Politicizing University Governance
Conservatives appointed by Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani now control governing boards of New York’s public universities
By Jon Marcus

If the meeting in the Albany, New York conference room had been a university lecture, the professor would have stopped to reprimand the class for not paying attention. Half the people in the audience were frantically reading, instead of listening to the discussion.

But these weren’t students who hadn’t done their homework. They were presidents from campuses of the State University of New York. And they had just been handed a proposal for a core curriculum requiring 30 credit hours of classes in ten subjects, including math, foreign language, communications, natural science, social science and American, western and other world civilizations. Even some of the members of the SUNY Board of Trustees, which was voting on the plan that day, had seen it for the first time less than a week before.

The core curriculum was being pushed by conservative advocacy groups and by think tanks including the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, the pro-privatization Manhattan Institute, and the Empire Foundation for Policy Research, an arm of the anti-tax group CHANGE-NY (Citizens Helping Achieve New Growth and Employment in New York), which is closely tied to Republican Governor George Pataki. One of the proposal’s principal architects was a founding member of CHANGE-NY named Candace de Russy, who Pataki had appointed to the board of trustees. There had been little or no input from the faculty.

It was a pivotal moment in the contentious process through which the governor had gained control of the 16-member board of trustees. Within 13 months after Pataki took office in 1995, his largely conservative appointees now control the SUNY Board of Trustees. Pataki is shown on election night, 1998, with his wife Libby.

Trying to Measure Student Learning
Missouri gathers a lot of data, but what does it all mean?
By William Trombley
Senior Editor
KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI

Students at Truman State University, in this small town in the northeastern corner of Missouri, are tested, interviewed, surveyed and assessed within an inch of their lives.

Truman is a “bastion of measurement,” said a former campus administrator. “If it moves, they measure it.”

Freshmen take a general education test during their first week on campus, then take the same test again as juniors, to measure their progress. Sophomores must successfully complete a “writing experience” which consists of writing an essay and then having it evaluated by a faculty member in a one-on-one session. Seniors are tested in their majors and also must present portfolios that are supposed to reflect their academic experiences at Truman.

All of this is in addition to the tests they take, and grades they receive, routinely in college courses.

Students are surveyed or interviewed frequently while on campus and additional questionnaires pursue them after graduation, asking about jobs and other aspects of their lives as alumni. “I wonder if I’ll have to fill out something when I die?” one student asked a recent campus visitor.

“This is an institution that believes in assessment,” said Robert Stein, associate commissioner for academic affairs at the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education. “If you’re serious about changing the campus culture, assessment has to penetrate throughout and it does at Truman.”

And not only at Truman.

Missouri is one of a handful of states with a comprehensive student assessment plan. Each of the state’s 13 public four-year campuses, and most of its two-year colleges, test students in both general education and in academic majors or technical specialties. Some do so more grudgingly than others.

The Coordinating Board for Higher Education uses these results, along with other factors, to determine how much money should be allocated to each campus from two incentive funds—one called “Funding for Results,” the other “Mission Enhancement.”

Missouri does not insist that a particular general education test be used, as a few other states do. However, to be eligible for the incentive money, a campus must use a nationally normed test, so the continued on page 7

In This Issue

AFTER YEARS of financial struggles, Barat College, a small Catholic liberal arts school in the north Chicago suburb of Lake Forest, is merging with larger, wealthier DePaul University. (See Kathy Witkowski’s article on Page 5.)
NEWS FROM THE CENTER

New Board Members

THREE NEW MEMBERS—Alfredo G. de los Santos, Jr., Virginia B. Edwards and James M. Furman—have joined the board of directors of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

De los Santos was vice chancellor for student and educational development at the Maricopa Community College District, in Phoenix, from 1978 to 1999. He is now a research professor at Arizona State University and serves on several national boards and committees.

Edwards has been editor of Education Week, which covers policy developments in elementary and secondary education, since December 1995. She is also president of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit corporation that publishes both Education Week and Teacher Magazine.


James B. Hunt Jr., former governor of North Carolina, will continue to serve as chairman of the board of directors of the National Center, while Garrey Carruthers, former governor of New Mexico, will be vice chairman.

“Senior Slump” Report Released at D.C. Press Forum

Michael Kirst (right), professor of education at Stanford University, discusses his “senior slump” report at a May press conference in Washington, D.C. Kirst urged that the senior year of high school be made more challenging. The report was published by the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
Overcoming the High School Senior Slump: New Education Policies, by Michael W. Kirst (May 2001). This report examines the causes and consequences of high school “senior slump” and presents policy directives that can help American high schools reclaim the academic rigor of the senior year.

Doing Comparatively Well: Why the Public Loves Higher Education and Criticizes K–12, by John Immerwahr (October 1999). The author explores public attitudes about K–12 and higher education, and identifies trends that suggest that higher education’s “honeymoon” with the public may be waning. The report is based on a wide range of public opinion surveys and focus groups conducted by Public Agenda during the past five years.

Higher Education and the Schools: State Strategies that Support Successful Student Transitions from Secondary to Postsecondary Education, by P. Michael Timpane (July 1999). This report explores the implications of school reform issues for the future of higher education.

All One System: A Second Look, by Harold L. Hodgkinson (June 1999). This update to the seminal 1985 report, All One System, clarifies trends, impasses, and areas of priority regarding the long-neglected relationships between higher education and the public schools.


A Review of Tests Performed on the Data in Measuring Up 2000, by Peter Ewell (June 2001). Describes the statistical testing performed on the data in Measuring Up 2000 by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.


Ordering Information: These publications are available for $15 per copy (quantity discounts available). The full four-report series can be purchased for $45. To order, please e-mail, fax, or mail your request to:

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These publications are available at www.highereducation.org. Single copies of most of these reports are also available by faxing requests to the National Center at 408-271-2697. Measuring Up 2000 is available by calling 888-269-3652; single copies are $25.00 (quantity discounts available).
CALIFORNIA FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM DISAPPOINTS

Bright promise of the Calgrant expansion effort has not been realized

One year ago, expansion of the California student financial aid program, known as “Cal-grants,” was being hailed as a giant step toward the goal of assuring postsecondary educational opportunity for every Californian who had the potential to benefit from education beyond high school but lacked the means to pay for it.

But the first year’s results have been disappointing. Fewer students have received Calgrants for the coming academic year (2001-2002) than received them during the last year of the old program.

Under the new Calgrant Entitlement Program, high school seniors who graduate with at least a 3.0 grade point average and can demonstrate financial need, are eligible for a Calgrant A award, covering tuition and fees at a University of California or California State University campus or a grant of up to $9,708 to attend a private college or university. Calgrant B awards of $1,551 go to financially needy students who graduate with at least a 2.0 GPA.

Legislators and staffers say the number of competitive grants should be increased, but they know that will not happen this year, when the state is spending billions for electricity.

In last January and the deadline for the entitlement part of the new program was March 2.

“The (Student Aid) Commission was trying to build a new program while operating the old one at the same time,” said a legislative staff member who asked not to be identified. “Lots of things slipped through the cracks.”

Said another legislative staffer, “There’s a tendency to just put programs out there real fast, without enough time for training people, outreach efforts and so forth.”

5) Communication with the various segments of education, especially the high schools, was inadequate in some cases.

Wally Boeck, executive director of the Student Aid Commission, personally contacted many high school district superintendents, and commission staff members held workshops to inform high school principals and counselors about the new Calgrant procedures. Still, many high schools did not get the message and even those that did sometimes lacked enough counselors to relay the information effectively to students.

“We’re in the process of putting together a much more aggressive marketing campaign” for next year, said Carole Solov, a commission spokeswoman.

Senator Ortiz held her own workshops in Sacramento—not only describing the Calgrant programs but also helping students and their families understand the rules, the forms and the deadlines. They even assisted some families with their income tax returns, since these must be filed before applications for federal financial aid can be made.

As a result of the workshops, Calgrant applications increased by 50 percent to 100 percent at some of the high schools in her legislative district, Ortiz said.

Some colleges mounted their own marketing campaigns. For instance, San Joaquin Delta College advertised the new grant programs in both English and Spanish, in print and broadcast media, as well as visiting every high school in the area. The effort paid off, as more than 600 San Joaquin Delta students have won either “entitlement” or “competitive” awards, with more winners likely to emerge during the second phase of the competitive process.

6) Opportunities for mistakes abound in the application process. Some families fail to fill out the complex federal financial aid forms correctly. Others misstate their incomes. Student Aid Commission forms present additional opportunities for errors of omission or commission. Some high schools are late in reporting student grade point averages, or don’t report them at all.

For all these reasons, and no doubt others, the bright promise of the Calgrant expansion effort has not been realized. However, there is still said to be strong support for the program among both Democratic and Republican legislators and there is hope that, if and when the energy crisis abates and budget surpluses return, that promise will be kept.

—William Troubley
Financially troubled small school merges with DePaul University

By Kathy Witkowski
LAKE FOREST, ILLINOIS

When Erica Van Schaik returned to Barat College after Christmas break, she discovered some unexpected changes. Gone were the seven-foot-high wooden lockers and floor-to-ceiling panding that had lined many hallways of Old Main, the 1904 red-brick Georgian Revival centerpiece of the school's wooded campus in the north Chicago suburb of Lake Forest. Hall doorways actually had doors—fire doors, no less—and workmen were busy installing sprinkler systems. Van Schaik realized that the changes were necessary safety improvements, but still, they temporarily upset her and many of her classmates.

“I came back and it was like, ‘What school is this?’” said Van Schaik, 22, a junior from Wauconda, Illinois. Van Schaik’s reaction may seem extreme, but these days, her question is a fair one. She transferred from a community college to Barat (pronounced “berra,” as in Yogi Berra) a tiny Catholic liberal arts school with an enrollment of 800, because she liked its small classes and personalized attention. She didn’t mind that the physical facilities had suffered from neglect; in fact, she sort of liked it.

“Look at this place—there’s wobbly windows, the floors creak, the desks are from, like, the 1930s,” said Van Schaik, as she gestured happily around one of the worn classrooms. “That was part of the reason I came here—because the school has this unique look.” Like many of her classmates and professors, she was taken aback when Barat announced last December that it planned to become part of DePaul University, the nation’s largest Catholic university, based in nearby Chicago.

Van Schaik and her classmates still can graduate from Barat College. So can students entering this fall, who may choose whether to enroll in Barat College or the newly created Barat College of DePaul.

Some students remain concerned that increased enrollment will cause Barat to lose some of its small-school feel.

University. But by fall 2002, all new students must enroll in Barat of DePaul. The two schools will co-exist until 2005, when Barat College graduates its last class.

The Barat-DePaul arrangement is one of the latest of several mergers and closures that have struck financially troubled schools across the nation.

But officials from both Barat College and DePaul University say that they are determined not to allow Barat to be subsumed by DePaul the way other small schools have been swallowed up through educational mergers in the past. “We didn’t want a Mundelein,” said Sheila Smith, former board chair of the Barat Board of Trustees, in a reference to the way Mundelein College, another small Catholic women’s college, was absorbed into Chicago’s Loyola University in 1991.

Instead, administrators hope to create a new model. By retaining all 33 of Barat’s tenured and tenure-track faculty, and developing new interdisciplinary programs exclusive to the Barat campus, they say the school can maintain a separate identity while still benefiting from DePaul’s brand name and resources, including an endowment worth about $180 million.

“I’m very optimistic,” said Smith, a Barat alumnus who spearheaded the merger, or “strategic alliance,” as she prefers to call it. “We’re hoping to create a unique college here—and that college will be part of DePaul. That’s very different from being merged out of existence,” said Smith, who now chairs the newly formed Barat Education Foundation. The foundation will oversee the school’s remaining endowment, alumni affairs and fundraising for the Barat campus.

A new and temporary Barat College board, comprised of eight members named by the Barat Education Foundation and nine named by DePaul’s board, will oversee the school as it phases out over the next four years, while DePaul’s board will take over the running of the school in its new incarnation.

“Higher education is changing in this country, and either you adapt or you become a victim of it,” added Smith. “And Barat is certainly not going to be a victim of it.”

“We’re seeing an era where small colleges really are struggling,” said Tom Ekman, president of Higher Education Executive Associates, a consulting firm that encouraged Barat to look for partners. “Any school that has less than $10 or $15 million in endowment is in a gray area,” said Ekman, who estimates that about 50 schools have endowments of less than $8 or $9 million, which puts them in “very dangerous water.” Barat’s endowment was under $2 million when it decided to join up with DePaul.

“I think the financial circumstances for many small colleges have gotten more severe in recent years,” said Richard Ekman, president of the Council of Independent Colleges. Private schools are facing higher operating costs at a time when they’re offering increasingly greater tuition discount rates. Still, despite a handful of recent well-publicized mergers and closures, Ekman said, “It’s not new to think that small colleges are all going to be subsumed into larger entities. I think that many—indeed most—small colleges are likely to find ways to not only survive but thrive.” He estimated that only about a dozen schools are “on the edge.”

In general, the nation’s 1,600 independent colleges and universities are healthy, said David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. Each year, about five institutions close, he said, but at the same time, three new ones open. Relatively speaking, that’s not a big change, according to Warren. “I don’t think we have a trend here of either closings or any kind of dramatic increase in mergers,” he said, and added that the issue is not even on the list of his members’ concerns.

But, he conceded, “If you are a school with a small endowment, $10 million or less, and a small enrollment of a thousand or less, you’re going to have to be incredibly ingenious and innovative and flexible in order to keep ahead of the curve.” It is becoming increasingly common for schools—even public institutions—to share faculty and academic programs, or pool their resources to jointly purchase expensive laboratory equipment, computing equipment, and even electricity and health care, Warren said. Some are consolidating “back of the office” positions such as registrars, bursars and business officers.

“The sky is not falling,” said Warren. “The sky has different colorations to it.”

But the sky was falling at Barat. The school couldn’t attract enough students—it needed between 1,000 and 1,200 to be viable—and was doping into its endowment to pay its bills, according to Smith. And that endowment was too small to last long. An all-women’s college until 1982, Barat has suffered from a lack of large donors, since alumni either didn’t have the financial resources to give generously or concentrated on their husband’s alma mater.

“I was surprised to find out how viable the college was,” said Smith, who joined the Barat College board in 1995 and became its chair two years later. She quickly came to the conclusion that if Barat was to remain open, it needed a partner with greater financial resources. “I knew we had to have an alliance that would allow us to compete in a very technical world,” she said.

Barat and DePaul are a natural fit, said Smith. Both are long-standing Roman Catholic institutions that emphasize public service. Barat was founded as a women’s academy in 1858 by the Religious of the Sacred Heart, a French order of nuns; DePaul was founded as a men’s college in 1898 by Vincentian Fathers. Both now serve a co-educational student body with about 30 percent minority populations. About 40 percent of undergraduate students at both schools are first-generation college students.

“What we found was that there was a convergence of missions,” said Richard Meister, DePaul’s executive vice president for academic affairs. Meister recognized that Barat offered more than a 30-acre campus in the wealthy suburb of Lake Forest. It offered an established presence and a loyal faculty, student body and alumni base on which to build.

That is one of the reasons Meister insisted on retaining the tenured Barat faculty, even though the DePaul faculty would have preferred to have had a voice in the matter. “If we were going to be successful...continued next page
from preceding page

cessful up there we had to build off the faculty,” Meister said. “Otherwise we’d still be fighting. They’d be in court. We may never have signed.”

But the task of blending without merging is tricky at best. The upgrades to Old Main were simply the first of the changes yet to come as Barat College transforms into Barat College of DePaul University over the next four years. Officials from DePaul wouldn’t even finalize the agreement until they had begun to sink what will amount to $1 million in safety features and maintenance into the school.

DePaul expects to spend another $4 million upgrading the physical facilities—

It is becoming increasingly common for schools—even public institutions—to share faculty and academic programs, or pool their resources.

improving dorms, purchasing furniture, remodeling faculty offices and installing new technology—over the next year and a half. That’s more than double the size of Barat’s entire endowment.

Improvements to the physical plant are expensive, but they’re far less complex than managing enrollment and course logistics. Barat will keep six standard majors and some of its unique programs, such as community service, arts therapy and its Learning Opportunities Program for students who have learning disabilities.

But Barat’s beloved dance conservatory is being phased out due to its high costs. Administrators said that decision was made before the alliance with DePaul, and that the DePaul administration had nothing to do with it. Nonetheless, the decision, which was announced not long after the alliance was made public, has upset many Barat students and faculty members, even those unaffiliated with the dance department.

“It’s going to make a big difference in the atmosphere of the place,” said professor of English Amy Kessel. She’ll miss hearing the music and watching the dancers stretching in the halls, she said, as well as the discipline and rigor they bring to class, where they often serve as role models for less mature students.

Most of Barat’s academic programs will be incorporated into existing programs run by DePaul, though many of those classes still will be available on the Barat campus.

Meanwhile, Barat of DePaul will launch four new interdisciplinary programs to distinguish itself from DePaul’s other colleges.

“You can be anything except what you are now,” DePaul’s Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs Laura Hartman told the Barat College faculty this spring. “You can be anything except a traditional liberal arts college.”

That’s a tall order, but also an exciting opportunity, said Gene Beiriger, a Barat associate dean, who is in charge of developing an interdisciplinary curriculum in the humanities, social science, interdisciplinary science and leadership. Tentative new programs include environmental science, peace and social justice, global studies, ethics and human values, and non- disciplinary leadership. “If we are going to be distinct within this greater university, it falls to us to do that. If we fail, it won’t be because of a lack of opportunity,” said Beiriger, who hopes to have the new interdisciplinary programs in place by 2002.

Faculty are relieved that the school has a future—and that they have jobs. “I’m very happy that Barat College will continue to exist,” said Lesley Kordecki, chair of Barat’s English department. At the same time, she said, “I’m worried about the changes. We are told that we are continuing, but of course with a whole other set of rules. It makes a difference in terms of people’s careers.”

Kordecki also is concerned about class sizes, which are expected to increase from the current average of 13 students to an average of 20. Administration officials downplay the increase, but “that’s a huge difference,” Kordecki said.

And then there are the transitional difficulties. The agreement went through 19 drafts—mostly due to nitpicking by attorneys—before the alliance was finalized and signed on February 1, 2001. Even so, there were a number of issues no one thought much about.

Throughout the 2001-02 school year, Barat College courses will remain on the semester system, but at the same time, professors also will have to teach Barat of DePaul courses on the quarter system. Other logistical hassles include transferring federal aid from Barat to DePaul and bringing Barat’s tuition in line with DePaul’s. Students will be charged on a two-tiered system: Current Barat College students will continue to pay tuition tied to Barat’s current tuition, which in the 2000-01 academic year was just under $14,000; students enrolling in the fall will pay DePaul’s new-student tuition of $16,500. DePaul also needs approval from the Illinois Board of Higher Education before it can begin offering degrees in Lake County.

“It is more difficult than I thought,” acknowledged DePaul’s Meister. But the long-term gain is worth the effort, he said. “We can’t even foresee the possible benefits of this decision ten or 20 years down the road.”

The immediate benefits, though, are obvious. DePaul already has two Chicago locations, the original campus in the Loop (downtown) or Lincoln Park—that’s what we do,” said Meister. “But to add 2,000 students up there is really going to change the nature of DePaul. It’s going to change our future.”

But not as much as it will change the future of Barat College. Students say that after an initial period of anxiety, they are looking forward to the infusion of capital and other opportunities that the alliance represents. “I think at first there were a lot of harsh feelings, but I think it’s eased up a lot,” said Samantha Schrunk, 21, a junior from Dubuque, Iowa. “I’ve always trusted the administration,” she said. “I don’t think they’re going to allow DePaul to swallow us.” In fact, Schrunk said, “I think DePaul is really going to help us out.”

Still, some students remain concerned that increased enrollment will cause Barat to continue on page 9
results can be compared with other states. Most campuses use either the CAAP (College Assessment of Academic Proficiency) test, produced by ACT, or the Educational Testing Service’s “Academic Profile.” Tests in academic majors include some that are nationally normed and some that are not.

Many faculty members and campus administrators regard the Missouri assessment program as little more than a public relations effort, designed to placate politicians who question whether the state is getting its money’s worth. (This year, Missouri is spending about $1.2 billion on postsecondary education.)

“In the long run, some good will probably come of all this but a lot of it is PR and some of it is smoke and mirrors,” said an official at the University of Missouri’s flagship campus in Columbia, where resistance to assessment has been strongest.

“This is part of the whole national movement toward accountability,” said Deborah Carr, director of teacher development at the University of Missouri’s education school. “It’s beginning to trickle up from K–12 to higher education.”

In Missouri, student assessment had its beginnings in the mid-1970s at Truman State, then called Northeast Missouri State University. Charles J. McClain, president at the time, was not convinced that the university’s graduates were as well-prepared as they should be.

“Everybody kept telling me what a great job we were doing but I thought, ‘compared to what?’” McClain said in a recent interview. “I set out to get the data on how well we compared nationally and when the numbers came in, it was clear we weren’t up to national standards,” he said.

McClain and Darrell Krueger, his dean of instruction, quietly began to put in place a student assessment program that depended largely on nationally normed tests.

“There was no announcement by the president, there was no faculty meeting, McClain recalled. “We just started collecting data and sharing it with the departments. It was a very gentle process,” although “it wasn’t always easy to tell faculty members they weren’t as good as they thought they were.”

The system was “pretty well in place” by the early 1980s, McClain said. “I think it changed the campus discussion to one about teaching and learning, and that was a wonderful thing.”

The president had another motive. He knew that Northeast Missouri State would not flourish, and might not even survive, in a remote, bleak part of the state where population was declining steadily. McClain hoped that the assessment program, which was beginning to show results in terms of higher test scores and better retention and graduation rates, would gain some national attention for his isolated campus.

And it did. Northeast Missouri State’s name began popping up in academic reports and journalistic articles as the “accountability” movement began to gather steam nationally.

“It was a marketing device, no two ways about it,” said Peter Ewell, senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, who has written extensively about assessment. “Charles McClain did it quite deliberately and it worked.” (Ewell is now a member of the governing board at Truman.)

Performance funding, based partly on student assessment, has had enormous appeal for the nation’s governors and legislators, who spend billions of dollars each year on higher education but have only the dimmest notions about the results. Twenty states now tie postsecondary funding directly to performance, according to Joseph Burke, who has been studying the issue for several years as director of the higher education program at the Rockefeller Institute, in Albany, N.Y.

Missouri began to explore performance funding in the late 1980s, when Republican Governor John Ashcroft (now U.S. Attorney General) and a group of influential business and education leaders began to promote the idea. At first, there was considerable resistance.

“This was a very tough ship to turn around,” said Sandra Kauffman of Kansas City, who was a member of the state House of Representatives from 1987 to 1998. “There was a real reluctance on the part of the administrative family to be questioned, to provide data to show that they were doing their job.”

A 1991 report by the Business and Education Partnership brought change, Kauffman said. “The business community made it clear what their expectations were for postsecondary education in Missouri and that they just weren’t being met.”

Although Ashcroft supported performance funding, he provided no state funding for this purpose. But his successor, Democrat Mel Carnahan, did, including $3 million in his first state budget. Robert Stein, of the Coordinating Board for Higher Education, called this a “small but symbolic commitment.”

This was the beginning of “Funding for Results” (FFR), which has generated more than $66 million for the state’s public colleges and universities since 1994. Public campuses have received another $137.5 million from the second incentive program, “Mission Enhancement,” which began in 1997. These funds become part of the ongoing campus base budget; they are not a one-time bonus.

In allocating the FFR dollars, the coordinating board considers not only the results of student assessment but also graduation and retention rates; performance on national exit exams in such fields as teaching and nursing; and the number of minority students receiving degrees or certificates, among many other factors.

Some campuses work hard to earn the incentive money, others do not, but coordinating board officials believe the statewide effort has been generally successful.

“Assessment and this whole process are what people talk about now,” said Kala Stroup, Missouri commissioner of higher education. “Everything is now geared to improving teaching and learning.”

“Those dollars have made a real difference” at Southeast Missouri State University, in Cape Girardeau, according to Provost Jane Stephens, who said the campus has received $6 million in “Mission Enhancement” money over the last four years, as well as about $400,000 from the “Funding for Results” pool.

Some has been used to support “satellite centers” in parts of rural southeastern Missouri where there are no other postsecondary institutions. Other dollars have paid for an intensified advising program, which Stephens said has led to higher grade point averages, and a higher reten-
Man.

Although there are no particular ties to the statewide public liberal arts and sciences dwindling population to designation as a university serving 22 counties in an area of "There's nothing here except school!" large cities, find the combination of Kirksville's small-town atmosphere and Tru-...之城 is 160 miles away, St. Louis 200 miles. (population 17,000, counting the students) "Is it too cumbersome?" he asked. "Maybe so, and we're always looking for ways to improve it, but people here feel the whole concept of assessment has brought us to the national table. It's been very good for this university.

Ninety miles south of Kirksville, on the 23,000-student University of Missouri campus in Columbia, there has been considerable resistance to the state assessment program. There are relatively few complaints about tests in subject majors, or in professional fields like nursing and teaching, but few faculty members or administrators have much confidence in the tests that are used to measure an undergraduate's knowledge in general education courses.

"In a research university like this, there's a real frustration" with using nationally normed tests to assess student performance, said Associate Provost Lori Franz. "We think we do much more than can be assessed in a multiple-choice test."

"The faculty culture is a little stronger here," said Gary Pike, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs. "If you tell them to do something, they'll resent it and re-fuse to do it."

Faculty members also feared assessment results would be used to take money away from the Columbia campus and give it to more cooperative institutions.

Administrators were not keen on assessment either. In a 1994 letter to the state coordinating board, Charles Kiesler, then the campus chancellor, described the approach as "basically flawed."

Taking their cue from the administration and faculty, students stayed away from the assessment tests in droves, despite lures that included free pizza, graduation gowns and even cash.

Over the years, this recalcitrance cost the Columbia campus at least $1 million in state incentive money (some say much more) and won few friends in the legislature.

Richard Wallace, who became chancellor in 1997, and Provost Brady Deaton decided to try to find a way to cooperate with the state program while not alienating the faculty. Deaton turned the problem over to Lori Franz, who was a professor of management before moving into the administration.

Reading the coordinating board regulations, Franz discovered that the campus could comply with the mandate by testing students on just one part of the CAAP general education test, instead of insisting that students devote four hours on a Saturday morning to taking all four parts.

The test is now given during a single 50-minute period, without advance notice (so students won't skip class that day) and, Franz said, "Ninety-five percent of the undergraduates now take it."

"That was a brilliant stroke," said Gil Porter, director of the campus general education assessment tests. "To me, assessment is the outcome," she said. "Did our students go to graduate and professional schools? Did somebody light their intellectual fires? Do they get good jobs? Are they valuable citizens? Those are the things that count."

Student assessment has gained greater acceptance at Southeast Missouri State University, a 9,000-student campus serving 25 counties in the region where five states (Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee) come together along the Mississippi River.

"It really has become part of the campus culture," said Provost Jane Stephens. "I think we have real buy-in on this campus."

This was not always so. "I was a faculty member here when Governor Ashcroft first talked about assessment," Stephens said. "I thought he was the devil incarnate and so did many others."

Tony Duben, chairman of the computer science department, recalled that "it came from Jefferson City (the state capital) and was seen as one of those mandates from the top...Most departments did not consider it a high priority."

But "there's been a gradual acceptance..."
of the idea of assessment,” said Rusty Curtis, professor of education and former chair of the campus assessment committee. “Some departments still don’t see the value of it and don’t take it seriously but most do, I think.”

The current campus administration certainly takes it seriously. “The allocation of resources and other major decisions are being made in part on assessment outcomes,” Provost Stephens said.

Southeast is not happy about the quality of the nationally normed tests that are mandated by the state coordinating board and would prefer to design its own. Campus officials are especially critical of the multiple-choice general education tests, which sometimes are several years old and do not, they say, adequately test a student’s reading and critical thinking skills.

“We need to have assessments that make sense to faculty members and department chairs,” said Vice Provost Dennis Holt. “Many of them think nationally normed exams are simply ineffective.”

Questions about the adequacy of national tests present a problem in Missouri, as they do in many other states.

Other tests have been developed that some experts consider to be better measurements of student reading and critical thinking. For example, in the late 1980s, Educational Testing Service developed the “College Outcomes Program” for the state of New Jersey, part of which required students to read and analyze a passage, then write several short essays about it. But the test was expensive because it could not be scanned by machine—each test had to be read individually. After three years, in the midst of a budget crunch, New Jersey dropped the program.

Another problem in Missouri and elsewhere is that some campuses collect vast amounts of student assessment data but then don’t use it to improve either the curriculum or methods of instruction.

“Are we testing for accountability—so we’ll look good to some governor or legislative committee—or for improvement?” asked a University of Missouri faculty member. “I can’t see that much of the information we gather is being put to good use.”

“It’s both,” Robert Stein responded. “If you’re continuously improving, and you can demonstrate it, then you’re also being accountable.”

However flawed the efforts to measure student learning might be, there seems little doubt that they will continue. The movement for accountability, for higher standards and high stakes testing, has preoccupied elementary and secondary schools in recent years, almost certainly will sweep through public higher education as well. Politicians, accrediting agencies and governing boards all are demanding proof that college students are actually learning something.

In 1982, in need of money, Barat went through another radical change when it began accepting male students.

“That was really a shock,” said Hettich. “I can still remember how unhappy many of our alumns were. Some of our students thought that was the end of their education.”

It wasn’t, and the alliance with DePaul won’t be, either, Hettich said. “We are not dead. We have changed radically again to survive and offer our students education.”

And that’s exactly the point, said Sheila Smith, the former Barat College board chair. “If ‘It’s the students, stupid!’ said Smith—playing off a well-known Clinton-era campaign slogan—"then I’m convinced we did the right thing.”

But in the end, Smith said only time will tell. “I will be thrilled if four years from now you are interviewing me and saying, ‘You were right.’”

A lone student in the library during Barat College’s last days as an independent campus. After acquiring Barat, DePaul University plans to spend several million dollars on upgrading its physical facilities.

From page 6

to lose some of its small-school feel. “I have pretty much mixed feelings about it,” said Silas Betten, president of Barat’s student government. He credits Barat with showing him the value of an education after he flunked out of Merrimack College in Massachusetts, which he was attending on a basketball scholarship.

“You can’t hide here. That’s the good thing about Barat,” said Betten, a 25-year-old senior who said he never expected to get involved with anything other than basketball. These days, he often lunches with his professors, an opportunity he hopes won’t be lost as enrollment increases.

Another potential danger of a merger is the possibility of losing alumni support. But Barat alumni are overwhelmingly in favor of the Barat-DePaul deal, said Catherine Miserendino, director of alumni relations. “They realize that the DePaul administration is very sensitive to our identity and the Sacred Heart mission and core values,” she said. “I see my job being only enhanced.”

Through the Barat Education Foundation, alumni still will be able to support the Barat campus and programs.

“We want the feeling and spirit of Barat to continue,” said Rosalind Hodgkins, who was one of Barat’s numerous non-traditional students when she returned to school as an adult and graduated in 1983. “I don’t want this to become just a campus satellite of DePaul,” said Hodgkins, who is often back on campus because her alumni book group meets regularly at the school.

There is no question that the alliance is a huge turning point for the school. But Paul Hettich, a professor of psychology who has taught at Barat since 1970, is quick to point out that it’s not the first time the school has adapted to changes in the educational marketplace. Prior to 1970, Barat had a “convent-school image,” and its students were generally white, wealthy girls aged 18 to 21, said Hettich. But in 1969, the operations were turned over to a lay board, and by the mid-70s, Barat had begun to reach out to non-traditional—and non-white—students: often married or divorced women with children who came for Barat’s new nursing and education programs.
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Now consider the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). In February 2001, the president of

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elimination of the SAT as a criterion for admission to the university. According to him, reliance on test scores is “not compatible with the American view on how merit should be defined and opportunities distributed.” Moving away from quantifying admissions standards by scores, he said, “will help all students, especially low-income and minority students, determine their own educational destinies.”

Although score disparities among socioeconomic and ethnic groups received only a whisper of a mention in Atkinson’s speech, these well-known score gaps featured prominently in the reverberating reactions to his proposal. In The Chronicle of Higher Education, for example, test critic Alfie Kohn suggested that the verbal section of the SAT, which includes some difficult vocabulary, merely measures “the size of students’ houses.” “Call it the Volvo effect,” said journalist Peter Sacks, “a boost that peaks out at the highest levels of family income. Being white, on average, confers an extra 200-point advantage over a black test-taker.” These remarks echo a recurring theme in discussions of standardized admissions tests—the idea that test scores vary across socioeconomic and ethnic groups because of some intrinsic property of the tests—either their content or their susceptibility to pricey test coaching.

It is indisputable that SAT scores vary among socioeconomic and ethnic groups. College Board data from 1997 show that the average combined SAT score (math score plus verbal score) for college-bound seniors whose families earned less than $20,000 was 908. The SAT average increased steadily with family income, reaching 1132 for students whose families earned over $100,000. And in 2000, the spread between the highest- and lowest-scoring ethnic groups was 95 points on the verbal section of the SAT and 140 points on the math section.

The 1995 National Center for Education Statistics study also found that SAT scores were strongly related to both socioeconomic status (SES) and race. Thirty-two percent of the high-SES students versus nine percent of the low-SES group were found to have combined SAT scores of at least 1100. And the percentage of students with SAT scores this high was largest for Asian Americans (28 percent), followed by whites (25 percent), Latinos (eight percent) and African Americans (three percent).

It is just these sorts of findings that have led test critics to claim, as did the watchdog group FairTest, that “the SAT is very effective at eliminating academically promising minority (and low-income) students…” The National Center for Education Statistics study provides an unusually good opportunity to examine this charge. A close look at the results shows that for each ethnic group, the percentage meeting the GPA standard is strikingly similar to the percentage satisfying the SAT criterion. Twenty-nine percent of Asian Americans met the GPA standard, 28 percent met the SAT standard; four percent of African Americans met the GPA standard, three percent met the SAT standard, and so on. What the GPA and the SAT have in common, of course, is that they are indexes of previous achievement and, therefore, reflect past inequalities in educational opportunity. In a recent analysis of the achievement gap which appeared in The Nation, Harvard professor Pedro Noguera and co-author Antwi Akom made the point that “explaining why poor children of color perform comparatively less well in school is relatively easy: Consistently, such children are educated in schools that are woefully inadequate on most measures of quality and funding. This is particularly true in economically depressed urban areas, where bad schools are just one of many obstacles with which poor people must contend.”

What, then, do these findings say about the likely effect on campus diversity of abandoning the SAT as an admissions criterion? The best evidence comes from the University of California. This very topic was addressed in a December 1997 report issued by the university president’s office, based on supplementary analyses of data from a study conducted by the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Transcripts, test scores and background information from a random sample of more than 15,000 students who graduated from California public high schools in 1996 were analyzed to determine the effect of applying various admissions criteria. In particular, the study considered the impact of eliminating standardized admissions test requirements on the rates of UC eligibility, which at that time was based on the completion of certain college preparatory courses. GPA for those courses, and, if the GPA were below a certain level, scores on the SAT or ACT. (Students who are judged UC-eligible are then subject to the admissions criteria of the individual UC campuses.)

The study’s conclusion was surprising to some: Elimination of the admissions test requirement, when combined with other mandated features of UC admissions policy, would produce very small changes in the eligibility rates for Latinos (from 3.8 percent to four percent), African Americans (from 2.8 percent to 2.3 percent) and Asian Americans (from 30 percent to 29 percent). The largest change would be an increase in the eligibility rate for whites (from 12.7 percent to 14.8 percent).

The minimal change in the predicted eligibility rates for African American and Latino
students in the California study is less remarkable in light of the finding that “low test scores rarely are the only reason for a student's ineligibility.” In fact, fewer than three percent of California public high school graduates were ineligible solely on the basis of inadequate admissions test scores. (It is perhaps ironic that this key piece of information comes from the office of the same university president who has become an instant hero of the anti-SAT movement.)

Most students—63 percent of graduates overall—were ineligible because they had major course omissions or grade deficiencies, or because they attended “schools that did not have a college preparatory curriculum approved by the University.” The percentage of students in this ineligibility category was much higher for African Americans (77 percent) and Latinos (74 percent) than for whites (59 percent) and Asian Americans (59 percent).

So, if we were to condemn any admissions criterion that varied among ethnic and socioeconomic groups, we’d have to cross high school grades and course background off our list along with test scores. It’s a sad reality that educational disparities in our country make it unlikely that we could find any reasonable measure of educational achievement that was unrelated to ethnic or socioeconomic status. Disparities in high school grades, admissions test scores and course background are reflections of the same educational system with all its flaws and inequities.

What are the implications of this situation for admissions policy? First, any policy that relies heavily on traditional evidence of past academic achievement—whether it be test scores, grades or course completion—will tend to perpetuate societal inequities. So, in the short term, attaining campus diversity requires an admissions system that places significant weight on other factors. Of course, the most effective means of achieving ethnic diversity is through explicit affirmative action programs, but this is no longer legally possible in many parts of our country.

We need flexible admissions policies that allow for the inclusion of a wide range of student characteristics. Among the student attributes that warrant further investigation are motivation, perseverance and “spike talents” in particular areas. Such factors are already considered at many schools, but we need more research to determine how best to measure these characteristics and to assess their predictive value.

Second, the focus in the longer term must be on improving K–12 education for all students. The evidence of inequalities in academic preparation among ethnic and income groups is overwhelming. These achievement gaps are not surprising in light of the enormous variation in the quality of K–12 education across districts and states, as reflected in teacher-pupil ratios, teachers’ educational level and years of experience, and school resources. According to an Education Week survey, for example, state per-pupil expenditures for 1999 ranged from about $4,000 to about $8,700, after adjustment for regional cost differences. Even more striking is the range in spending among districts within a state, which exceeded $3,000 in several states, according to 1997 calculations.

Finally, although public scrutiny of high-stakes tests is certainly appropriate, we don’t need to point to the difficulty of vocabulary questions or to the cost of test coaching to explain the differences in SAT results among ethnic and income groups. While ignoring test score disparities would be unforgivably irresponsible, attributing the score gap to an inherent property of tests has its own dangers—the diversion of time, energy, editorial space, and resources that could otherwise be used toward the improvement of educational opportunity for all children.  

Rebecca Zwick is a professor of education at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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**Professorial Prose Why do they write like that?**

By Todd Sallo

A **DOONESBURY CARTOON** from 1972, when most of the characters were still in college, shows Zonker Harris working feverishly on a typewriter: “Man, have I got a lot of papers due,” he laments.

Mike Doonesbury reads some of Zonker’s work-in-progress: “Most problems, like answers, have finite resolutions. The basis for these resolutions contains many of the ambiguities which conditional man daily struggles with. Accordingly, most problematic solutions are fallible. Mercifully, all else fails; conversely, hope lies in a myriad of polemics…”

Mike asks, “Which paper is this?”


On the surface, this is a satire on students who grind out essays or term papers at the last minute and, having little or nothing to say about the topic, inflate their work with airy platitudes. But it also makes a more general point about the tendency of academic writing to seem overly complex, if not downright incomprehensible.

Zonker’s essay is virtually indistinguishable from a good deal of published material. In fact, compared to some professorial prose, it’s actually pretty good.

Why do writers in higher education insist on using a thousand words where a hundred would suffice? Where do they get their ideas for what constitutes a full essay? Why do they use the philosophical and literary jargon that Confucius himself might be hard-pressed to understand?

In the culture of academia, writing that is too accessible, especially to non-specialists, often is considered suspect.

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**Why do writers in higher education insist on using a thousand words where a hundred would suffice?**

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“Emporer's New Clothes,” no one wants to be the first to admit that he doesn’t get it.

Trying to make sense of such works can be the bane of college students’ existence (or maybe even a rite of passage). But for those who will not be tested on the material, it can be quite entertaining.

Some have actually made a game of it. For instance, the scholarly journal *Philosophy and Literature* sponsors an annual “Bad Writing Contest” celebrating “the most stylistically lamentable passages found in scholarly books and articles published in the last few years.” The journal’s editors caution that “entries must be non-ironic, from serious, published academic journals or books. Deliberate parody cannot be allowed in a field where unintended self-parody is so widespread.”

A recent first-prize winner in the contest was Judith Butler, a Guggenheim Fellowship-winning professor of rhetoric and comparative literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Professor Butler’s first-prize sentence appears in “Further Reflections on the Conversations of Our Time,” an article in the scholarly journal *Diacritics* (1997): “The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.”

Stung by the dubious honor of winning a bad writing contest, Butler wrote a blistering opinion piece for *The New York Times* in which, if nothing else, she proved that she is capable of writing intelligibly. Later, in a letter to the editors of the *London Review of Books*, she argued that if her prose is hard to read, that is because she refuses to confine herself to “writing introductory primers” dominated by the “truisms which, now fully commodified as ‘radical theory,’ pass as critical thinking.”

Perhaps Butler would accept this paragraph, from Roy Bhaskar’s *Plato etc: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (Verso, 1994), as legitimate critical thinking:

Indeed dialectical critical realism may be seen under the aspect of Foucauldian strategic reversal—of the unhy the trinity of Parmenidean/Platonic/Aristotelian provenance; of the Cartesian-Lockean-Humean-Kantian paradigm, of foundationalisms (in practice, fideistic foundationalism) and irrationalisms (in practice, capricious exercises of the will-to-power or some other ideological and/or psychosomatically buried source) new and old alike; of the primordial failing of western philosophy, ontological monovalue, and its close ally, the epistemic failure with its ontic dual; of the analytic problematic laid down by Plato, which Hegel served only to...
replicate in his actualist monovalent analytic reinstatement in transfigurative reconciling dialectical connection, while in his husbantic claims for absolute idealism he inaugurated the Comtean, Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean eclipses of reason, replicating the fundamentals of positivism through its transmutation route to the supercriticality of a Baudrillard.

That entire passage is only one sentence. And, believe it or not, a blurb on the book jacket boasts that this is “Bhaskar’s most accessible book to date.”

Finally, here is a paragraph excerpted from D.G. Leahy's *Matter the Body Itself* (State University of New York Press, 1996) that is utterly unintelligible:

Total presence breaks on the univocal predication of the exterior absolute the absolute existent of that of which it is not possible to univocally predicate an outside, while the equivocal predication of the outside of the absolute exterior is possible of that of which the reality so predicated is not the reality, viz., of the dark of the self, the identity of which is not outside the absolute identity of the outside, which is to say that the equivocal predication of identity is possible of the self-identity which is not identity, while identity is univocally predicated of the limit to the darkness, of the limit of the reality of the self). This is the real exteriority of the absolute outside: the reality of the absolutely unconditioned absolute outside univocally predicated of the dark: the light univocally predicated of the darkness: the shining of the light univocally predicated of the limit of the darkness: actuality univocally predicated of the other of self-identity: existence univocally predicated of the absolutely unconditioned other of the self. The precision of the shining of the light breaking the dark is the other-identity of the light. The precision of the absolutely minimum transcendence of the dark is the light itself: the absolutely unconditioned exteriority of existence for the first time/ the absolutely facial identity of existence/ the proportion of the new creation sans depth/ the light itself *ex nihilo*: the dark itself univocally identified, i.e., not self-identity identity itself equivocally, not the dark itself equivocally, in “self-alienation,” not “self-identity, itself in self-alienation” “released” in and by “otherness,” and “actual other;” “itself,” not the abnormal inversion of the light, the reality of the darkness equivocally, absolute identity equivocally predicated of the self-alienation equivocally predicated of the dark (the reality of this darkness the other-covering of identity which is the identification person-self).

M.J. Devaney, an editor at the University of Nebraska Press, described Leahy's book as “absolutely, unequivocally incomprehensible.”

There are more examples—a lot more. Even the most cursory research into academic writing reveals a treasure trove of ramblings just like these. It is hard to imagine how anyone, even the most seasoned and brilliant expert in these fields of study, could make heads or tails out of some of this stuff. If these ideas are so deep and significant, don’t they deserve a more accessible presentation?

Gerald Graff, an associate dean at the University of Illinois, discusses what he calls “the myth of academic difficulty,” in a recent essay for *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. Graff describes this as “one of the most pervasive beliefs in our culture—one that is found among academics and nonacademics alike…They evidently assume that, like modern poetry as famously described by T.S. Eliot in 1921, serious scholarship must be difficult.” Many graduate students, according to Graff, firmly believe that a certain amount of obfuscation in their writing is “a prerequisite for professional success.”

Graff goes on to relate a story about a recent symposium sponsored by the University of Chicago that addressed questions about the extent to which academic writing should be accessible to the general public. When one of the speakers was asked why academics often fail to explain “the gist” of their research, he replied, “We’re not in the gist business.”

In the field of journalism, of course, a different approach to writing prevails. Journalism thrives on the gist of things, and it is obsessed with clarity. A common bit of advice often given to young writers in the field is: First, tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em; then tell ‘em; then tell ‘em what you told ‘em.

This approach is, of course, no panacea. It has produced racks of tabloids with ten-inch headlines, and some detractors charge that the popular media have devolved into little more than a series of empty “sound bites.” Some academics feel that journalistic writing is responsible for a “dumbing down” of our culture.

But is there no middle ground? Must academic writers choose between these two artificial extremes: impenetrable complexity on the one hand, and simplistic banality on the other?

Even some of the most challenging academic discourse could be improved by the addition of encapsulations. In fact, some of the most well-known works of philosophy and science were made memorable, at least in part, by a famous attendant sound bite: “I think, therefore I am,” “History is written by the winners,” “E=MC^2,” and “God is dead,” for example.

Because sound bites are associated with popular culture, however, many academics are loath to use them, or any reductive passages, in their work. “Reductive,” according to Graff, “is felt to be just about the worst charge—this side of an accusation of plagiarism or sexual harassment—that can be leveled against an academic author.”

In that climate, the academic predilection toward complexity is likely to continue unabated. And the suggestion that complex communication and reduction can and should coexist in the same work will likely go unheeded (if not unnoticed).

In a humorous essay published in *The Academic Author*, “How to Write Like a Professional Snoot,” Helpful Hints from the Lesczyk Szagagojevic School of Pompous Prose,” the writer (using a challenging pseudonym so that “I can pompously and with contempt state that it’s pronounced just the way it’s spelled”) offers tongue-in-cheek advice for academic writers.

Simplification and readability, of course, go out the window in this formula. In addition to the cardinal rule of writing—“redundancy, repetition, and…redundancy”—Szagagojevic counsels, “You must never lose sight of your arrogance. I cannot stress this enough. Arrogance is your friend; love it, nurture it, talk to it and it will bloom in all its bright flowery splendor.”

Like all good satire, this is rooted in reality. But for many writers in higher education, maintaining the stylistic tendencies of academic writing is not the result of arrogance or grandiosity; it is simply the path of least resistance.

For those who advocate simplification in academic writing, George Orwell, who loved to challenge convention, has become a sort of patron saint. “If you simplify your [language],” Orwell wrote in 1946, “you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself.”

That’s good advice for any writer. ♦

Todd Sallo is an editor for National CrossTalk.
Roscoe Brown, former president of Bronx Community College, now heads a new advocacy group called Friends of CUNY.

While a sexuality conference at the SUNY campus in New Paltz won national notoriety for including presentations about the use of sex toys, Pataki's trustees rejected a review that said the conference was within the bounds of academic inquiry, and they called for the firing of New Paltz President Roger Bowen. "Never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined that a New Paltz women's studies conference would create this kind of stir," said Susan Lehrer, who coordinated the event. "It wasn't that the content of the conference was so dramatically different as that the political climate was."

At least one trustee demanded Bowen's resignation again the next year for allowing a performance of The Vagina Monologues on his campus. "The trustees weren't always the best" before Pataki, one former SUNY president observed. "But they did serve as buffers against outside interference. Now they're conduits for it." And Bowen, in a closed-door meeting with members of the SUNY faculty union, said, "It appears that every new member of the SUNY Board of Trustees appointed over the past six or seven years has passed a political litmus test. They have had to demonstrate their bona fides as Republican Party members or as Pataki Democrats."

In the end, the core curriculum was passed by a vote of ten to three. SUNY faculty responded with an unprecedented declaration of no confidence in the trustees. The board had "failed in its responsibilities by allowing ideological views to shape academic decisions, failing to advocate for strong financial support for SUNY, and failing to conduct fair and open searches for senior administrators," the declaration said.

SUNY had become the definitive battleground in a culture war between liberals and conservatives, a cautionary tale for other universities where boards of trustees have begun to pursue far more intrusive political agendas than in the past, while activist organizations such as the National Association of Governing Boards and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni have become more influential.

Public higher education in particular has become a reform target of conservatives. Core curricula like New York's also have been proposed in Virginia and in Pennsylvania, where state Education Secretary Eugene Hickok, Jr. has questioned the academic rigor of the curriculum and teacher-education programs—and where Hickok, an appointee of Republican Governor Tom Ridge, has a seat on the governing boards of each state university.

Florida has handed over control of public universities to individual boards appointed by Republican Governor Jeb Bush. That state's commissioner of education, Charlie Crist, has called for replacing tenure with a pay-for-performance system, attacked administrators at Florida Atlantic University for allowing a play in which a Christ-like character is portrayed as a homosexual, and declared that academic freedom is "the final refuge in which professors hide when confronted with the absurdity and ignorance of their decisions."

Meanwhile, in New York City, combative Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was transforming the City University of New York on the same timetable as Pataki's SUNY makeover, appointing trustees who backed his plan for raising admissions standards and ending remedial programs for many students. CUNY's board also is now considering a core curriculum.

So pronounced is this trend that the Association of Governing Boards adopted a report in April complaining that "external pressures have led some trustees and political leaders to abandon long-accepted principles of citizen trusteeship. Some believe board members should be responsive to narrow interests; others use their trusteeships inappropriately to advance personal visibility, aspirations or policy goals; still others fail to grasp that trustees are responsible for seeking consensus and acting collectively as a board, and not as individuals."

Nonsense, said de Russy, of the SUNY board. She said too many other university boards of trustees "have ceded their roles as final guarantors of institutional integrity. Many see themselves primarily as fundraisers or cheerleaders. Often they do not set clear educational goals. They don't even rigorously select or review their CEOs." Intervention by trustees like SUNY's represents "a reclamation of normal oversight that's to be expected," de Russy said. "Trustees have ceded too much lawful and necessary oversight to presidents and (faculty) councils. The public is demanding higher standards. We have seen it dramatically at the K-12 level. It shouldn't be surprising that that same urge for accountability would hit the higher education level."

But Richard Novak, director of the governing boards' association's Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance, said the organization's declaration was "a reminder to members that they need to adhere to good principles. There have been reports of the greater politicization of board members. Some of the stuff is pretty egregious in some places."

Novak was speaking generally, but the "examples of common pressures" cited in the association's report could have come directly from New York, where Pataki and Giuliani have made no secret of their desire to change the universities. "If you were running a business, you would invent this system if you didn't want it to be successful," Giuliani has said. He said CUNY, the largest urban university in America, with 200,000 students, was so bad it should be "blown up" and begun again.

The university practically did blow up, figuratively speaking, when, after three decades of open or nearly open admission, Giuliani and Pataki appointed enough members of the CUNY Board of Trustees to essentially end remedial programs at most of the system's senior colleges. The move followed a report that found significant problems, including that 72 percent of senior college freshmen and 87 percent of community college freshman had failed one or more of CUNY's three placement exams.

"If a student cannot read, a college education is wasted on him," says Heather Mac Donald, a scholar at the Manhattan Institute and a frequent critic of the university who is a member of the mayor's task force on CUNY. "Reading is the barest minimum requirement. These tests hardly require students to demonstrate anything but the most basic skills—in fact, skills that would probably be considered..."
Republican New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has said The City University of New York was so bad it should be “blown up” and begun again.

name the trustee who would become the ninth and deciding vote in favor of phasing out remedial classes over three years at all 11 CUNY senior colleges. All five CUNY trustees appointed by Giuliani, and four of the six appointed by Pataki, voted in favor of ending remediation. Even as the decision was being deliberated, 23 people were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for allegedly disrupting the meeting, or for refusing to leave—including Edward Sullivan, a Democrat who chairs the state Assembly’s education committee—in what the state Committee on Open Government later said was a violation of the public meeting law.

Even some of Pataki’s appointees were left uneasy by the decision. One, John Morning, accused the governor and Giuliani of political interference to ensure that remediation would be ended. “Left to its own devices and its own conscience, this board would not have taken that step,” Morning said. “It’s worse than that,” said Sullivan: “The mayor directs them as to how to vote. The mayor and the governor should absent themselves from the day-to-day workings of the board.”

But Herman Badillo, a close advisor to Giuliani, who Pataki was soon to name as chairman of the board of trustees (and who stepped down in June to run for mayor himself), said: “Anyone who ignores the mayor and the governor is a fool. The money comes from the mayor and the governor and the policies come from the mayor and the governor. They are the top elected officials.”

That point was not lost on Giuliani, whose governing style sometimes has included the use of his budgetary clout—most famously, his threat to evict the Brooklyn Museum of Art for refusing to cancel a controversial art show. Giuliani said he would withhold $79.4 million in funding to CUNY if it failed to require a qualifying test of entering students who took remedial courses. A state Supreme Court justice later ruled that the mayor had exceeded his authority, and that such decisions should be left to educators, but the CUNY board imposed the tests anyway.

Giuliani also promised to withhold $110 million in city funds from CUNY community colleges if they didn’t require an 80 percent attendance rate. “If [the students] don’t show up to be educated, why are we subsidizing their education?” the mayor asked. In April, Giuliani threatened to withhold a quarter of the CUNY budget unless the remaining remedial training for incoming students is privatized, and an outside company hired to review testing standards.

Pataki, too, has used the power of the purse. As a candidate in 1995, he criticized the state Education Department as “a bloated bureaucracy.” Last year, he cut its staff, stripped it of oversight of private and public colleges, and transferred its library and archives to his control. He also took away authority over the charter school application process and split it between his SUNY trustees and the Board of Regents, whose members are appointed by the Democrat-controlled state Legislature (although Pataki has said he ultimately wants the power to select the regents’ chancellor and nominate prospective regents).

Among other charter schools the SUNY board approved is the Rochester Leadership Academy, which teaches students about creationism as a scientifically based theory competing with the theory of evolution. (SUNY trustees now are considering the concept of charter colleges—an idea being pushed by the conservative National Association of Scholars—which would operate like charter schools and get a share of the public higher education budget. Faculty say the concept is a way to privatize public higher education and end tenure.)

If there were threats before the fact, there also has been retribution after. President Bowen, at New Paltz, has reportedly been denied a pay raise and encouraged to leave. “I strongly believe partisan politics have no place in higher education,” he told the student newspaper. “But I am not in the mainstream, at least not in New York at this time.”

Vincent Acceto, a widely respected 40-year faculty veteran at the University at Albany, was turned down by the SUNY trustees for a distinguished service professorship, the university’s highest honor, after leading the no-confidence vote against them during the core curriculum controversy. Acceto, a professor of information science, finally received the honor after the incident was widely publicized. A member of the CUNY board who voted against the mayor’s choice for president of Hunter College was removed by Giuliani and replaced by a deputy mayor. “These are world-class universities, and look at the pettiness that’s gone on,” said William Scheuerman, president of United University Professions, the SUNY faculty union.

Many people close to the governor and the mayor have been given university appointments. The aforementioned nominee to head up Hunter College was Jennifer Raab, who chaired Giuliani’s Landmarks Commission and was issues director of his 1989 mayoral campaign. She was installed despite the fact that Matthew Goldstein, the CUNY chancellor installed by Giuliani and Pataki, preferred another candidate. Trustees acknowledged that they had been pressured by the mayor and they had to go.

end Michael C. Crimmings, protested “the outside political intimidation.” Students, faculty and staff at Hunter issued a resolution of no confidence in the board of trustees because of Raab’s selection.

Despite such opposition, at least four Giuliani deputies or former deputies are now at CUNY, including one who was named to head its research foundation, one who is serving as a labor consultant, and two who are on the board of trustees.

“No one who works for city or state governments should be on the board of trustees,” said Roscoe Brown, former president of Bronx Community College and now chairman of a new advocacy group called Friends of CUNY. “What has happened now is that because of the ideological positions of the mayor and also the governor, the initiation of policies has come from outside of the chancellor and the presidents, which is really contrary to the way universities should operate.”

Gerald A. Kitzmann, a New Paltz physics professor and representative to that school’s faculty senate, compares the situation to the administration of the military. “We have the very best military in the world because we have been able to balance the civilian and military worlds in this country,” Kitzmann said. “Can’t we at least try to do the same for public higher educational institutions by having persons appointed to the boards of trustee with non-political agendas and knowledge of higher education based on their experience?”

Giuliani’s former head of health and hospitals was made dean of health sciences at CUNY; one of his lawyers is the university system’s outside counsel and a consultant to
the mayor's campaign committee was given two major CUNY contracts. Giuliani's former press secretary even got a job as an adjunct instructor at CUNY's Baruch College.

There also has been pressure to hire candidates preferred by the mayor and the governor for major posts. Giuliani and Pataki announced the nomination of Goldstein to be CUNY chancellor before the search committee even knew about it. The committee, which had been looking for a new chancellor for almost two years, was allowed to discuss the mayor's nominee at a meeting two days later. 90 minutes before his name was put before the full board of trustees for a vote.

At SUNY, after a national search for a new chancellor that cost the university system $108,667, Pataki's budget director, Robert King, ultimately got the job. The daughter-in-law of the Republican Party chairman was hired for a position in the SUNY chancellor's office. And Bill Paxon, a former Republican congressman who served in the state assembly with Pataki for YEARS. New Paltz, some liberals attacked then-SUNY Chancellor John Ryan, a former president of Indiana University, for hypocrisy because he served as a trustee of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. When Giuliani started criticizing CUNY, the city council used the opportunity to push him for more funding for schools.

The die has been cast, said Kenneth Sherrill, a political science professor at CUNY's Hunter College. “What the Republicans have done by politicizing the university is to guarantee that when the Democrats come into power, key elements of the Democratic party are going to demand a return to Democratic values, and heads are going to roll. It's going to become like the Sanitation Department or the Department of Motor Vehicles—they did it to us, and we have to get it back. What I'm afraid of is that the universities are now politicized forever.”

In fact, many of the likely candidates to succeed Giuliani have suggested that they would restore remediation to the CUNY system. “No mayoral candidate to my knowledge has unequivocally supported the maintenance of high standards at CUNY, so I suspect that whoever comes into office will cave to the pressures of the faculty union and the advocacy groups,” conceded Mac Donald, of the Manhattan Institute. “That will be a bad thing, for CUNY's status quo ante was a pale shadow of what it could become if it stayed committed to high expectations.”

As he began his campaign for re-election in 1998, Pataki was taken to task by Democrats for the decline of SUNY and CUNY because of budget cuts and tuition increases—even though some of those cuts dated back to earlier Democratic administrations. Two decades of budget cuts had decreased state appropriations to CUNY by 40 percent, and city appropriations by 90 percent. While enrollment was the same, the number of full-time faculty had fallen by half, and 60 percent of courses were being taught by part-time adjuncts.

Tuition had doubled in the previous ten years. New York ranked second to California in tax revenues, but 50th of the 50 states in the percentage of revenues going into public higher education. Only three percent of New York's revenues went to higher education. By contrast, California spent eight percent of its revenues on higher education, and North Carolina spent nine percent. A study undertaken by the Rockefeller Foundation found that New York's funding for prisons had increased by almost the same amount as its spending for universities and colleges had decreased. And, built in a monumental spurt when Governor Nelson Rocke-
and, as the budget process advanced and the governor came under pressure from his conservative allies, he ended up vetoing millions earmarked to hire more full-time faculty and to increase financial aid for SUNY’s 30 community colleges.

The trustees themselves recommended cuts in SUNY’s budget, apparently for the first time in the system’s history. (“We have a responsibility to those who are providing the money, the taxpayers, the parents who are providing the money they pay for tuition, and students’ money that they pay for tuition.”) They also changed the way they fund the individual schools, so that every campus keeps the tuition and fees it brings in, making them compete for students, instead of turning the money over to the central office and then having it re-allocated—a system the conservative Empire Foundation had labeled “socialist.” (The new procedure is called the Resource Allocation Method, or RAM.)

“It’s almost like the guy who shoots his mother and father, then complains about being an orphan,” said Brown, of Friends of CUNY.

The stakes continue to rise on both sides. Conservatives worry that, with Giuliani leaving office in December, pressure to continue his reforms at CUNY will subside. Liberals fear that low-income students will no longer be able to get into CUNY under the higher admissions standards. While defenders of Giuliani’s reforms say there has been no appreciable decline in enrollment, detractors allege that the university is trying to cook the books. They point out that there has been a sharp increase in the number of students ushered through the admissions process under a waiver program to accept poor students who did not meet the regular entrance criteria.

Faculty and their supporters say top academics won’t come to SUNY or CUNY anymore, fearful of political interference. Several top candidates for the job of chancellor of CUNY in 1998 pulled out, including George Washington University President Stephen J. Trachtenberg, who explicitly cited the highly charged political environment.

“I don’t know if there’s permanent damage, but there’s been damage,” said Scheuerman, the union president. “Faculty have been fleeing the universities. It’s extraordinarily difficult to recruit the best and the brightest.”

Mac Donald responded: “Who defines quality academics? If by that, you mean advocates of the fearsome race-gender-class triumvirate of identity politics, yes, those academics may well shy away from a school that requires a solid core curriculum in traditional disciplines. There are plenty of quality academics, however, who are in the closet about their dedication to traditional scholarship, who would jump at the opportunity to teach at a university serious about maintaining high standards.”

There is also heightening conflict over academic freedom. “I’m a staunch supporter of academic freedom, but the term is somewhat abused,” de Russy said. “Let’s remember what it is. It’s a historic compact between faculty members and the public, which obliges faculty to seek the truth. It is protected speech in the service of truth. It’s a privilege. It is not a license to indoctrinate students into political ideologies or any kind of ideology. It is not a license to conduct oneself in any way at all on a college campus.”

Some see wide divides, and ominous lessons, and not only in pronouncements such as this one. Sherrill, the Hunter political science professor, said, “There are times when I think that the trustees’ vision of a university is Bing Crosby and Bob Hope in straw hats in a canoe out on a lake with a pretty coed. They are, for the most part, people who are opposed ideologically to the public sector, and to providing public benefits to people who are not already privileged.”

Sullivan, the state assemblyman, agrees. “They don’t want people educated,” he said. “They wish that New York was more like Indonesia, where you have a large swath of undereducated people who would be willing to work for less money. The notion that the children of the working families of New York should go to college just like anyone else—to excellent colleges—is anathema to them.”

While politics has never been completely absent from public higher education, said Sherrill, “What is different now is that instead of appointing people who can reach the mayor or the governor if the university ever is in trouble, they are enforcing the will of their electoral coalition by appointing people whose appointment is contingent on the goodwill of the mayor or the governor. Thus you have control.” He said the universities have become a target “because politicians don’t care much about universities. The Republicans have thrown universities as a bone to people because you can’t get away with ending abortion, because you can’t return to segregation. You can make those constituencies happy by giving them a university.” Said Brown: “It’s a form of class warfare.”

Conservatives worry that, with Mayor Giuliani leaving office in December, pressure to continue his reforms at CUNY will subside.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has appointed conservative trustees and administrators to the City University of New York and has worked to reduce remedial instruction at CUNY’s senior colleges.