evaluations instead of grades. Many students and some faculty, then and now, believed that carefully written appraisals told more about a student’s strengths and weaknesses than did traditional A-to-F grades.

Some years later, letter grades were made available voluntarily to students who wanted to apply to graduate and professional schools but the written evaluations continued. As the campus grew larger, some faculty members thought the written commentaries were becoming burdensome and increasingly irrelevant. After a lively debate last year, the faculty voted to make letter grades mandatory beginning with this fall’s freshman class, although students are allowed to take them if they desire. Some professors’ qualms about the new system, however, have not disappeared. After a lively debate last year, the faculty voted to make letter grades mandatory beginning with this fall’s freshman class, although students are allowed to take them if they desire. Some professors’ qualms about the new system, however, have not disappeared.

The second example comes from a seminar-style freshman core course in “Ideas and Literature in Western Civilization”:

“Although Jane attended class regularly, she rarely contributed to discussions. Eventually she seemed to spend a lot of time in class just chatting with her neighbor. This was a pity, because we depended on one another in class to help us explore and understand challenging texts. The few remarks she ventured were helpful; so we wished she would pitch in more. What a rare opportunity for most university students, and she did not seize it!”

“Jane wrote consistently fine papers on a wide range of challenging topics. She used language to focus her observations and ideas and then to sustain her reporting in pieces that were often marked by shrewd and persuasive subtlety. We wish she had carried her keenness over into class, for it was laudably and abundantly evident in her essays.”

Meantime, a highly visible expansion is occurring in UC Santa Cruz’ engineering program. In 1997, the campus formally established its engineering school, although it already had offered some computer engineering and computer science courses. The original concept for UC Santa Cruz included plans for a school of engineering, but the university dropped the idea when a committee headed by Stanford’s Fred Terman in the late 1960s said in effect that California already had enough engineers. With the help of $7 million in gifts from builder Jack Baskin, the engineering school now is expanding its size and scope.

Today the Baskin School of Engineering, as it has been renamed, has 52 faculty, 159 graduate students and 807 declared undergraduate majors. Its dean, Sung-Mo (“Steve”) Kang, new to UC Santa Cruz in January, has an ambitious plan to expand the faculty to 100 or 110 by 2005 and to double student enrollment even sooner.

There are three areas which UC Santa Cruz is well poised to develop, he believes: information technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology. This work “can make significant contributions to the wellbeing of human beings,” he said.

Another area of change, less visible in bricks and mortar but real nonetheless, is graduate education. That level “has always been an afterthought on this campus until now,” according to Frank Talamantes, who became dean of graduate programs last August after teaching at UC Santa Cruz since 1974. He has the responsibility of doubling the number of graduate students, probably over ten years. Today there are 1,077 graduate students, or nine percent of its spring 1965 undergraduate enrollment. In effect that California already had enough engineers. With the help of $7 million in gifts from builder Jack Baskin, the engineering school now is expanding its size and scope.

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One of the reasons that Talamantes came to Santa Cruz, he said, was the opportunity, at a young campus, to try to change the culture to get more women and minorities into the sciences. A similar attraction brought Francisco Hernandez, vice chancellor for student affairs, to UC Santa Cruz. He believes that the residential college experience helps orient children of minorities and immigrants to university life.

Minority representation in the UC Santa Cruz student body—that is, African American, Latino and Native American students—has gone from 12.5 percent in fall 1989 to 15.7 percent in fall 1999 according to the California Postsecondary Education Commission. In that same period, both UC Berkeley and UCLA lost minority populations.

Hernandez said the university is working with high schools in the region to increase the pool of minority applicants as well as the number eligible for acceptance. To those students who may think they want to stay in an urban area, Hernandez says, “If you want tar and lights and no trees, that’s readily available just over the mountain.” But he thinks many students need to be away from home and that if the university brings them to see the Santa Cruz campus, they may be hooked.

UC Santa Cruz may be at one of the many turning points it has faced since Clark Kerr and McHenry dreamed of their academic “city on a hill.”

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UC Santa Cruz may be at one of the many turning points it has faced since Clark Kerr and McHenry dreamed of their academic “city on a hill.”

William A. Ladusaw, professor of linguistics and provost of Cowell College, said that universities in general and UC Santa Cruz specifically face many challenges today. “This is not a period when we can blithely carry on on inertia,” he said.

Nationally, Ladusaw said, research universities are reassessing their relationship with industry. In the past, universities liked to think of themselves as the incubators of change, but much of the technological innovation today is going on in industry. So a place like UC Santa Cruz must consider how it can best serve California by teaching just students 18 to 22 years old, or by viewing its service to the state and its educational mission more broadly.

Another national trend involves reassessment of the ways in which curricular material is presented to students. Computerized or televised “distance learning” is already changing the role of the faculty member. But one of UC Santa Cruz’ core values involves intimacy—smaller-scale operations than undergraduates might find at other campuses. So, Ladusaw said, UC Santa Cruz also is wrestling with the question: “What’s the warm-and-fuzzy Santa Cruz way to do distance learning?”

A bigger question hovers over all these debates, Ladusaw added, one of basic outlook. “Are we abandoning the past or are we reinventing ourselves?” If one thing is clear, it is that UC Santa Cruz will go on debating this question for years to come.

Kay Mills, a former Los Angeles Times editorial writer, is the author of four books, including one on the federal Head Start program.
Daring to be Different

Rio Salado College has won a reputation as both outcast and innovator

By Pamela Burdman

TEMPLE, ARIZONA

I

If the six-story cement-and-mirrors edifice doesn’t resemble the typical college campus, the interior looks even less like an ivory tower.

In the hallways, inspirational posters extol virtues like “Teamwork,” “Vision,” “Success” and “Excellence.” Offices buzz with talk of marketing to clients, selling products and winning new accounts.

Students are few and far between—most take courses via the Internet or at nearby corporations—but FTSE (Full-Time Student Equivalents, or “footsie”) are part of every conversation. Exact enrollment is a moving target, because classes begin every two weeks.

Welcome to Rio Salado College, the renegade institution that eschews the trappings of the typical college. Rio’s refusal to bow to academic norms and traditions—rejecting everything from the classroom wall to the academic calendar—has won it a reputation as both outcast and innovator.

The dual roles have been with Rio since its founding as the “college without walls” for the Maricopa Community College District in 1978, well before the advent of the Internet added luster to the idea of distance learning. Envisioned to serve working adults and those who could not reach existing campuses, Rio has tried every form of delivery from radio and newspaper to correspondence and CD-ROM.

That those experiments were not always successful—newspaper classes, for example, flopped—has not enhanced Rio’s reputation locally. And Rio’s habit of rethinking everything from the academic calendar to full-time instructors in all of its departments in the country requires a rethink of everything from the classroom wall to the academic calendar.

Still, Rio isn’t growing for most of its 23-year life, and flexibility and adaptability have been key: Not only do classes start every other week, the distance learning format means that classes are never full and are never cancelled.

Today Rio ranks third in size among the ten colleges in the Maricopa district, the second largest district in the country. In 1999-2000, the school enrolled more than 26,000 students in for-credit courses, for a total FTSE of 8,457. The average age of students is 32.

If anything, daring to be different has raised Rio’s profile outside Arizona’s borders—to the point that raised eyebrows only seem to encourage the folks who run the place.

“It’s music to our ears when someone says, ‘You can’t do that,’” Linda Thor, Rio Salado’s president since 1990, said with a laugh.

The laugh underscores Thor’s conviction that she will prove her critics wrong. “We’re always under the microscope,” she said. “Our level of accuracy has to be high.”

Thor then proudly ticked off examples of accomplishments that others didn’t think possible:

• classes that start 26 times a year;
• a “dual enrollment” program that allows high school seniors to take college classes at the high school site;
• an accelerated dental hygiene program that takes 15 months instead of the usual two years—and has only one full-time instructor;
• one of the most lopsided ratios of part-time to full-time instructors in all of academia;
• online laboratory science classes; and
• a law enforcement certificate that awards 35 units of credit for graduates of the Phoenix Police Academy’s 16-week program.

That these innovations have contributed to a six-year stretch of 15 percent annual enrollment growth has helped to vindicate Rio’s model.

Take dental hygiene for example: Skepticism about the quality of the accelerated program was quickly dispelled after the first class achieved a 100 percent pass rate on their board examinations. Rio was catapulted to the top ten percent of hygiene programs nationwide, despite being the only 15-month program and the only one with a single full-time faculty member, according to Jim Van Dyke, dean of applied programs at Rio.

A statewide shortage of dentists made hygiene a priority. The Arizona Dental Association and the Delta Dental insurance company pitched in $1.2 million to renovate a clinic and classroom facility. Unlike most hygiene administrators, Rio health programs director Liz Kaz doesn’t need to scrounge up used equipment.

On a recent morning, a dozen student hygienists dressed in white lab coats were leaning over patients in a state-of-the-art clinic. The students checked patients’ blood pressures and performed intra-oral exams as purple-clad instructors (hygienists who teach part time) looked on.

Down the hall, more students clustered around dental slides, studying them in preparation for their board exam.

Eryn Ramsey, 24, of Yuma, explained that she and her classmates were “stress” about passing the exam, but pleased that the accelerated program would get them into the job market in record speed. Ramsey said she came to Rio at the recommendation of a dentist in Flagstaff, where she used to work as a dental assistant: “He thought very highly of it. The dental hygienists coming from Rio know more about what the dentists want.”

Dental hygiene typifies Rio Salado’s programs in that it is tailored to meet the needs of area employers. At any given time, Rio courses are being offered at some 50 to 75 government and corporate partners in the greater Phoenix area. Such partnerships account for 51 percent of the college’s total students, but a greater number—64 percent—of the FTSE.

Rather than packaging courses and offering them to employers, the college’s curriculum specialists assign college credit to existing training programs. “We can’t do this for everyone, because it has to meet standards,” said Van Dyke.

The Law Enforcement Technology program is a good example. Rio officials analyzed the Phoenix police academy’s 16-week, 585-hour program and identified 17 separate courses—ranging from a one-unit search and seizure course to a four-unit seminar on criminal investigation—for a total of 35 credit hours. Upon completion, that work earns police recruits a certificate from Rio Salado.

Though only one out of 100 police departments in the country requires a bachelor’s degree, college credentials often figure in promotion decisions, a message that was delivered home to 41 new recruits one Monday afternoon this spring at the police academy.

Graduates of the 16-week Phoenix Police Academy training program can also earn 35 credits from Rio Salado College.

Wearing crisp white shirts, black pants and buzz cuts (or, in two cases, buns), the recruits sat staring at a white board that removed any doubt about how to behave.

“SIT DOWN. DO NOT TALK. DO NOT TOUCH ANYTHING,” the board barked.

In addition to being their first day as recruits, this was to be, for some, their first day of college. Others already had some college experience.

Retired police officer Jim Hornburg, coordinator of Rio Salado’s public safety programs, guided the recruits in filling out enrollment forms—and exhorted them to think about their futures. “Academic credentials translate to credibility,” he said. “Patrol is a lot of fun, but you’re going to want to go on to other things, into specialty details. An academic degree in law enforcement looks good in your portfolio. “This is a service being offered to you by your agencies and Rio Salado College,” Hornburg added. “Take advantage of it.”

The police academy pays the recruits’ tuition. Rio, in turn, pays the police academy for use of their facilities and instructors—resulting in a paper exchange. After that, the college collects another $1,625 per FTSE from the state.

The program is important because most criminal justice programs include coursework that is redundant to the police academy.

continued next page

Vernon Smith is president of the Rio Salado faculty, which includes 21 full-time instructors and 600 part-timers.
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demy curriculum, and few are tailored to the schedule of working officers, said Kelly Michelson, director of Rio Salado's law enforcement program.

With an additional 29 units at Rio Salado, graduates of the LET certificate program can earn an associate's degree. And through a partnership with Ottawa University, officers can take another 52 units online and earn a bachelor's degree.

More than 8,000 students have gone through the law enforcement program, and a new agreement with the state of Texas could enroll as many as 5,000 police academy graduates a year for credit by examination. Another eight states have asked Rio Salado to evaluate their police academies as well.

Arrangements like these—along with a low ratio of full-time faculty—help Rio Salado keep its cost per student about one-third lower than its sister colleges in the Maricopa district: Rio spends about $3,209 per student, compared to a district average of $4,733.

The workplace partnerships also fulfill a long-term goal of Thor's to adapt education to meet the needs of working adults and the expectations of employers. That interest dates back to Thor's days in the '70s and '80s as an administrator in the Los Angeles Community College District, where business leaders told her they needed more hands-on training at the workplace—not two-year training programs at the college campus.

In pursuing that mission, Rio Salado flips educational models on their head.

"At traditional colleges, they build it and hope somebody comes. We essentially say, 'If you buy it, we'll build it,'" said Jim Van Dyke.

Rio looks for accounts of 50 FTSE and larger, said Karen Stigers, director of corporate and government programs. Otherwise, she said, "It isn't a win scenario for us, and it isn't a win scenario for them."

Van Dyke, who says he joined Rio Salado 12 years ago as the college's first "salesperson" and went on to sign up the first "client," America West Airlines, is unashamed of using sales terminology.

"It's a very noble thing," he said. "These are the people who make us grow. A student is a serf; a customer is a whole different kind of thinking."

The business model isn't limited to the school's external relationships, as attested to by a license plate on the wall outside Thor's office. "RIO TQM" reads the plate, alluding to Rio's focus on Total Quality Management, a business philosophy devoted to perpetual improvement of an organization.

And, while most colleges never mention customer service, Rio administrators decided two years ago that mere service wasn't enough. They hired a consultant to work on "customer astonishment."

Rio's entrepreneurial spirit and reliance on business models invite comparisons to the for-profit institution just across the freeway. In many ways, Rio has more in common with the University of Phoenix than it does with its sister community colleges.

Both are geared for working adults and have significant online enrollment. And both have national ambitions.

"They're a competitor in some respects and a partner in others," said Pam Felkins, director of operations for the Phoenix campus of the University of Phoenix. "They're an institution that's on the edge. They're willing to go out and explore things that the other community colleges either haven't been given the blessing to do or haven't wanted to do."

Rio Salado's public school price tag of just $41 a credit hour for in-state students is highly competitive at the lower division level. As a result, many students transfer to the university for their upper division work.

"If anybody asks me where to go to get their lower division courses, I always recommend Rio Salado. It's more like the type of learning environment they will get here," said Felkins.

With an annual online enrollment of roughly 10,000 students and growing, Rio Salado is a national leader in online instruction, particularly among community colleges. More than 1,000 of the online students live outside Arizona. Of its 300 distance learning courses, 200 are available on the Internet.

While today most colleges offer Internet courses, Rio's distance learning mission meant that it jumped in earlier than most. In 1996, Thor put the college's 17 full-time faculty members through "Internet boot camp," and then asked each to develop an online course for the fall.

Once known for hundreds of classroom sites dotted around the county in shopping centers and public buildings, Rio has shrunk back to just seven locations, even as out-of-state enrollment grows.

A vehicle for growth is Anatomy and Physiology, a course using a customized commercial CD-ROM with on-screen dissections and lab practicals. Rio officials love to use the course for demonstrations and student testimonials.

Rio certainly has not escaped criticism for having the guts to do science labs online, but John Arle, faculty chair for the sciences, has a ready retort: "Are you still using a cat?" he quipped, referring to the standard practice for lab dissections. "I've replaced a cat in a tray with a human on a screen. At least it's the right species."

That combination has worked for student Matt Zimmerman, a Florida psychotherapist. "Not only can you do dissection, but it gives you computer graphics of anatomical structures," said Zimmerman. "It can rotate them, and do all sorts of things you can't do in an actual lab."

To teach such courses, Rio relies almost exclusively on part-time faculty—another feature it shares with the new for-profit institutions. Adjuncts are particularly common at virtual universities, where instruction is labor intensive.

"It's the emerging model for online institutions," said Sally Johnstone, director of the Colorado-based Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications. "If you bring in someone at an assistant professor level...you just won't generate enough money to cover that salary," noted Jerry Ice, president of the International Center for Distance Learning and provost at Thomas Edison State College, a New Jersey distance institution that employs no full-time professors.

Though the use of part-timers is rising everywhere, Rio has taken the principle further than most. This year, the school employs 600 adjunct instructors and just 21 full-time instructors. The full-timers teach very few courses, instead serving as department chairs—supervising part-timers and overseeing academic programs.

Since its founding, Rio Salado intended to have a small number of full-time faculty. That enables the college to keep costs down, and keeps it nimble.

"If you have a large group of full-time faculty, you can't move as fast," said Dean of Instruction Carol Scaraffioti. "With a small group, the whole organization is a lot more agile."

Faculty who choose to work at Rio seem to like the system. "We try to move forward as an entire faculty and an entire college," said Vernon Smith, chair of foreign languages and faculty president. "At other institutions of higher education...I hear problems like, 'My dean won't let me do that.' It's not even in our mindset. It sounds so foreign."

In keeping with TQM philosophy, Rio Salado provides many services for part-timers that other colleges do not: Couriers deliver paperwork directly to instructors' homes, for example. "You have to view the adjunct faculty as a customer, not as a pain," noted Linda Thor.

That has been sociology adjunct Dave Horsman's experience. "Anything I bring up as a suggestion for improvement, generally it's seized upon and acted upon and in place not too far in the future," he said. It was his idea, for example, to set up a special team to help ensure that students can track down instructors when they have to—a regular need at a distance learning institution.

Despite all these efforts, the lopsided ratio of full- to part-time faculty has been a great source of controversy since Rio Salado's inception. Al Shipley, a math professor in the district since Rio's founding and current chair of Glendale Community College's math department, is among the skeptics.

"There are good part-time teachers, and there are bad full-time teachers, but the probability of getting mostly full-time teachers with higher standards is greater," said Shipley.

In math, for example, Shipley's depart-
Emphasis on Learning
Alverno College offers an alternative approach

By Kathy Witkowski

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

W OULDN’T YOU LOVE to work with people who knew how to, well, work with people? If they went to Alverno College in Milwaukee, chances are they do.

That’s because social interaction is one of eight skills that students at this all-women’s Catholic college have to master before they graduate. Students also learn how to communicate well; think critically; identify and solve problems; develop and adhere to values; consider and respect global perspectives; contribute to their community; and appreciate art. All the while, they learn to critically and accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Alverno incorporates the teaching of these skills into traditional disciplines including nursing, education and the usual array of liberal arts courses of study. Ideal

Alverno’s practical and supportive approach distinguishes the school and keeps students commuting to its modest, 46-acre campus on Milwaukee’s south side.

ly, students at other liberal arts schools pick up similar skills en route to their degrees. But the Alverno administration believes that students learn better when they are aware of what they are supposed to be learning. So the school has turned the usual approach to education on its head: The disciplines provide a framework for teaching the skills, rather than the other way around.

“You’re not going to college just to stuff your mind with bits of trivia so you can be on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” said Sister Joel Read, Alverno’s feisty and passionate president. Read, a founding member of the National Organization for Women, decided education was the way to go.

The philosophy behind Alverno’s curriculum—that students should be able to do something with what they know—is hardly revolutionary. It’s Alverno’s practical and supportive approach that distinguishes the school and keeps students commuting to its modest, 46-acre campus on Milwaukee’s south side.

Traditionally, education has focused on critical thinking and reasoning, said Marcia Mentkowski, director of Alverno’s Educational Research and Evaluation department. “What we’ve learned through our research is that it’s equally important to focus on performance.

“We all understand [the notion of] intellectual development—years of schooling to develop reasoning,” continued Mentkowski. “Now imagine performance development. That needs as much teaching and learning as does intellectual development.”

So on a chilly February night in Milwaukee, Sara Duelge sat at a round conference table and entered into a lively discussion with four of her Alverno classmates. The group had 25 minutes to reach a consensus on a recommendation for an environmental post.

Twenty-two-year-old Duelge favored a politician with environmental leanings, someone she thought “understands the relationship between politics and the environment.” But she couldn’t persuade her peers, and in the end she agreed to lend her support to a woman with a long history of environmental research.

The endorsement was meaningful; this was only an exercise for Alverno’s Social Interaction class. What Duelge and her peers were really doing was displaying their social skills to some 30 observers who sat at surrounding tables taking copious notes. The observers, many of whom were Alverno alumnae, had been given a list of 11 typical behaviors, good and bad—from “leading” to “challenging” to “blocking”—and kept track of how often the students displayed them.

Afterwards, Duelge unclipped her microphone from her overall and compared her analysis of her behavior with that of six observers who had been assigned to focus specifically on her. While all were Alverno alumnae, and therefore familiar with the assessment process, none had ever met Duelge prior to that night.

“We thought you did very well,” assessor Jeanne Maly told Duelge. And the longer Duelge stays at Alverno, the better she will get at these group interactions, Maly added. Maly was Duelge’s main assessor, while the other five observers were just learning their roles. Alverno regularly uses more than 200 volunteer assessors to help students understand what will be expected of them once they graduate.

In painstaking detail, the group told Duelge what they had observed. They had recorded three instances in which Duelge demonstrated “leading” behavior—meaning that she had taken charge of the discussion—and encouraged her to do so more often. They agreed that Duelge did well at “information giving” and “reinforcing,” though they wished she had stood up more for her preferred candidate. Then they asked Duelge to choose two behaviors that she would like to improve on. She picked “summarizing” and “information seeking.”

It might sound clinical, but former students say the method is effective. “I take my abilities for granted,” said assessor-in-training Joan Schneider, 41, who graduated from Alverno in 1998 and is now a cost accountant for an insurance company. “It’s my supervisors who will point out, ‘Not everyone can do this.’ And I think a lot of it is because of the abilities I learned at Alverno.”

Schneider, who spent ten years pursuing her degree in business management and computer studies before graduating in 1998, said the school taught her how to provide evidence to back up her point of view. Now, she said, “When I present issues or concerns to management, they can’t ignore it—it’s concrete.”

Even assessors who never attended Alverno say there is something to it. “We’re learning as well,” said Rod Johnson, who has been a volunteer assessor for Alverno for 17 years. A former manager at an electronics company, Johnson said that simply performing the assessments made him aware that he often took the lead and wasn’t listening enough to his co-workers.

Duelge, who wants to be a teacher, acknowledged that it was a little nerve-
from preceding page

their strengths and their weaknesses. “We believe in criticism,” said Austin Doherty, a longtime faculty member and now director of the school’s outreach program. “A lot of people think that’s a negative word, but we don’t.”

During a recent nursing class, sophomore Carol Strem and two of her classmates were critiquing a tape-recorded interview she had conducted with a mock “client” about his health practices. “Boy! I learned a lot about myself!” said Strem, 42, after listening to the tape. She noticed that she had tended to withdraw when the interview wasn’t going well, and that her voice dropped in pitch when she was frustrated. “I can use this as a tool now,” said Strem, who immediately began to consider a visualization technique to overcome her weaknesses. “When I get to this point [again], I have to picture myself getting bigger and bigger and bigger.”

“Being able to interview effectively is the whole basis on which nurses make good judgments,” said Nursing Professor Zita Allen, explaining why she has her students practice. “If you talk about being socialized into the profession of nursing—then by doing it, you get it. By having [the students] experience this in a controlled setting, we can avoid mistakes.”

Allen has been teaching at Alverno for 30 years—since before the curriculum changed. “In some ways it was easy being the expert on the stage,” said Allen. “This takes a lot more thinking.” It also takes a lot more collaboration. Faculty members must belong to two academic skills she had learned at Alverno to use in counseling, and she meets with him on a weekly basis. “If by doing it, you get it. By having [the students] experience this in a controlled setting, we can avoid mistakes.”

The Wall Street Journal called Alverno “a kind of post-feminist finishing school.” But actually, its performance-based approach feels more like a hybrid of the traditional liberal arts college and a vocational school.

“Business people will say that in a group they can always point out who’s an Alverno grad,” said Vice President for Academic Affairs Kathleen O’Brien. “They’ll often say, ‘She can solve a problem,’ or ‘She’ll take the initiative.’”

Deborah Kozenia agreed. As director of communications and special events for Catholic Knights, which sells life insurance and other benefits, she’s had half a dozen Alverno students work for her as interns. “While all college students these days are more grown up and professionally equipped than in years past, there’s a difference” between the Alverno students and students from other colleges, said Kozenia, who has gone on to hire two of the interns for her Milwaukee office and would have hired all of them had there been job positions available. The Alverno women “have a professional poise” that is noticeable, she said, and enables them to jump right in during staff meetings. “There’s a sense of self, and they’re able to think well on their feet,” Kozenia said.

“I used to think this was a lot of baloney,” said sophomore nursing student Mary Beth Slavick. But in fact, said Slavick, 36, “I’ve actually used some of the techniques.” She is more apt to listen to her children now, she said, and less inclined to block them out or dominate the conversation.

Senior Jessica Kacz, 31, used the social skills she had learned at Alverno to confront an abusive boss. Once so lacking in self-confidence that she almost failed a class due to repeatedly poor self-assessments, Ginster calmly explained to her boss that his explosive behavior was costing him productivity. “Before, I would have thought, ‘You’re being a girl. You’re being too emotional,’” said Ginster, who is getting a degree in marketing.

The Alverno alumnae did well by those standards, too. The authors concluded that the Alverno graduates “were deeply collaborative, sensitive to differences, caring and balanced in how they approached the perspectives of others. They often used a wide range of intellectual and interpersonal abilities to find and solve complex problems. By combining their interpersonal abilities and intellectual abilities in the students grow in confidence and ability—that’s what sold me on the curriculum.”

While most colleges measure the success of their alumni by income, Alverno actually wrote a book analyzing its graduates’ post-college lives. The result, Learning That Lasts: Integrating Learning, Development, and Performance in College and Beyond, offers an in-depth look at the school’s alumnae, based on a study that charted the progress of 356 Alverno graduates.

The results proved what Alverno administrators had believed all along. Five years after graduation, 95 percent of the alumnae were employed; 60 percent were working in professional positions in their area of study; another 28 percent held higher level positions. And 88 percent of those working were in jobs that required a college degree—a significant figure since most of them worked in jobs that didn’t require a degree before entering Alverno. So it wasn’t surprising that 79 percent improved their economic status compared to their mothers, and 66 percent compared to their fathers.

Twenty-five percent had enrolled in graduate school; another 26 percent had pursued further education in other ways.

The numbers looked good. But Alverno administrators wanted to look deeper, to evaluate how their former students solved problems, interacted with others, communicated and expressed their values.

“If we compare our graduates to graduates from other institutions, that would not be a high enough standard for us,” said principle author Marcia Mentkowski. “In general, the public is not satisfied with graduates of other institutions. So we have to set higher standards—that is, ‘What are outstanding contributors to society like?’”

The Alverno alumnae did well by those standards, too. The authors concluded that the Alverno graduates “were deeply collaborative, sensitive to differences, caring and balanced in how they approached the perspectives of others. They often used a wide range of intellectual and interpersonal abilities to find and solve complex problems. By combining their interpersonal abilities and intellectual abilities in
Even though there are no grades at Alverno College, students can fail a course if they don’t prove they’ve mastered the abilities that it is designed to teach.

The college actually has lost student population in the past few years, from a high of more than 2,400 to its current enrollment of about 1,930. It is trying to re-verse that trend by appealing to younger students, with athletic programs and other on-campus activities. Like other area schools, Alverno also has an aggressive marketing campaign.

Undoubtedly, though, Alverno’s best promoters are its students, who universally love the place. The only downside to attending the school, according to Stephanie Duelge (no relation to Sara Duelge), is that “not everyone has gone to Alverno!”

After seeing the changes in Duelge, her boyfriend also would like to attend Alverno. But that is not likely to happen anytime soon. Aside from a small co-educational graduate program, Alverno administrators say they plan to keep the college single-sex until and unless the world treats women fairly.

Students said they liked the single-sex aspect, which they said adds to Alverno’s safe, caring atmosphere. “They make you feel like there’s nothing you can’t do,” said senior Nina Hughes, 21.

Still, according to Alverno President Thor, “Alverno graduates are not sought after because they’re kind, nurturing, compassionate people. They’re sought after because they can perform.”

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowski lives in Missoula, Montana.

Even as Rio’s national ambitions are increasing (the school recently entered a partnership with the U.S. Open University, for example), its attempts to invade new territory more than mere service wasn’t enough.

Dual enrollment is a case in point. Rio was the first of the Maricopa community colleges allowed to offer programs in which high school students earn college credit for courses taken at the high school.

Those programs, now also offered by Rio’s sister colleges, have been criticized as low-quality cash cows for the district, since both colleges and high schools receive state funding for the same student.

“The notion that every student is ready to do college work before they graduate high school—it sounds ludicrous when you say it out loud,” said Gay Garesche, an economics instructor at Glendale. “There was a tremendous drive to see this everywhere because it’s so lucrative, but it’s way beyond what’s academically warranted.”

“You have a bunch of faculty who think this is a sham...that the system is open for abuse,” said Tom Trotter, Arizona State University’s vice provost for academic affairs.

But since ASU has articulation agreements with all of the community colleges, the university leaves quality control up to college officials. Thor defended the quality of the classes, and said the additional money helps pay for faculty development, lab upgrades and field trips at the high schools.

Rio Salado sent 445 transfer students to Arizona State this year, but Trotter declined to say how well the transfers are doing this year or how well they have done in the past.

While the universities may have grudgingly accepted dual enrollment, they could not tolerate another initiative of Rio Salado’s: a campaign to extend community colleges’ tentacles into the universities’ territory by letting them offer four-year degrees in selected areas.

Though the idea was approved by the Legislature in 1997, then-Governor Fife Symington vetoed it under pressure from the universities—a rare case of the University of Phoenix siding with the state’s three public universities.

“The offering of degrees comes at a cost,” said Trotter. “It requires faculty and the resources. The question is whether those resources should be duplicated on the community college level. We felt that the universities are meeting the needs of the citizens.”

Thor doesn’t agree, citing several areas, law enforcement among them, where degree completion at Arizona universities is not easy. “I believe the need for the community college baccalaureate still exists,” she said.

Still, Rio Salado has successfully expanded its role in upper division education, through partnerships with four-year institutions that accept up to 80 units from the college, more than traditional universities.

“Rio Salado has been and still is the leader in the arena with regard to aggressively finding new ways to serve students,” said Sally Johnstone.

The college’s commitment to using business models and breaking boundaries in order to work with private institutions raises the issue of the relevance of public institutions. On this question, Linda Thor has much to say. Educational entrepreneurship, she believes, is necessary to protect public institutions against inroads made by the likes of corporate universities and credit aggregators.

“We potentially could lose what has been a large part of the community college function,” she said. “We are trustees of the public’s dollars and the public’s faith. We will have failed if we don’t adapt the institutions to the public’s needs.”

Freelance writer Pamela Burdman is a former higher education reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle.

RIO SALADO
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ment employs 32 full-time instructors—50 percent more than Rio. Rio employs college-wide—even though Glendale is only slightly larger than Rio.

Leaders of the district’s part-time faculty association also have their complaints. “The leadership of Rio Salado was non-cooperative in any effort we made to contact adjunct faculty. It seemed they went out of their way to make formal contact with those teachers difficult,” said Jack Goodman, association chair in the late 1990s. “A lot of people are glad they’re there because they’re so flexible...but the people who teach for them still have to make a living.”

Warren Mosby, current chair of the association, says the situation has improved only slightly, noting that two years ago, he had a hard time getting e-mail addresses of Rio adjuncts.

Thur, who insists Rio’s part-time instructors are treated as well as any in the district, if not better, understands the suspicion. “If this model is effective, and you project it to all of higher education, it would be very threatening to the ranks of faculty,” she observed. “We have never suggested that. We are a niche institution.”

Fairly or unfairly, the use of part-timers lends Rio Salado a certain taint in the minds of some area academics—and draws additional scrutiny to everything the college does.

Even as Rio’s national ambitions are increasing (the school recently entered a partnership with the U.S. Open University, for example), its attempts to invade new territory more than
I S STANDARDIZED TESTING a gateway or a gatekeeper, a road to equal opportunity or a means of maintaining white male privilege? American public opinion always has been sharply divided. But you’d never know it from the last presidential campaign, in which the candidates vied for the position of most enthusiastic test booster.

In one of the debates, George W. Bush scolded Al Gore for allegedly favoring only “voluntary” testing of America’s students. “You can’t have voluntary testing,” Bush insisted. “You must have mandatory testing. You must say that if you receive money, you must show me whether or not children are learning to read and write and add and subtract…Testing is the cornerstone of reform.”

Now, President Bush has a blueprint for education reform based on this principle. Called “No Child Left Behind,” the plan, which forms the basis for bills pending in the Senate and the House, says that “schools must have clear measurable goals focused on basic skills and essential knowledge. Requiring annual state assessments in math and reading in grades 3-8 will ensure that the goals are being met for every child, every year.”

But of course testing alone ensures no such thing. Because tests are very visible and can be put into place quickly, they often are instituted as the first step in educational reform, before changes in curriculum standards and instruction are put into place. And testing can divert resources that could otherwise be used to implement these crucial changes.

Many states have made testing a centerpiece of their education programs in recent years, only to find that improvements in student learning did not obediently follow the implementation of the new assessments. Alaska, Arizona, Illinois and Massachusetts are among the states reporting failure rates of 50 percent or more on some components of their statewide exams.

Some schools have resorted to extraordinary means in order to demonstrate score increases, including an Oregon elementary school that was acclaimed as the state’s most improved school earlier this year. The school was found to have tested only 55 percent of its third graders with the standard state reading exam, mainly as a result of exempting students with limited English proficiency. Although the school was evidently playing by the rules, its participation rate was far lower than the state average of 90 percent.

Outright cheating by school personnel on standardized tests has been reported in at least a dozen states in recent years. The massive test cheating scandal in New York City, which allegedly involved more than 50 educators, is still in the news two years after it was brought to light.

Testing proponents argue that despite its rocky start, the standards-based reform movement, which emphasizes accountability through testing, will ultimately boost student achievement. The new approach, they claim, just needs some time to work. In the meantime, what could be bad about monitoring student learning? One reply comes from an unlikely test critic—Greg Anrig, who was the third president of Educational Testing Service. Anrig used to say that testing grade school kids on a frequent basis is like repeatedly pulling up carrots to see how they’re growing. Testing, in other words, can interrupt the very process it is intended to assess.

The amount of classroom time spent on testing has escalated dramatically in recent years. In California, which leads the nation in terms of hours devoted to standardized testing, according to a recent Education Week survey, students in grades two through 11 spend an average of six to eight hours per year on tests. And the amount of time devoted to assessment is likely to increase nationwide: In addition to annual state testing of students in grades three through eight, the Bush plan declares that “a sample of students in each state will be assessed annually with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth and eighth grade assessment in reading and math.”

In order to receive their full share of federal education dollars, states will have to demonstrate progress by “disadvantaged” students on the states’ own tests, and these gains will have to be “confirmed” by the NAEP results. (To be “confirmed” by the NAEP results, (The House version of the bill gives states the option of confirming their results with other tests that meet “widely recognized professional and technical standards.”) It’s no wonder that Bush’s reform package is referred to in some government circles as “No Child Left Untested.”

And of course, it is not merely the testing time itself that is lost when new assessment programs are added. Teachers, parents and researchers all have bemoaned the “teaching to the test” phenomenon, in which test preparation drills crowd out instruction on more complex and important material.

In a national survey of public school teachers conducted by Education Week in 2000, nearly 70 percent of teachers said that state standards have caused instruction to focus “far too much” or “somewhat too much” on tests. One teacher quoted at a National Education Association convention last year vividly described the current testing frenzy as an “education-eating bacteria” that is overtaking our schools.

According to some critics, teaching to the test is the primary explanation for the “Texas Miracle”—the large score gains on statewide tests for both minority and white students in Bush’s home state. To see if these increases were reflected in other measures of achievement, researchers at the Rand Corporation compared scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to results for Texas and for the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress—the very test that is to be used to confirm state gains, according to “No Child Left Behind.”

The researchers, Stephen P. Klein, Laura S. Hamilton, Daniel F. McCaffrey and Brian M. Stecher, focused on changes in fourth grade math and reading achievement and eighth grade math achievement during the 1990s. (Data were not available for an analysis of eighth grade reading.) TAAS and NAEP gains were compared in terms of “standardized differences,” obtained by dividing the change in the average score by the standard deviation, an index of the variability of the scores. Although NAEP results confirmed that school achievement in Texas improved, only in fourth grade math were the Texas gains substantially greater than those for the nation as a whole.

More significantly, the score gains on the TAAS dwarfed the NAEP increases, especially for minority students. For example, between 1994 and 1998, the increase in fourth grade reading achievement for African American students on the TAAS was about three times as large as the gain on NAEP. And while the gap between minorities and whites on the TAAS shrank between 1994 and 1998, this decrease was not paralleled by the NAEP results. (A report just released by the National Education Goals panel, a bipartisan group of governors and legislators, shows that the Texas score gap on NAEP held steady during the 1990s, lending support to the Rand conclusions.)

What is the reason for the discrepancies between NAEP and TAAS? The Rand researchers speculated that “many schools are devoting a great deal of class time to highly specific TAAS preparation. It is also plausible that the schools with relatively large percentages of minority and poor students may be devoting this more than other schools.” The authors reasoned that the preparation must have been quite narrow in scope because, “if TAAS scores were affected by test preparation, then the effects did not appear to generalize to the NAEP exams.”

Just as it occupies classroom time, testing, of course, drains financial resources as well. A question that is all too rarely asked is, “Could the money expended to add more testing be put to use in a more effective way?” According to one state testing director, the cost of assessing a child is roughly $15 per year, including test development, administration, scoring, analysis and reporting. Not a huge sum, perhaps, but under the Bush plan, that’s $15 per year for every third through eighth grader in the United States. One testing expert anticipates that the Bush plan will add $150 million to the states’ expenditures on K-12 testing, currently estimated to be about $800 million. How else could we spend that money? What if it were used to increase teachers’ salaries and improve their continuing education opportunities; or to beef up course offerings and tutoring programs for students; or to repair decaying school buildings and expand libraries and computing facilities? Can promoters of increased assessment make the case that adding tests is a more effective use of resources?

On the subject of the “No Child Left Behind” proposal, Democratic Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland remarked, “We’re worried that no child be left out of the appropriate process.” Education reform requires a commitment of resources to the improvement of teaching and learning, especially in poor communities. Testing should follow rather than precede these changes.

Thermometers don’t cure fevers, and testing does not fix school problems. Testing is not the cornerstone of educational reform. Learning is.
Making College More Affordable

Skyrocketing tuitions threaten to place college out of reach for all but the wealthy

By Jerry S. Davis

For the past two decades, parents, policymakers and the general public have expressed concerns, even alarm, that “skyrocketing” tuitions threaten to make college unaffordable for all but the wealthy. However, in spite of these concerns, enrollments continue to rise, and growing percentages of almost every potential student group attend postsecondary education.

These apparently contradictory facts led me to look more closely at historical data on college prices, financial aid and family financial resources for undergraduate study at four-year colleges. That examination resulted in College Affordability: Overlooked Long-Term Trends and Recent 50-State Patterns, a report published by the Lumina Foundation. This article describes key findings leading to the conclusion that, to help increase access and cut the financial risks of attendance at four-year colleges, the federal government should provide more grant aid to lower-income and other first- and second-year undergraduates.

Undergraduate tuitions at four-year colleges started to soar in the 1980s and continued to grow in the 1990s, but at a slower annual rate than during the previous decade. College prices absorbed growing shares of family earnings at all income levels. However, in many cases, colleges offset much of the cost of attendance by increasing institutionally funded aid to their students.

But during the 1990s, it became much more difficult for students from lowest-income families to afford college. By 1997, it took them from five to ten more days of earnings than it had in 1990 to cover “net prices” (calculated to account for college financial aid). Families with median and higher incomes took two to four more days of earnings to cover net prices in 1997 than in 1990.

Because it took median-income families only two more days in 1997 than in 1990, and in 1970, to cover net prices at four-year public colleges, I concluded that the “affordability crisis” for students from families with median and higher incomes has likely been exaggerated by the media and many policymakers. The “affordability crisis” for many such families may be a crisis of willingness to pay rather than of ability to pay for college expenses.

I wanted to know how college price increases compared to student earnings after graduation. Did the significant price increases mean that the financial returns from attending were diminishing? I compared the 1970 to 1997 trends in cumulative expenses for four years of college to the differences between average annual earnings for young college graduates (between 25 and 34 years old) and high school graduates. This allowed me to estimate how long it would have taken graduates to recover their expenses with their additional earnings from employment with a bachelor’s degree.

Since the 1980s, earnings of college graduates have grown much faster than those of high school graduates. Consequently, the financial penalty for attending four-year college without earning a degree rose significantly during the 1990s.

The trends were not nearly as positive for undergraduates who enrolled at four-year colleges but left without degrees. During the 1990s, it would have taken them growing numbers of months to recover their expenses with relatively modest additional earnings. Their increased earnings did not keep pace with the growth in charges. Put another way, the financial penalty for attending a four-year college without earning a degree rose significantly during the 1990s.

Although college enrollments rose, the graduation rates for students at four-year colleges probably increased only slightly, if at all, during the past decade. (One cannot precisely estimate changes in rates at which freshmen eventually graduate because retention and graduation data typically are collected for specific colleges. Many students transfer, earning degrees at second or even third colleges.) We do know for certain that more students are leaving college without degrees—and more are leaving with more student loan debt for their efforts. Even if the students who left college without degrees had not borrowed, it still would have taken them substantially longer than graduates to recover their college expenses.

These findings have important implications for federal financial aid policy and discussions of college affordability. The trends in affordability for the nation as a whole generally are more positive than they have been portrayed by the media and public policymakers. For the lowest-income students, however, rising college prices represent a growing barrier to access to four-year colleges, especially private ones. Fortunately, federal grant aid to such students grew and helped offset a portion of the higher charges. More grant aid is needed.

Grants are effective in helping students overcome the financial barrier to college attendance because they immediately and permanently reduce the charges students must pay. Unlike loan aid, grant aid does not defer payment of college expenses from future income. Students who receive grants instead of loans are not forced to make calculations about their likelihood of graduating and consequent ability to repay loans.

Grant aid reduces student uncertainty about their ability to succeed and reduces the financial risk in paying for college. Grant recipients who do not have to borrow know that if they enroll but do not succeed, they will not be worse off financially than if they had not enrolled.

However, more lowest-income students have had to accept loans because college charges grow faster than grant aid. Borrowing increases their risks and the penalty for failure to complete their programs of study. As risks rise, it becomes harder for students to overcome the financial barrier to attendance.

If all students graduated, it might be okay to give them loans, because most graduates currently earn enough to repay loans without much difficulty. If all first-year students were well-prepared and confident in their ability to succeed, using loans to help overcome the financial barrier could be efficient and cost-effective, because loans cost the federal government less than grant programs. But not all students are well-prepared, confident in their ability to succeed, or graduate. Studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics during the 1990s suggest that four out of ten first-year students who enroll full-time at four-year colleges will not receive their baccalaureate degrees.

I believe loan programs could be more effective if loans were offered to four-year undergraduates only after they have successfully completed their first two years of study. To substitute for the lost loan aid in the first two years, low-income students could receive more Pell Grant aid. Grant aid from a new program geared toward lower-middle-income students could allow those students the financial support they need.

To help cut the federal government’s costs for substituting grant aid for loan aid, undergraduates could be deemed ineligible for federal grant aid during their last two years. Federal aid for those years would be offered in the form of loans (or employment awards from the Federal Work-Study Program).

Using only grants for the first two years of college (called “front-loading” in policy discussions) would reduce the financial barrier to attendance because students wouldn’t have to risk accepting loans when they are uncertain of success. Using only loans (or employment) for the latter undergraduate years is justified because students who reach their junior years are very likely to graduate and, therefore, should be able to afford to repay their loans from higher earnings.

Some analysts oppose front-loading because they believe students would simply withdraw when faced with the necessity of borrowing larger amounts for their last two years of college. I do not share this view. Borrowing for educational expenses does not represent a barrier to enrollment when students are confident of success and payoffs. This is demonstrated in students’ willingness to incur substantial debt to attend prestigious but expensive undergraduate colleges, law schools, medical colleges and MBA programs.

Another charge against front-loading is that students who successfully reach their latter years of college will not be “rewarded” for this achievement by receiving more federal grant aid. If they believe this is a problem, state governments and colleges could give upperclassmen borrowers additional grants to offset the lost federal grant aid.

A third objection to front-loading is that it could affect the distribution of total federal grant aid dollars among students at the different types of two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions. If federal grant aid went only to first- and second-year students, a greater share of the total federal grant dollars would be awarded to students at two-year colleges and proprietary business, trade and technical schools than to students at four-year colleges. This problem could be addressed by applying front-loading exclusively to students at four-year colleges and continuing to award combinations of federal grants and loans to first- and second-year students at other types of institutions.

The primary reason for front-loading federal grants to four-year college students—and not to other students—is that the four-year students will incur greater expenses and larger loan debts to complete their education and, therefore, take longer to recover those expenses from increased earnings. Because they take longer to complete their programs, they are more uncertain about their ability to succeed, recover educational expenses, and repay larger loans.

Front-loading grants to students at four-year colleges addresses the increasing penalty for failure to complete a degree at a four-year college and the difficult affordability issues faced by lowest-income students, because more of their expenses would be covered by grant aid in their initial years when they are uncertain of their ability to succeed. If new federal grant aid programs were provided to lower-middle-income students, “front-loading” could give them relief as well from trying to keep up with rising college tuitions.

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appointed post, and it was thought the first occupant would be “Chain Gang” Charlie Crist, who earned his nickname when, as a state legislator, he reintroduced striped clothing and leg shackles to the Florida state prison system.

Crist was elected education commissioner last November, and, until a few weeks ago, it seemed likely that Governor Bush would appoint him to the same post in the new governance arrangement. Then Crist attacked both academic freedom and faculty tenure within the space of a few days, and now it seems unlikely that he will be asked to supervise the shift from the old system to the new.

The local governing boards will hire and fire campus presidents, subject to review by the new Florida Board of Education, the “super board.” They also will approve new academic programs up to the master’s degree and conduct collective bargaining negotiations, among other duties.

The goal is to provide more autonomy for the campuses and to eliminate or streamline statewide functions. “The university system was run by the Board of Regents in a collegial fashion, with a concept of centralized management,” Phil Handy, the Orlando multimillionaire and Bush ally who ran the “transition task force” that recommended these changes, said in an interview. “That kind of thing is a bit antiquated.”

Handy believes a single board, made up of seven unpaid gubernatorial appointees, can adequately oversee all of Florida education and its three million students.

“It happens in America every day—at Cisco (Internet systems), at Dell (computers), at well-run companies everywhere,” he said. “It’s a corporate model and it works because you define properly what the board does—it sets broad policy, management carries out that policy and the board holds the chief executive responsible.”

Handy dismissed the argument that universities are not like corporations and do not usually respond well to the corporate model. “If anybody has the courage to follow us, this will become the model for the United States,” he declared.

State Senator Jim Horne, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who carried the reorganization bill in the Senate, is equally enthusiastic about the new approach. “For the first time, we’ll be funding the entire educational system, instead of having these food fights over resources,” he said.

Opponents argue that, if anything, the new decentralized structure will aggravate the “food fights” between educational segments and within the university system itself.

Representative Evelyn Lynn, chief sponsor of the super board legislation in the House of Representatives, said she hoped the new governance arrangements would eliminate the “total disconnect between higher education and K-12.”

Except in the field of teacher education, however, neither Lynn nor anyone else has spelled out what might be done to bring about closer cooperation between Florida’s universities and its public schools.

Opponents believe that the new governance structure will mean more political interference than before and that it threatens academic freedom at the state universities and on community college campuses.

“Unfortunately, Florida has had a history of gubernatorial and legislative intrusion” into higher education, U.S. Senator Bob Graham, a Democrat, told the transition task force earlier this year. He cited the Johns Committee, a legislative group that started out searching for links between the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and communism in the late 1950s. Finding few, the committee turned its attention to homosexuals, resulting in the dismissal of at least 39 professors and deans at three state universities, during an investigation that lasted nine years.

“None of us are naive enough to believe that the temptation for political meddling in academia was halted in the 1960s,” cautioned Graham, who intends to sponsor a referendum that would undo the new plan.

Modesto (“Mitch”) Maidique, president of 31,000-student Florida International University, in Miami, said the threats to academic freedom and faculty tenure are exaggerated.

“Academic freedom and tenure are protected by civil rights laws, by the courts, by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and by good administrators,” said Maidique, whose campus has been the target of occasional protests by right wing Cuban American groups.

However, observers wonder how Maidique would deal with local boards of trustees controlled by ultra-conservative Cuban Americans, as Florida Internationals might well turn out to be. Similar concerns were expressed about the influence of the “Bull Gators” (powerful University of Florida alumni) might have on that campus board, or Florida State University alumni on the FSU board.

Education Commissioner Charlie Crist’s recent attacks on academic freedom and faculty tenure have done little to reassure critics that the universities would be immune from political interference.

Angered when Florida Atlantic University administrators cited academic freedom in defending a campus production of Terrence McNally’s play “Corpus Christi,” in which Christ is portrayed as a homosexual, Crist wrote to editors of the state’s leading newspapers.

“Academic freedom is the final refuge in which professors hide when confronted with the absurdity and arrogance of their decisions,” the Crist letter said. “It is a wasteland entirely unmoored from standards, where any activity can be justified…”

A few days later, in an interview with the Gainesville Sun, Crist suggested that it was time to review the concept of faculty tenure, which seeks to guarantee that professors can do controversial work, and make controversial statements, without fear of being fired.

Faculty leaders immediately criticized Crist.

“A man with such a limited vision should not be in a position to define education policy,” said Nancy Jane Tyson, faculty senate president at the University of South Florida.

The governance overhaul began when Florida voters approved a 1998 constitutional amendment that created the new state Board of Education, changed the Commissioner of Education from an elected to an appointed position and charged the board and the commissioner with supervising the state’s “system of free public education.” Ever since, there has been a dispute as to whether voters intended to include higher education or were concerned only with elementary and secondary schools.

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A Ten-Campus System

THE STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM of Florida includes ten campuses. Here is a listing of each campus, followed by its fall 2000 headcount enrollment figure.

University of Florida (Gainesville) 45,561
University of South Florida (Tampa) 35,473
Florida State University (Tallahassee) 33,587
University of Central Florida (Orlando) 33,453
Florida International University (Miami) 30,725
Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton) 29,944
University of North Florida (Jacksonville) 27,417
Florida A&M University (Tallahassee) 19,123
University of West Florida (Pensacola) 8,218
Gulf Coast University (Fort Myers) 3,496
“It was our understanding that we were to revamp the entire educational system,” Representative Lynn said. “The people of Florida had indicated they wanted that.”

But Senator Tom Rossin, the Democratic floor leader in the Senate, disagreed. “I’m quite sure voters thought they were dealing with K–12,” Rossin said. “The general feeling was that the four-year schools and community colleges were doing fine but there were problems with K–12.”

This argument probably will have to be settled in court. In the meantime, most of the changes have involved higher education, not the supposedly troubled public schools.

Last August the transition task force, headed by Phil Handy, was appointed by Governor Bush and legislative leaders to recommend how the change should be made to a new “scrambled-student-centered” K–20 governance model. The task force held several meetings around the state, heard from some experts and, on March 1 of this year, sent the super board proposal to the governor and the legislature.

Faculty leaders say they were left out of the process. “We weren’t involved and neither was anybody else,” said Rosie Webb Joels, professor of education at the University of Central Florida and president of the United Faculty of Florida. “The task force knew exactly where they were heading.”

Although the constitutional amendment called for changes by January 2003, the task force recommended, and the legislature has agreed, that existing education boards, including the Board of Regents and the State Board of Community Colleges, should be abolished by July 1 of this year.

Governor Bush is to appoint members of the super board and the local university boards between July 1 and November 1, but it is not clear how much authority the local boards will have, nor when they will begin to exercise it. Many details have not been worked out and will be left for next year’s legislative session.

The general thrust of the legislation came as no surprise to Bush. He and former House Speaker John Thrasher, a Jacksonville Republican, had sketched out the framework for the super board plan on a restaurant napkin over dinner a year and a half ago, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune reported.

Both Bush and Thrasher have acknowledged that the dinner discussion took place. “The governor and I had a meeting, we started to talk about some ideas and we started writing some things down on a big napkin,” Thraisher said in an interview. “We just didn’t happen to have any paper.”

Bush told the Sarasota paper, “I believe that three systems—or five, if you count the private schools and pre-kindergarten—are disjointed and it is time to have a seamless system that is more student oriented. I think over time this will yield many innovations that will yield higher student achievement and a more relevant education experience for the diverse group of Floridians seeking educational opportunities.”

In effect, the work of the transition task force and the legislature amounted to little more than rubber-stamping the plan drawn up by Bush and Thrasher.

“It was a blatant political ploy,” said Joan Ruffer, a prominent Orlando Democrat who was a member of the Board of Regents from 1985 to 1991. “I think we're the task force recommended, and the Regents have acknowledged that the transition task force and the legislature amounted to little more than rubber-stamping the plan drawn up by Bush and Thrasher.

Since Florida’s state university system has been generally thought to be on the rise in recent years, many wonder why the governance change is being made.

“We asked why Florida is doing this. The answer is pretty simple,” said Patrick Riordan, director of the Resource Center for Florida History and Politics at the University of South Florida, in Tampa. “We had this election and Jeb Bush won.”

“Jeb Bush has been talking about this for six years,” said Anthony Catanese, president of Florida Atlantic University, in affluent Boca Raton. “He has strong reservations about big government, especially Tallahassee government, and he saw the regents as an important part of that.”

However, there were many other contributing causes, including a history of tension between the Board of Regents and the legislature.

In recent years the regents, at the recommendation of Chancellor Adam W. Herbert, rejected proposals for a new medical school at Florida State University and new law schools at Florida International and Florida A&M, the only historically black institution in the system. In each case, the action was reversed by the legislature.

The medical school decision was particularly galling to former House Speaker Thrasher, a Florida State graduate who, many believe, would like to be president of that institution one day.

“The chancellor and the regents alienated a number of powerful legislators, especially Thrasher, who was the most powerful and vindictive Speaker I have seen in more than 30 years,” said E.T. York, Jr., the retired former chancellor of the statewide system.

Herbert further irritated lawmakers when he refused to consider Donald Sullivan, an influential state senator from St. Petersburg, as a candidate for the presidency of the University of South Florida because Sullivan, an orthopedist, lacked academic experience.

“It’s sad the chancellor and the regents are going to do their job, they’re going to alienate some individuals and some groups,” York said. “Otherwise, when does it end?”

Some believe the Board of Regents has lost stature in recent years because of weak appointments by former Democratic Governor Lawton Chiles. “The two governors who preceded Chiles (Democrat Bob Graham and Republican Bob Martinez) made some strong appointments to the board, but Chiles tended to pick his hunting and fishing buddies,” a longtime observer of Florida educational politics said.

Others blame Herbert, the departed chancellor, who was thought to have done a good job as president of the University of North Florida but did not seem to take to the rough and tumble of dealing with the legislature that the systemwide chancellor’s job required. Many critics compared his performance unfavorably with that of his predecessor, Charles B. Reed, who is now chancellor of the California State University system.

“The regents and the chancellor are supposed to be a buffer between the politicians and the academicians,” said a current member of the Board of Regents, who asked not to be identified. “Charley Reed did that but Adam did not.”

“I’m a close friend of Adam’s and I like him a lot, but Adam is a policy guy. He didn’t have the street smarts that the job required,” said Anthony Catanese, the Florida Atlantic University president.

Several regents and former regents said Herbert, an African American and a Republican, was chosen for the chancellor’s job in part because he was close to Jeb Bush. Herbert chaired Bush’s gubernatorial transition team and supported Bush’s controversial “One Florida” plan, an alternative to affirmative action that angered many of the state’s black leaders.

Herbert is said to have argued against the super board idea, but when it became clear that the governor was determined to press ahead and that both the Board of Regents and the chancellor’s position would be eliminated, he resigned and returned to the University of North Florida to run a new public policy institute.

All of these factors, and doubtless others, contributed to what Tom Healy, vice chancellor for governmental affairs in the statewide office, called the “perfect storm,” which blew away the Board of Regents and other state education boards. In their place stands the new kindergarten-through-graduate-school governance structure.

Idaho is the only other state with a K–20 super board, but Idaho’s total enrollment at all educational levels is only 300,000, compared with Florida’s three million students. The New York State Board of Regents theoretically oversees all of education but as a practical matter spends most of its time on K–12 and has little to do with higher education.

“You’d be hard pressed to find a K–20 agenda anywhere,” said Dennis Jones, president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a Boulder, Colorado, consulting firm that continued next page
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t works all over the country.

The transition task force report says the “seamless” K–20 system would lead to better teacher preparation programs, reduce the need for remedial instruction, end the competition between community colleges and public schools over job training programs, and reduce the “mission creep” that takes place when two-year community colleges seek to become four-year institutions, or universities try to add an endless array of graduate and professional programs. But neither the report nor support ers of the new plan offer many specifics on how any of this would be accomplished.

“All this ‘seamless’ talk is garbage, but it sounds good. It’s good politics,” said John V. Lombardi, former president of the University of Florida, who now runs a policy center on the Gainesville campus. “If you want things to be seamless, you just pass a law making it what you want it to be.”

Some campus officials think closer cooperation between the state universities and the public schools might lead to better teacher preparation and could help to alleviate the state’s chronic shortage of qualified elementary and secondary school teachers.

“Floridians of all persuasions are worried about the schools,” said David Colburn, provost at the University of Florida. “I think we can help to mobilize the intellectual capital of the universities to work on that problem but I don’t know that we can perform miracles.”

Some of the university presidents, especially Florida International’s M. Maudique, have long advocated a decentralized system, with more authority at the local campus level. “I think a reasonably independent local governing board, working with the president, will be better able to address the concerns of the southeast Florida region,” he said.

“I think they’ve got it about right,” said Florida State University President Talbot (“Sandy”) D’Alemberte. “There was a big shift in my thinking when they decided to decentralize the power that had been accumulated by the Board of Regents.”

D’Alemberte said the presidents are pleased that the legislation allows individual campuses to increase or lower tuition. At Florida State, that will mean more financial aid for low-income students, he said.

Charles E. Young, longtime chancellor at UCLA and now president of the University of Florida, told his foundation board that the new governance structure “while not ideal, would likely be somewhat better than the system we had before,” the Gainesville Sun reported.

“The failure of the Board of Regents to protect the universities from political interference and duplication of programs in its higher education system, we (the campus presidents) felt the loss of whatever it was the Board of Regents was supposed to do would not be too great,” Young said.

However, Young suggested that there should be a separate statewide governing board for the ten university campuses, in addition to the K–20 super board, and that the new university board should be given constitutional status, as a shield against political intrusion. He also recommended that terms for local and statewide board members should be 12 to 16 years, not four years, as the task force proposed.

None of these suggestions has been incorporated into the bills now moving through the legislature but they are likely to be part of Senator Graham’s proposed referendum.

Although each campus is expected to have more autonomy under the K–20 plan, some observers believe the presidents will be more constrained than before. “They don’t realize the kind of scrutiny they’re going to be under—from board members, local news media and the general public,” said William B. Proctor, executive director of the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission.

A high-ranking administrator at one campus agreed. “If we had a controversial branch of the University of South Florida; and to permit 600-student New College, in Sarasota, to break away from the University of South Florida and become an independent institution.

“It will be intensely political,” said Lombardi, the former University of Florida president, “but what else is new? It always has been.”

Many higher education officials believe Florida’s tax system is inadequate to support the existing ten state universities, much less add more. There is no state income tax, property taxes are moderate and most of the state’s revenue comes from sales tax. With the state’s economy sagging, Governor Bush has proposed an $11.5 million cut in the 2001-2002 higher education budget. The Board of Regents had requested a 13.8 percent increase.

“Florida is not in a position to have ten research universities,” Senator Graham said in an interview, “but we can have at least one center of academic excellence at each campus. To do that, we need a strong central governing board to make those tough decisions.”

Opponents of the Bush K–20 plan are gathering around the 64-year-old Graham, who was governor of Florida for two terms and has been a U.S. senator since 1986. Graham says he expects to challenge the plan in court and also with a referendum that he hopes to qualify for the November 2002 ballot. The referendum would create a new statewide governing board for the universities (probably not called the Board of Regents), with constitutional status, and it would require the legislature to make lump sum appropriations to the ten campuses, instead of giving legislators line-item control over spending.

Graham has been holding “sounding out” meetings around the state, to see how much support there is for the referendum, which would require 490,000 valid signatures to make the ballot. So far, he said, “people seem to be interested.”

Others wonder how much voter interest there is in this issue. “How many people care?” asked a statewide education official. “How many even know we have a Board of Regents?”

“Only a small group of apologists for the Board of Regents support him,” said Phil Handy, the task force chairman.

But John Lombardi is not so sure. “Graham is still very popular; he has never lost a statewide election,” he pointed out. “If he pushes hard, this will get on the ballot and, if it gets on the ballot, it could pass.”

A battle between the state’s two most popular politicians—Graham and Jeb Bush—over a seemingly obscure issue like education governance seems unlikely but it could happen.

Should the Graham referendum be approved by voters, Bush’s decentralized K–20 system would be tossed out after only two years, to be replaced by yet another governance structure.

“We would have a rather chaotic situation here,” acknowledged former Chancellor E.T. York, Jr., who supports the Graham referendum, “but it’s better to have a little chaos in the short term than have to live with a bad system in the long term.”

In effect, the work of the transition task force and the legislature amounted to little more than rubber-stamping Governor Bush’s plan.