THE POLITICAL APPOINTEE VS. THE ELECTED OFFICIAL: AN EXAMINATION OF

HOW STATE REGENTS INFLUENCE THE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY PROCESS

by

PAUL GREGORY RUBIN

(Under the Direction of Erik C. Ness)

ABSTRACT

State higher education governing agencies are tasked with directing the public

postsecondary education sector statewide. However, in light of policy changes in Wisconsin and

controversial presidential hirings in Iowa and North Carolina, there have been increased

concerns around the role politics plays in motivating the actions of these organizations. In

particular, some question whether political appointments onto state agency boards serve as a

means for state officials to extend traditional limits of their power and provide a channel to

influence postsecondary education processes. This dissertation aims to help fill this research gap

through a qualitative comparative case study of the governing agencies in Georgia, where

University System of Georgia Regents are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the

Senate, and Nevada, where Nevada System of Higher Education Regents are publicly elected.

Through the lens of principal-agent theory, this study examines how means of appointment

potentially mediates board members' role and use of research in the policy process around

improving college completion.

Findings from this dissertation indicate the role of regents in determining a state's policy

agenda and prescribing solutions may have been previously overstated. In particular, although

regens are charged with governing the postsecondary sector and ensuring the system is providing adequate services to stakeholder groups, board members rely heavily on the system-level staff to guide the policy process. Following policy enactment, regents play a larger role in ensuring the system and institutions are held responsible for the established policies. Nevertheless, variation in appointment mechanism has influenced dynamics of each state's board including: the individuals serving as board members, the sources of information considered in the decision-making process, and the involvement of the state government.

By considering the means by which state board members are appointed, this study examines the potential effects of political officials extending their influence and oversight through appointment power. This analysis is important given the growing politicization of postsecondary education in the United States and concerns around how such political influence will negatively impact traditionally underserved populations. Furthermore, this dissertation makes a conceptual contribution by considering an under-utilized theory of the policy process.

INDEX WORDS: State Higher Education Policy; Governance; Research Utilization; College
                Completion; Governing Boards; Trustees; Principal-Agent Theory

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In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity - it is a pre-requisite.

- President Barack Obama

Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

State higher education agencies play a critical role in the postsecondary sector in the

United States. Though there exist variation between the three most common structures –

consolidated governing boards, coordinating boards, and planning agencies – regarding levels of

autonomy and fiduciary responsibility, these organizations broadly serve as a given state's

central hub for public higher education and are "explicitly charged with statewide policy for

higher education" (McGuinness, 2005, p. 207). Yet, despite this critical role, state agencies

remain an under researched group within the higher education literature, especially in

comparison to other stakeholders, with even less known about the decision-making process on

state-level policies of the individuals that constitute these organizations' overseeing boards.

The extant literature examining higher education state agencies and their role in the

policy process has taken two distinct forms. The larger body of literature has quantitatively

examined how variation in state governing structure, such as the difference between a

consolidated governing board, coordinating board, and planning agency, influence policy

adoption and enactment at the state level as an independent variable (e.g., Doyle, McLendon, &

Hearn, 2010; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; McLendon, Heller,

& Young, 2005; Tandberg, 2013). For instance, McLendon, et al. (2006), emphasize governance

arrangements as "serving to institutionalize the preferences of different sets of stakeholders" (p.

19), with consolidated governing boards representing an autonomous "academic cartel" of

university-system administrators and coordinating governing boards serving more like a traditional government agency with a greater focus on the state. These studies have investigated various policies and outcomes – including accountability, financial aid programs, and policy innovation – and have utilized various theoretical frameworks pertaining to the policymaking process. Interestingly, while the magnitude and direction of impact has varied, the majority of these studies have found governance structure to be a significant and influential variable on state policy behaviors (Hearn & McLendon, 2012).

The second group of research, focusing directly on the role of state higher education agency boards on the policy process, is more limited. One topic that falls under this research agenda seeks to understand the traditional system- and institutional-level roles and responsibilities that fall under the duties of state agency boards and, more broadly, under boards of trustees. These duties include selecting and supporting the president, long-range strategic planning, and ensuring financial solvency (AGB, 2015; Baldridge, 1971; Bastedo, 2009; Bowen, 2008; Hughes, 1944; Kezar, 2008; Michael & Schwartz, 1999; Michael, Schwartz, & Cravcenco, 2000). An additional body of work centers on the individual members that constitute these boards, and their connections to external forces and organizations. For example, as board membership is rarely a full-time position for individuals, some research has traced how institutions have utilized trustee interlocks with corporations and industry, established by trustee's connections vis-à-vis serving on corporate boards or professional ties, as "information portals" and means to establish and diversify funding sources (Mathies & Slaughter, 2013; Pusser, Slaughter, & Thomas, 2006).

Similarly, and more pertinent to the current study, there has been research investigating the appointment by state officials onto state agency and institutional boards. This strand of

research has questioned whether appointed members on higher education agencies and institutional boards serve as token figureheads, representing the elected officials who nominated them and other influential peripheral parties, providing an indirect mechanism for these external actors to enter the postsecondary policy sphere (Lane, 2007, 2012; Kivisto, 2005, 2008; Lowry, 2001a, 2007; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Toma, 1986, 1990). Results from these studies tend to support this hypothesis, finding that board members appointed by elected officials or chosen via direct elections will support policies that most benefit the political priorities of the constituency in charge of their nomination. Further, these studies suggest that undergirding this relationship is a desire by the overseeing party to maintain a level of oversight capacity, which, in turn, motivates the action of the board members. It is notable that these studies emphasize the role of state agency structure and other sector-level factors, including number of overseeing boards and postsecondary institutions within a state, as potential mediating forces that may limit this relationship, extending the potential legitimacy to an oversight capacity rationale.

While these studies provide a framework and hypothesis to consider how means of appointment influences the state higher education policy process, there remain limitations to this work. First, these studies are narrowly focused by only examining the role appointment has on the policy adoption process. Although this has aided in our understanding of features influencing policy enactment in various state and campus contexts, the prescribed hierarchical relationship and well-defined roles of actors involved in the implementation process restricts what can be understood about any specific actor within the greater policy process and does not consider less obvious patterns of influence that may exist. Second, many of the policies investigated within these studies are highly politicized, such as tuition setting and institutional spending, which may conflate the specific influence of appointment, rather than board member's own political

ideology on these topics. Finally, this work has been conducted primarily quantitatively, which restricts consideration of case-specific features that may influence the relationship between states, state agency boards, and campuses. Considering recent concerns centering on the connection between state agency boards and state governments, it is critical to develop a better understanding of this relationship, in order to better recognize which stakeholders truly control higher education decision-making at the state level.

PROBLEM

There is currently no postsecondary education policy initiative more widely under discussion than those centering on increasing college completion. While the benefits to postsecondary degree attainment, including those to the individual and spillover effects to society, have been widely researched, studies suggesting completion rates have failed to keep up with the demand of state- and national-level workforce demands (e.g., Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; McMahon, 2009; OECD, 2009) led to declarations by multiple stakeholders for improvement. For instance, the Obama Administration stated the United States will lead the world in postsecondary degree attainment by 2020 (Obama, 2009), the Lumina Foundation (2009, 2013) noted strategies to reach the goal of "having 60 percent of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials by 2025," and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2008) pledged $69 million to double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree. Notably, because these attainment goals did not explicitly endorse a specific policy plan, each state developed their own agenda, highlighting the decentralized nature of the American higher education sector, whereby individual states and their governing agencies are primarily responsible for the creation and implementation of a state's

postsecondary policy agenda. However, as there has been an array of initiatives undertaken and levels of success achieved nationally, differences in state higher education governance must be better understood to determine how improvements can be commonly reached.

One characteristic that that could influence this policy variation is means of appointment to state governing agency boards. Recently, this mechanism has been heavily criticized in some states, with suggestions that state government officials are extending their power and oversight into the higher education sector through their ability to appoint board members. For instance, institutional stakeholders and third-party organizations, such as the American Association of University Professors, have voiced concerns regarding hiring former IBM and Boston Market executive Bruce Harreld at the University of Iowa (Miller, 2015) and former education secretary Margaret Spellings at the University of North Carolina (Strauss, 2015) for presidential positions. Critics have argued these individuals' lack of higher education experience makes them wholly unqualified, and suggested each hire was politically motivated and influenced by state legislators and governors who appoint state agency board members. Outside of administrative hiring, similar apprehensions has been voiced regarding system-level policy, most notably in Wisconsin where tenure protections were removed from state statute and left to the discretion of the state's Board of Regents, where sixteen of the board's eighteen members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Wisconsin Senate (Davey & Lewin, 2015). This policy shift has led to an exodus of faculty from the University of Wisconsin System and significant criticism from faculty and other higher education stakeholders across the nation. Considering this heightened scrutiny, questions loom regarding other ways in which means of appointment may influence state agency decision-making, especially in regards to statewide policies, which may affect higher education in a given state for years to come.

In particular, considering state agencies and their boards serve in an intermediate position between the state government and postsecondary system, how might means of appointment affect the relative influence of these different constituencies, which may have competing goals regarding a given topic? Similarly, could this mechanism impact what is prioritized or considered as a policy solution for the state? Might this relationship also guide state agency board members' willingness and consideration of other sources of research and information to guide their decision-making in determining policy agendas?

PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My dissertation seeks to help fill a gap in the higher education literature by furthering our understanding of the role of state higher education agency boards by investigating their role in the state policy process. Through a multi-state qualitative case study, I intend to investigate how state agency board members perceive their role in the development of statewide college completion policies and the sources of information they utilize to inform their policy position. Further, I am interested in understanding how means of appointment on agency boards and principal-agent theory may explain variation across state agencies. Consequently, guiding this study are three research questions:

(1) What is the perceived role of members of state higher education governing boards on the state-level college completion policy process, regarding:

    a. How policy agenda are determined?

    b. How state-level policies are developed and implemented?

    c. How sources of information are utilized?

(2) How does variation in means of appointment to state agency boards influence their role and mediate the influence of governors and other state officials on the policy process?

(3) How does the principal-agent framework explain the relationship between state agency boards and state governments, as well as regents' role in the state policy process?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Findings from this study could impact our understanding of state-level higher education practices, with potential implications for other policy sectors as well. By examining state agency boards and their role in the policy process, this study adds to a limited body of research focusing on this critical stakeholder, while also further unpacking the postsecondary policy process by studying their role in regards to research utilization. Findings from this study may also contribute to our understanding of the use of principal-agent theory, adding to a scant body of higher education-focused work that has utilized this framework (McLendon, 2003a), while also potentially expanding the theory by considering an organization that serves in both a "principal" and "agent" role (Rubin, Ness, Hagood, & Linthicum, 2016). Finally, acknowledging the previously discussed events in Iowa, North Carolina, and Wisconsin, which have suggested state politicians and political connections influence state agency decisions and actions, findings from this study may yield insight into the extent to which means of appointment on state agency boards, and similarly situated organizations in other sectors, serve as a channel for state officials and other external parties to extend the traditional limits to their power.

CHAPTER II:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to contextualize this study, this chapter reviews the current knowledge base on the four topics most central to this study. First, I will integrate the work pertaining to the primary actors involved in this dissertation – state higher education agencies and trustee boards – highlighting the extant knowledge pertaining to their role in the policy process and the current understanding of how members serving on postsecondary boards influence policy decision-making. Second, I will synthesize the growing body of literature on college completion within the United States, which serves as the primary policy context for this dissertation, including discussing several state-level policy initiatives that may be discussed by respondents. Third, I will review literature pertaining to research utilization, which serves as a central consideration in how political appointment influences state governing board members in the policy process. Finally, in addition to a discussion of pertinent literature, I will also discuss the conceptual framework that guides this study, principal-agent theory (PAT), and highlight previous studies that have utilized PAT to investigate similar relationships within the state higher education policy process.

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION AGENCIES AND BOARDS

State higher education agency boards are comparatively under researched across the higher education governance landscape. The majority of the research that has been conducted on these overseeing bodies tends to focus on broad overviews, including a discussion of the position

and expected role of the board and its members or examinations of the backgrounds and demographic characteristics of the individuals that constitute boards. These studies are often produced by various national organizations (e.g., Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Council on Education) and tend to be exclusively descriptive in nature, with minimal work that examines these governing bodies and board members empirically or via theoretical lenses. Although Hearn and McLendon (2012) noted a growing body of work examining these agencies broadly, little remains known regarding the individuals that constitute these boards and their actual, rather than expected, role and influence on postsecondary policy at the state-level. To this end, the following is a review of the literature on state higher education agency boards, as well as pertinent work on college and university trustee boards, as it pertains to their structure, their composition, the role and influence of individual board members, and how these characteristics guide decision-making.

Agency Structure

A central theme in research about state higher education agencies focuses on variation in state agency structure. Citing Kerr and Gade (1989), McGuinness (2005) listed the three most common agency structures, in order of centralized authority: 1) consolidated governance systems, 2) coordinating boards, and 3) planning agencies. He noted a state's likelihood of opting for a specific type of higher education structure is often a function of various factors, including "general governmental structure (for example, different legal responsibilities of the executive and legislative branches), political culture, and history" (p. 207), and often relates to the larger relationship between the state government and postsecondary education sector. A primary difference across these structures, which is strongly related to the variation in level of

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autonomy, is the agency's oversight responsibilities and the extent that their position serves as the locus of decision-making for the state's public higher education sector.

Consolidated governing boards are the most centralized form of higher education governance and possess the most autonomous authority over the sector. Structurally, consolidated agencies consist of a single board that has unilateral oversight of all two- and four-year postsecondary institutions in the state, though some states operate "segmental systems" (McGuinness, 2005, p. 209) where separate boards govern specific types of institutions (e.g., research universities, comprehensive institutions, community colleges, or technical institutions). Since this type of organization generally has independent oversight over the sector, consolidated governing boards are charged with appointment of institution personnel, allocation of resources across institutions, setting tuition and fee policies, adoption and implementation of statewide postsecondary initiatives, and serving as an advocate of the sector to the state government (Berdahl, 1971; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; McGuinness, 1997, 2005, 2016; McLendon, 2003b; McLendon, Deaton, & Hearn, 2007).

Coordinating boards, which have also been referred to as "intermediary bodies" (Hearn & Griswold, 1994), are less autonomous than consolidated governing boards and are structurally positioned between campus system or individual institutional boards and the state government. Rather than having unilateral oversight of the postsecondary sector, coordinating boards tend to be responsible for only specific aspects of a state's public higher education system, such as managing program review or holding budgetary and fiduciary responsibilities. Variation in these responsibilities has created an additional distinction among these agencies, between advisory coordinating boards, which oversee academic programs and budgets, and regulatory coordinating boards, which approve budgets and programs (Berdahl, 1971; McGuinness, 1997, 2005;

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McLendon, et al., 2007). Considering their positioning structurally, though, coordinating boards do not have governing power over institutions or systems, and are solely responsible for the appointment and oversight of agency officials.

Planning agencies have the least authority among governing structures and are most akin to advisory coordinating boards. Their role centers on carrying out various functions for the state postsecondary system, such as administration of student assistance and data collection and analysis, but hold a minimal role regarding programmatic and budgetary approval (McGuinness, 2005; McLendon, 2003b). Although studies have noted shortcomings with this three-mode typology of governance (Lacy, 2011), the influence of differences in governing agency structure has been investigated theoretically and empirically, especially as it pertains to the adoption of various state and institutional policies.

For example, Toma (1986, 1990) and Lowry (2001a) found that states with centralized boards act more akin to private organizations and will generally charge more to students than those institutions with decentralized boards. Furthering Lowry's findings, Nicholson-Crotty and Meier (2003) investigated if structure variation shields institutions from the influence of politics in decision-making; however, their findings are inconclusive regarding the extent of political influence in regards to governance structure. Nevertheless, all four studies were framed using principal-agent theory and argued those states with coordinating boards are more greatly influenced by the desires of taxpayers, because this structure is less autonomous and taxpayers can use their support as a means to affect change. On the other hand, consolidated governing boards function more autonomously and have greater flexibility to act as independent organizations.

In their investigation of the state adoption of accountability policies, McLendon, et al. (2006) suggested an alternative explanation regarding the influence of variation in board structure. Also considering principal-agent theory, they promoted the idea of an "academic cartel" as being central to consolidated governing boards and argued the more autonomous governing structure supported the goals of their primary stakeholders and principals, namely academics and other institutional administrators. On the other hand, less autonomous coordinating boards are influenced greater by the state government and politics, due to appointment relationships and general association with the state.

Beyond these studies, which have focused or made notable declarations regarding governing board structure, there are also a number of quantitative studies that have considered the organization of state agencies as an independent variable. Underlying these studies is the perspective that more autonomous state agencies will devote greater analytic resources to state postsecondary needs, resulting in greater overall knowledge and willingness to consider innovative policies (Berdahl, 1971; Callan, 1975; Doyle, 2006; Lowry, 2001b; McLendon, 2003b; Zumeta, 1996). Nonetheless, some studies (Berger & Kostal, 2002; Doyle, McLendon, & Hearn, 2010; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Hearn, Griswold, & Marine, 1996) have found that the relationship between state agency autonomy and policy innovation is not always positive, with Doyle, et al. (2010) suggesting these varied results may be a function of differences between policies focused on academic functions versus financing higher education.

McLendon, Heller, & Young (2005) extended this contested hypothesis by considering state political characteristics and their influence on board structure and likelihood for policy innovation. After conducting a longitudinal analysis investigating a state's likelihood of adopting three financing policies and three accountability policies, as well as considering both interstate

and intrastate factors, they found mixed results regarding the influence of governance structure. In particular, while more centralized governance arrangements are found to be positively, albeit weakly, associated with innovation around financing policies, there was no relationship, positively or negatively, associated between agency structure and accountability policies. Although they noted the policies they investigated are not universally representative of all financial or accountability policies, these findings do provide an additional perspective on the influence of agency structure on higher education policy.

Board Appointment and Composition

Governing boards in postsecondary education are unique stakeholders in the higher education industry in that their appointment and composition varies by institutional type and sector. On one hand, boards of private colleges and universities are typically self-perpetuating, whereby the current or outgoing members have a significant role in selecting future or replacement board members (Gale, 1993; Glazer-Raymo, 2008); however, among public institutions and state systems, board members are most often appointed by a state's governor and confirmed by the legislature, directly selected by the state's legislature, or elected publicly (AGB, 2010a, 2015; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Longanecker, 2006). Interestingly, trustees appointed by the governor, regardless of legislative involvement, are rarely publicly contested (Pusser, 2003). Further, on the whole, private boards tend to be larger than public boards, averaging 29 members compared to eleven or twelve on public boards (AGB, 2010a, 2010b, 2015).

Variation in appointment mechanisms also results in different types of individuals joining boards. Longanecker (2006) explained, "Some members are selected simply because of who they are personally… Others are selected because of their association with a specific constituency… Both of these conditions – who selects the members of the governing board and who they

represent – affect how they govern" (pp. 103-104). For example, citing Pusser and Ordorika's (2001) case study of the University of California and the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, he noted that political appointees tend to have made political contributions during the campaign or are appointed due to a specific affiliation with the institution. Moreover, Longanecker argues board members tend to exhibit different perspectives underlying their decision-making process based on their appointment mechanism. In his perspective, elected board "clearly have a reflection of the public good as defined by the public" (Longanecker, 2006, p. 107), whereas appointed board more often reflect the perspective of the governor. To this end, there have been some empirical studies that have investigated how this variation influences decision-making and other outcomes.

In examining institutional boards, Lowry (2001a) explored how various characteristics of boards influence financial policy. One of the major findings of this study related to appointment highlights that institutions with a majority of board members selected by external, nonacademic stakeholders, tend to charge less than those institutions with self-perpetuating boards or those selected by academics. Utilizing principal-agent theory as his primary framework, Lowry argued his findings to be a result of trustees being held accountable to the concerns of their electing constituency and, therefore, individuals appointed by external constituencies are more likely to have an opinion that aligns with government officials. Alternatively, those trustees selected by internal stakeholders are more inclined to support charging more, since their main constituency is more likely to receive benefits from an increase in institutional financial gains.

Pusser (2003) made a similar conclusion regarding the influence of political appointment in his investigation of the decision by the University of California (UC) system to remove affirmative action policies from their admissions standards. Although many groups at numerous

UC campuses supported affirmative action as an admissions metric, regents, who were majority political appointees, sided with the governor at the time, who opposed the inclusion of race for admissions. Drawing on institutional theory, Pusser argued that his case study highlights higher education, and postsecondary institutions specifically, as political entities, with significant influence by local, state, and national political environmental characteristics, which further highlights the critical nature of appointment to these boards.

Kaplan (2004) also argued institutions are political entities and included board composition as one of factors that influence decision-making at the institutional-level. Using rational choice theory, which suggests that fundamental structures and policies influence how choices are made, he found that the composition of boards did not play a factor generally in policy adoption. One exception, though, was the involvement of faculty on boards, which he noted increased the likelihood of the institution having an academic as a president and reduced the likelihood of academic programs being shut down. Regarding means of appointment, Kaplan found little conclusive evidence, save for a finding that self-perpetuating boards overall spent more annually. Although he did not explain this finding further, this could be the result of departing trustees maintaining an influence on the agenda of the board via their appointees, rather than having a continual shift in agenda, with new perspectives and goals, due to external appointments.

Minor (2008) considered the relationship between the selection and appointment processes of trustees and state higher education performance, as defined by four variables (participation, affordability, completion, and benefits) in the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's 2004 *"Measuring Up"* report. Comparing five top performing (Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Utah, and Colorado) and five bottom performing states

(Arkansas, West Virginia, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Nevada), he conducted a typological analysis to identify patterns in how trustees are selected in the two groups of states. Although Minor (2008) suggested his findings to be "provisional" (p. 841), he found the lower performing states have less evidence of scrutiny and qualification requirements. Ultimately, he questioned if lower performing states adopt more rigorous appointment processes, akin to top performing states, might they be able to improve their higher education performance metrics?

A final body of work highlighting the influence of trustee appointment and board composition centers on organizational change. Specifically, some researchers examined why states may shift their postsecondary agency from a coordinating board to a consolidated governing board or vice versa. While the majority of this work focuses on state-level decision-making, one case that highlights how this change can influence institutions is that of Florida, which switched from a consolidated governing board to a coordinating board with independent trustee boards for each public institution. Leslie and Novak (2003) and Mills (2007) used political science theories – notably, Kingdon's revised multiple streams theory and punctuated equilibrium theory – to examine the process of Florida's change in governance. While both studies highlighted the causes that resulted in the statewide agency change, a key component that both mentioned is the governor's desire to have greater influence and control over decision-making at the state's institutions. Consequently, the newly established coordinating and independent boards were majority governor appointments, which allowed the state to eliminate affirmative action as an admissions policy across all public institutions.

Influence of Individual Trustees

There is also a body of work focusing on the individual members of trustee boards and how they influence decision-making (e.g., Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1993, 1996; Kerr & Gade,

1989; Mathies & Slaughter, 1994). While this work primarily focuses on institutional trustees, rather than state agency board members, these studies highlight the means by which individual board members have been viewed as effective in their role and how colleges and universities have utilized individuals to benefit their own goals. Additionally, based on governing structure, it is notable that some state agency boards can also function as an individual institution's board of trustees. Therefore, for purposes of the current dissertation, this work is helpful in understanding how individual state agency board members may be considered impactful on the policy process and could also help explain why certain individuals are considered for appointment to boards.

Trustee Effectiveness

A primary focus of work centering on board members, rather than the collective unit, aims to gauge the utility and importance of trustee boards to American higher education. Though methodologies vary, these studies focused primarily on the traditional roles and responsibilities of board members, such as presidential oversight, as well as characteristics that were believed to be integral to be effective, such as knowledge of higher education broadly and of the specific institution. It is also notable that underlying a lot of this work is the aim to improve boards, as seen by the support of these publications by national organizations, such as the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) and the American Council on Education, which have a vested interest in the continued success of trustee boards.

Kerr and Gade (1989) conducted one of the earliest studies investigating trustee effectiveness. Using a combination of interview data from previous AGB studies on the college presidency and a Likert scale survey, these researchers compiled perspectives on the operation of institutional trustee boards from campus presidents, administrators, and other stakeholders across public and private institutions. Although respondents uniformly confirmed the importance and

essential role of trustees to colleges and universities in American higher education, there was also agreement that, overall, boards were not working effectively overall. Respondents attributed this situation, in part, to the erosion and blurring of roles between the board, the institution's president, and other members of the administration. Another important takeaway from this study is that characteristics sought to define trustee effectiveness was dependent on institutional characteristics and postsecondary sector, suggesting that context may ultimately define the appropriate role for individuals that sit on institutional boards.

Furthering the discussion on trustee effectiveness are two studies conducted by Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1993, 1996) in partnership with the American Council on Education. The first study aimed to gauge perspectives on effectiveness by sitting board members and presidents of private liberal arts and comprehensive colleges across the United States. Although their findings are in line with Kerr and Gade (1989), namely acknowledging that trustees are not as effective as possible, they did find more "effective" boards have certain qualities: 1) a knowledge of the culture and norms of the organization it governs, 2) an educational component to ensure board members are knowledgeable about the institutions and their role, 3) an atmosphere that nurtures a collective persona to the board to help aid members work together, 4) a willingness to accept the complexities and ambiguity that arise in the higher education sector, 5) an understanding of their role in regards to the other major constituencies and stakeholders of the institution, and 6) a strategic perspective of the current and future well-being of the institution (Chait, et al., 1993, 1996).[1] Effective boards tended to support institutional decision-making better and ultimately lead to higher performing colleges and universities.

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[1] Using grounded theory, these researchers also wrote an article identifying an underlying framework to gauge board effectiveness based on the data and findings from their first study (Holland, Chait, & Taylor, 1989).

In their second study, Chait, et al. (1996) used an action research methodology to focus on six institutions from their first study to determine if it is possible to improve board effectiveness. Ultimately, they determined that it is feasible to exact change on boards broadly, but such change must occur with an understanding of the greater context of the institution, both internally and externally. In other words, aligning with Kerr and Gade (1989), there is no panacea to improving the effectiveness of trustee boards by changing the organization or culture of trustees overall, and must be considered with an understanding of the institution to be successful.

Michael, Schwartz, and Cravcenco (2000) conducted one of the few studies undertaken by independent researchers on trustee effectiveness. Set in the context of higher education institutions in Ohio, they used a questionnaire to survey sitting trustees' perspectives on how their effectiveness should be gauged. In line with previous literature, they determined three areas of knowledge crucial for trustees to perform effectively: 1) knowledge of their higher education institution, 2) knowledge of the politics within their institution, and 3) knowledge of the uniqueness of higher education and how it differs from other sectors, specifically the business sector (Michael, et al., 2000). Though they disaggregated their findings by sector, these metrics were uniformly rated as highly important indicators of effectiveness. Of particular interest to the current study, trustees at public institutions emphasized "level of influence with politicians" as a critical indicator of effectiveness, which signals the close connection between public higher education and the state government.

Institutional Use of Individual Trustees

Besides investigating the effectiveness and utility of trustees regarding decision-making and outcomes for their institution, studies have also investigated how institutions are increasingly

utilizing their board members to further their own goals. Underlying the majority of this work are theories of resource dependence and academic capitalism (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), which investigate how higher education institutions utilize connections to industries as a means to secure external revenue streams in light of decreasing support from traditional sources and how this influences their organizational behavior. These studies often utilize network analysis to understand trustees' connections with corporations and other industries, and investigate how institutions may utilize these ties to benefit themselves in many ways.

For example, Pusser, et al. (2006) suggested trustees are sources of information and legitimacy for institutional policymaking by offering "information about business practices and market activity related to higher education" (p. 766). While they suggested these "corporate interlocks" might be more widely available among private institutions, due to trustees' role in directing presidential hiring and financial solvency, this study highlights that board members serve as a central channel for private sector practices to begin influencing institutional policy. Additionally, Mathies and Slaughter (2013) found the number of trustees connected to science-based corporations was positively related to the amount of research and development funding a given university receives. They also determined that as trustees are more connected to science corporations, there is increased convergence between subject areas researched by an institution and the industries the trustees are connected. Lastly, Slaughter, Thomas, Johnson, and Barringer (2014)[2] focused on university patenting, which they suggested could be viewed as an alternative financial source for the institution, and investigated how this function varies based on trustee connections to external corporations. Ultimately, while patenting occurs in a small number of

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[2] Slaughter, et al. (2014) investigated the 26 private institutions that are members of the Association of American Universities and, while they differ substantially from the cases considered in the current study, the findings still highlight the utility of trustees for institutions.

disciplines and has less influence than hypothesized, they concluded the potential for conflicts of interest and the resulting institutional governance issues must be considered should these trends continue.

As these studies focus on members of the Association of American Universities, it is notable that some of the public institutions they include only have their state agency in place as an institutional board of trustees. Therefore, findings related to these public universities are directly relevant to the current study, even though the focus is on institutional, rather than statewide, policy. Indeed, although much of this work has found greater prevalence of the use of trustees to influence institutional decision-making and resource allocation, these studies still provide important insight to consider for the current study, including validating the critical role board members can play in impacting policy decisions.

POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT

The current push to increase postsecondary completion has been attributed to the Obama Administration and several intermediary organizations, which has resulted in a range of policy proposals across the nation in order to improve America's standing globally. However, while increasing college completion rates has become the primary focus of higher education policy in the United States only in the past ten years, there is a robust body of literature that has discussed the importance and overall value of postsecondary degree attainment to individuals and the greater society. This section will summarize the major themes and perspectives around the value to higher education degree attainment, discuss the current college completion movement in the United States, and review some of the policies that states have been enacting to help contribute to the national effort.

Benefits to Postsecondary Degree Attainment

Underlying much of the research investigating the merits and value of postsecondary degree attainment are two distinct foci: the benefits to the individual and the benefits to the greater society. This distinction, often considered in terms of the "private good" for the user versus the "public good" for the community, is emphasized widely in the discussion around the purpose of higher education and is a central consideration for the current college completion movement. Although this body of literature discusses these benefits using various theoretical and analytic lenses, this section will primarily cover the overarching themes within this literature in order to highlight the underlying basis that guides the current policy movement.

When considering the private good of postsecondary degree attainment for the individual, the primary benefit discussed centers on pecuniary and economic benefits. In particular, the "wage premium," which is the disproportionately larger salaries earned by individuals who earn a postsecondary credential when compared to salaries of individuals who complete some or no postsecondary education, has been the focus of many studies (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Autor, 2014; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012; Carnevale & Rose, 2015; Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011; Heckman, Lochner, & Todd, 2008; Lumina Foundation, 2013; McMahon, 2009; Murphy & Welch, 1989; Perna, 2005; Perna & Finney, 2014). While there is no definitive estimate of the value of the wage premium, Carnevale, et al. (2012) suggested the average earnings of an individual holding a bachelor's degree remains nearly twice as much as those who have only completed high school, and individuals with an associate's degree or some college experience still earn approximately twenty percent more than those with only a high school diploma. Further, this wage premium has remained stagnant or increased during and

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following the 2008 financial recession, suggesting the pecuniary value of a postsecondary credential will continue to improve in the future regardless of external factors.

According to multiple studies, a primary contributor to this continued financial benefit to postsecondary education stems from fundamental changes to the economy. Abel and Deitz (2014) suggested that "although the wages of college-educated workers have stagnated since the early 2000s… the wages of high school graduates have also been falling" (p. 8), so the comparative advantage of postsecondary education has, in fact, grown. Carnevale and Rose (2011, 2015) also argued the United States is increasingly becoming a college-educated service economy, where workforce needs are less focused on the production of consumables and more on services that underlie the production process. For example, "farmers account for only 5 percent of the value added in food production. Almost 20 percent of the value added in the food network comes from… business services involved in bringing final food output to the table" (Carnevale & Rose, 2015, p. 19). Nevertheless, these changes to the economy only enhance the overall perception and benefit perceived by many regarding individual financial benefits (Doyle & Skinner, 2016).

Besides pecuniary value, postsecondary degree attainment has been considered in regards to non-economic benefits to the individual as well. For example, Baum, et al. (2013) suggested college-educated adults are more "active citizens," regarding volunteerism and voting, and are more likely to live a healthier lifestyle, including lower smoking and incarceration rates, which has also been found in other studies (Bowen, 1977; Haveman & Wolfe, 1984; McMahon, 2009; Perna, 2005; Rowley & Hurtado, 2003). While these social and non-pecuniary benefits are likely not the primary rationale behind an individual's decision to attain postsecondary education, these

private benefits have been extrapolated to understand how higher education degree attainment provides public benefits to the greater society.

In particular, governments see a reduction in costs related to health care, crime rates, and poverty as the percentage of college-educated citizens rises (Baum, et al., 2013; Bowen, 1977; Lumina Foundation, 2013; McMahon, 2009; Perna & Finney, 2014). Baum, et al. (2013) and Bowen (1977) also connected educational attainment with improved cognitive learning, emotional and moral development, family life, and consumer behavior for the individual, which, in turn, has positive neighborhood effects for the community. Often, these non-pecuniary benefits for society underlie the policy discussion around the importance of improving degree completion rates, which has recently become the primary postsecondary education policy initiative nationally.

College Completion in the United States

Increasing college degree completion rates has only recently become the central higher education policy concern following calls to action spearheaded by the Obama Administration and several prominent organizations. In particular, on February 24, 2009, in an address to the Joint Session of Congress, President Barack Obama (2009) proclaimed, "by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world."[3] The impetus for this announcement was a report released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009) that ranked the United States 10th among developed countries in percentage of adults aged 25 to 34 with tertiary degrees (equivalent of associate degree or higher), which was a significant change from its 3rd place rank in 1997. Although some have suggested the drop in ranking was primarily due to improved educational opportunities in other

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[3] Estimates released by multiple organizations suggest in order to reach this goal, approximately sixty percent of all adults aged 25 to 34 must hold a college degree (Kelly, 2010; Lumina Foundation, 2009, 2013).

countries (Cook & Hartle, 2011; Kelly, 2010), as well as an emphasis on postsecondary certificates, which the United States tends to exclude in their attainment rate calculations, Obama's (2009) speech highlighted the need for increased postsecondary attainment was primarily a function of high school credentials no longer providing sufficient training for the current workforce needs of the country.

In their first strategic plan, entitled *Goal 2025*, the Lumina Foundation (2009) underscored a similar goal as the Obama Administration of having 60 percent of Americans with "high-quality degrees and credentials" by the year 2025, though their rationale is framed differently:

> We do not believe the U.S. needs to increase higher education attainment simply because of our ranking in international comparisons. However, it is vitally important that we be clear about what we know with certainty about higher education attainment. Higher education attainment in the U.S…. has remained flat for 40 years, in spite of dramatic economic and social change during that period. Meantime, higher education attainment in the rest of the world has increased… We believe this reflects a fundamental change in the role higher education plays in advanced economies – a change that the U.S. ignores at its peril (Lumina Foundation, 2009, p. 2).

From Lumina's perspective, increasing postsecondary degree attainment is a national priority for three reasons: 1) the importance of higher education for success in America's knowledge-based society and economy; 2) social and economic opportunities in the United States can be addressed by increasing the proportion of individuals with postsecondary education (highlighting many of the listed previously mentioned to the individual and society); and 3) emphasizing the continued gap in achievement among underrepresented groups, notably first-generation, low-income, and students of color, emphasizing increasing the attainment rate nationally will aid in closing this gap (Lumina Foundation, 2009).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also announced a notable initiative focusing on the growing disparity among low-income students completing postsecondary education. To remedy this situation, they pledged $69 million to organizations to improve postsecondary enrollment and completion across the United States. The Gates Foundation's (2008) underlying goal aimed to "double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential with genuine value in the workplace by age 26 – an increase of approximately 250,000 graduates each year" by 2025. Nevertheless, while these multiple calls to action successfully elevated college attainment on the higher education policy agenda, due to the decentralized nature of the American higher education sector, individual states and their governing agencies are the primary actors responsible for the policy process, not the federal government. Consequently, there have been varied state responses across the nation, with some instituting extensive policies to help reach the objective while others have remained minimally interested.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) highlighted many of the various policy solutions undertaken in a brief entitled "A Guide to Major U.S. College Completion Initiatives" (Russell, 2011). In this document, Senior State Policy Consultant Alene Russell (2011) outlined thirteen different initiatives implemented across the United States that focus on increasing postsecondary degree attainment. The programs highlighted do not have uniform foci, with some efforts focused at the state-level and others at the system- or institutional-level, membership, ranging from the six states involved in the National Governors Association's Complete to Complete initiative to Complete College America's Alliance of 35 states (plus additional American territories and individual postsecondary systems), or promote similar policies, with some focused on students of particular socioeconomic and racial backgrounds or in specific postsecondary sectors, but the single goal

that underlies these programs underscores the many potential avenues that states can undertake to contribute to the federally-led goal.

While there is no typology or significant empirical work investigating the various state policy decisions regarding contributing to these completion goals, Perna and Finney (2014) conducted a study investigating the relationship between state public policy and higher education performance, including degree attainment, in five states (Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Texas, and Washington), providing some early insight around what underlies state policy action around this policy goal. Ultimately, they conceptualized a model for understanding how state public policy can improve higher education performance, structuring their framework around and emphasizing the importance of "state-specific context" (Perna & Finney, 2014, p. 204). They note their states differed regarding their position nationally on higher education performance measures, which impacts a given state's willingness and involvement in certain policies. However, besides state context, they also emphasized the critical role of state policy leadership in regards to steering higher education institutions to reach societal goals. While their framework considers two additional tenets – the need for adopting policies aimed at increasing the demand and supply for higher education and improving equity around educational access to improve attainment – Perna and Finney (2014) suggested that without effective leadership guiding statewide higher education policy, "colleges and universities [will] respond to other incentives and act (rationally) to advance their own priorities, such as enhancing their own prestige" (p. 206). Ultimately, this reality could prevent any possible statewide initiatives before they are even considered. To this end, it becomes imperative that policies directed at improving postsecondary attainment are both connected to the needs of the state and have support from state leadership in order to be successful.

Common State College Completion Policies

Applying the model from Perna and Finney (2014), state context and leadership will play a central role in determining the best-suited policy to improve attainment in a given state. Consequently, and underscored by the AASCU brief (Russell, 2011), there are many initiatives currently under consideration across the United States aimed at improving college completion. Although some states focus on holding public institutions accountable for outcomes, instituting financial accountability models to determine funding allocations, others are looking to improve the pathway for underprepared college students to reach degree attainment. While the following is not an exhaustive list of policies under consideration nationally, it aims to highlight some of the potential strategies directed at improving college completion that may emerge in this dissertation.

Performance-Based Funding

Currently, there is no college completion-related policy receiving more attention by state policymakers or higher education agencies than performance-based funding (PBF). The underlying principle around PBF is that of an inducement policy, whereby financial incentives will impact institutional behavior to be directed towards certain state priorities. Therefore, if the formula is based on student enrollment, institutions will focus on the students entering, possibly to the detriment of ensuring these students' achievement; however, institutions funded based on student achievement, such as degree attainment and other outcome metrics, will focus energies to that end instead (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011; Labi, 2015). Although PBF has gone in and out of popularity since Tennessee first enacted its funding formula in the 1970s, performance-based funding models has become the policy *du jour* to help states contribute to the national attainment

goal (Dougherty & Natow, 2015; Hearn, 2015; Rubin & Hagood, forthcoming). Nonetheless, there remains significant debate around PBF as a policy solution.

A recent line of research has utilized quasi-experimental methodologies to gauge the effectiveness of performance funding on increasing degree completion. In particular, Tandberg and Hillman (2014) and Tandberg, Hillman, and Barakat (2014) found little evidence that performance funding systematically led to increased degree attainment outcomes for four- and two-year degrees at the state-level. Similarly, state-specific studies were conducted in Pennsylvania and Washington and broadly came to similar conclusions regarding degree production and retention rates (Hillman, Tandberg, & Gross, 2014; Hillman, Tandberg, & Fryar, 2015). Notably, Hillman, et al. (2015) noted modest gains in short-term certificates. These findings are potentially attributable to a discussion by Rutherford and Rabovsky (2014), who debated a state's or institution's ability to directly influence student outcomes, questioning the foundational assumption that PBF can change institutional behavior by framing financial allotments on the goal of increasing degree attainment.

Despite this vocal opposition, according to Dougherty and Natow (2015), since 1979, 38 states have enacted performance-based funding with 30 states currently utilizing such a policy, with many more considering it as a possible policy solution.[4] They suggested a cause for PBF's resurgence has been, in part, due to the support and involvement of various third-party intermediary organizations. For example, the Lumina Foundation has been a vocal proponent of PBF as a policy solution, releasing two sets of white papers highlighting their benefits for state policymakers and as a means to increase institutional accountability (Weathers, 2015, 2016). Further, Tandberg and Hillman (2014) mentioned Complete College America (CCA), whose

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[4] These numbers include states that implemented either performance-based funding 1.0 or 2.0, where PBF 1.0 provides a small bonus over the base state funding and PBF 2.0 is embedded in the state funding formula, often tying a larger portion of funds to performance (Dougherty & Natow, 2015).

financial supporters include The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Lumina

Foundation, as a policy advocacy organization that has had particular impact in the recent PBF

movement in the United States. Interestingly, CCA (2013) suggested performance funding "on

its own will not guarantee more college graduates. But it… [ensures] the necessary conditions…

for other reforms to succeed. Simply put, money focuses minds" (p. 4).[5] Therefore, while

empirical studies have not proven a direct correlation between PBF and degree completion,

performance funding, as highlighted by CCA, may provide a means for other reforms to

influence degree attainment. Additionally, Zumeta and Kinne (2011), noting the cyclical nature

of accountability policies, emphasized "performance accountability efforts tend to suffer when

crucial political supporters leave office" (p. 191). Consequently, beyond serving as advocates for

PBF, it is possible the involvement of these external organizations serve as a means to ensure

continued state efforts around institutional accountability efforts. However, beyond financial

accountability measures, more direct policies aimed at increasing attainment rates have been

considered nationally.

    Improving Developmental Education

    Citing Chen, Wu, and Tasoff (2010) and Greene and Foster (2003), Long and Boatman

(2013) estimated that "only one-quarter to one-third of America's high school students are at

least minimally prepared for college academically" (p. 77), with an even smaller percentage

among Black and Hispanic student populations. This reality has resulted in a significant portion

of undergraduate students requiring coursework below college-level when entering

postsecondary education. The underlying issue with this troubling statistic is developmental

education coursework rarely counts towards a student's postsecondary credential, resulting in

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[5] Since November 2016, CCA has distanced itself from suggesting PBF as a policy solution. Although
they continue to support its effectiveness to influence institutional behavior, the organization no longer
focuses their efforts to explicitly expand the use of PBF across states.

increased course requirements and extending time to completion. Further, previous studies suggested students enrolled in developmental courses have lower persistence and degree attainment rates than students placed directly in college-level courses (Bailey, 2009; Barry & Dannenberg, 2016; Bettinger & Long, 2005). Unfortunately, according to multiple organizations (CCA, 2011, 2012; Gates Foundation, 2008; Lumina Foundation, 2013), in order to reach the national attainment goals, students traditionally placed in developmental education-level coursework, namely first-generation and underrepresented minority populations, must receive postsecondary credentials, which has policymakers considering ways to improve these efforts.

Rutschow and Schneider (2011) discussed the four primary types of interventions for developmental education being considered in the United States: 1) strategies aimed at helping students avoid developmental education before entering higher education; 2) interventions that expedite the students' time in developmental education prior to entering college-level courses; 3) programs that combine attaining basic skills with college-level coursework; and 4) programs that focus on supporting students in developmental education, like advising or tutoring. Utilizing aspects of these interventions, many states, as well as individual institutions and postsecondary systems, have been receiving funding from the federal government and private organizations to redesign developmental education to be more effective, using a diverse set of policies and to varied levels of success.

For example, from 2006-2009, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR)[6] received funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)[7] to redesign its developmental math and English curriculum, with the goal of increasing the completion rate while decreasing a student's time in developmental-level coursework. TBR

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[6] TBR oversees six universities, thirteen two-year colleges, and 27 colleges of applied technology, serving approximately 200,000 students, making it one of the largest systems of higher education in the country.
[7] Funding was distributed via the National Center for Academic Transformation.

utilized learning technology, both inside and outside of the classroom, to "enable students to work at their own pace and to focus their attention specifically on the particular skills in which they were deficient" (Boatman, 2012, p. 10) and, broadly, found positive effects. In fact, Boatman (2012) used a regression discontinuity design to determine causal estimates of the effects of the redesigned courses among three of the TBR institutions and found students exposed to the treatment had more positive outcomes than similar students unaffected by the treated courses. Notably, Austin Peay State University (APSU), which eliminated developmental math courses and replaced it with two required college-level courses offered with additional tutoring workshops (Long & Boatman, 2013), saw significant improvement in retention and completion. APSU's success has led to the development of their model becoming a policy solution considered nationally, referred to as "corequisite remediation."

Corequisite remediation encourages students in need of developmental-level education to enroll in credit bearing postsecondary courses with additional academic support, such as tutoring or additional class time (CCA, 2016). Proponents of this policy suggest, by allowing underprepared students to gain the knowledge they are lacking while still gaining credit towards their credential, corequisite remediation removes the additional time and financial cost for the student that traditional developmental education programs necessitate. Although some question if this policy can be universally beneficial to students, specifically among those with greater developmental needs or from traditionally underserved populations, early studies have found positive outcomes.

Complete College America (2016) released a report showing significant gains across five states – Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Tennessee, and West Virginia – that have replaced traditional developmental education with corequisite remediation. Although the report mentioned

that some states have only enacted the policy for a semester, often at a select group of institutions, CCA (2016) reported that corequisite remediation is "doubling and tripling gateway college course success in half the time or better." Additionally, expediting the time it takes students to enter credit-bearing coursework, as well as the impressive success rates, has been found to be more financially cost effective than the traditional developmental education model (Belfield, Jenkins, & Lahr, 2016). While CCA leaves the specifics of the corequisite remediation model to the individual state, the early successes of this program have gained national attention, leading many other states to consider similar policies.

Student Credit Requirements

Another policy solution considered by states focuses on decreasing the amount of time to degree by capping credit requirements and raising students' expected number of classes per semester. Originally adopted in Hawaii, the initiative known as "15 to Finish" pushes students to enroll in at least 15 credits per semester in order to graduate on time. Underlying this policy solution is work on academic intensity as a predictor of postsecondary degree completion. For example, Adelman (1999) found students who earn fewer than twenty credits in their first academic year are significantly less likely to complete a bachelor's degree program on time. More recently, using nationally representative data, Attewell and Monaghan (2016) determined academically and socially similar students who attempt "below 15 credits have a BA attainment rate that is roughly 5 percentage points lower than otherwise similar students who increase to 15 credits" (p. 701). These findings also make some common sense, as students completing more credits per semester should have a higher likelihood of finishing a degree program on time or faster than those who take earn fewer credits during the same timespan.

Referring to it as one of its "Game Changers," Complete College America has been integral in the spread of this program across the country. Discussed in their policy report, *Time is the Enemy*, CCA (2011) argued the longer a student is enrolled in an undergraduate program, the less likely they are to complete. They attributed this fact to an increased number of students "juggling some combination of families, jobs, and school while commuting to class" (CCA, 2011, p. 2), which extends the necessary time to degree. Therefore, they believe students should attempt fifteen credits per semester as a means to expedite their time to completion and discourage enrolling part-time whenever possible.

RESEARCH UTILIZATION

"Research utilization," a phrase developed by Carolyn Weiss (1977, 1979), refers to the extent and ways by which policymakers reference and utilize research-based information and data in the policy process. Literature pertaining to this topic centers on discussing the Weiss (1979) typology of research use, the varied goals and preferences of the research and policymaking communities, the movement of information between these two actors, and policymakers' preferred sources of research. This section will discuss these themes and highlight matters central to the current study.

Types of Research Use

The guiding work on ways research is utilized in the policymaking process is Weiss's (1979) seven-category typology, and its more widely referenced three-category version, which was developed following challenges to a limited understanding of how research could be used (Amara, Ouimet, & Landry, 2004; Caplan, 1980; Feldman & March, 1981; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Pelz, 1978; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980). The abridged typology focuses on three

classifications: instrumental use, conceptual use, and political use. Instrumental use refers to the direct application of research in the policy process, whether in the crafting, implementation, or decision-making processes. Conceptual use focuses on more long-term utilization of research, suggesting that the information supports a policymaker's broader understanding on a given topic. Dunn (1983) further delineated these two types of research use by suggesting instrumental use results in observable changes in behavior of the policy actor, while conceptual use changes the ways in which actors think about a policy or problem. Instrumental and conceptual use are also accepted as the most common forms of research utilization, with studies highlighting a preference for instrumental use in the private sector and conceptual use in the public and government sectors (Deshpande & Zaltman, 1983; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980). The third type of research utilization highlighted by Weiss is political use, which focuses on the tactical utilization of information supporting predetermined positions on policies (Beyer, 2011; Weiss, 1979), though limited work has investigated this specific type of research use. In fact, although an understanding of types of research use is widely considered a theoretical issue, Amara, et al. (2004) noted, "few empirical studies have systematically addressed the question" (p. 79) beyond several qualitative studies that have contributed mostly theoretical findings. Ultimately, considering the growing calls for research-informed policy and policy-relevant research (Hillman, Tandberg, & Sponsler, 2015), it is critical to gain a better understanding of how information is used in the policy process.

"Two-Communities" Perspective

A long-standing commentary in studies on research utilization literature focuses on the suggestion that policy actors and academic researchers comprise "two-communities" (Beyer, 2011; Beyer & Trice, 1982; Birnbaum, 2000; Caplan, 1979; Dunn, 1980; Hearn, 1997; Henig,

2008; Jones, 1976; Kezar, 2000; Kothari, MacLean, & Edwards, 2009; Wong, 2008). Underlying this perspective are Snow's (1959, 1961, 1963) "two cultures" studies, which suggested each community has distinct language, norms, and goals that stress different values. On one hand, researchers emphasize theory, reliability, and validity, while policymakers focus on experience and common sense. It is these differences between policymakers and researchers that are suggested to inhibit the use of research-based information to influence the policy process.

For instance, in discussing the perceptions of educators and politicians regarding communicating with individuals from the other sector, Halperin (1974) noted educators perceive politicians as focusing solely on short-term goals and are only concerned with their constituencies, namely other academics and the research community, with minimal concern for the greater population. Additionally, inconsistent political processes lack institutional memory, which he suggested is "like building a castle with dry sand" (p. 189). Meanwhile, politicians viewed educators as untrustworthy and potentially providing incomplete information, as well as having "little understanding of the legitimacy and importance of the political process" (Halperin, 1974, p. 190). Wolanin (1976), in discussing Congressional postsecondary policymaking, suggested similar obstacles between policymakers and information providers, noting the two actors have dissimilar "institutional perspectives and stakes... [so they] frequently talk past rather than to each other" (p. 94). Research outside of education has also emphasized structural limitations for policymakers to access research-based literature, including the boundaries of legislative committees, staff availability, and committee decentralization (Mooney, 1991; Weinberg, 1979; Webber, 1984). This perspective has led some higher education scholars to colloquially describe academic research as "trees without fruit" (Keller, 1985) and "shipyards in

the desert" (Weiner, 1986), suggesting its minimal impact on the policy process. Still, some question if the two communities should be aligned at all.

In his article "Policy Scholars are from Venus; Policy Makers are from Mars," Birnbaum (2000) questioned if academic scholarship and policy should be mutually dependent. He outlined four misleading assumptions about policy scholarship and the policy process that he believes "weaken rather than strengthen" (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 120) academic work, especially in regards to the suggestion that researchers should define their research agendas based on the current interests of policy makers. In particular, he highlighted: 1) the inability for uniform agreement on the importance on particular policy problems by policymakers, 2) the suggestion that policy scholars are not engaged in policy-relevant research, 3) the belief that policymakers do not utilize policy research, and 4) the provision of policy-relevant research would improve policy practice. Emphasizing Snow's (1959, 1961, 1963) "two cultures" perspective, he concluded, "policy scholarship and policy making are, and ought to be, two distinct knowledge-producing activities whose insights may inform each other but are not dependent on each other" (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 127). Ultimately, Birnbaum's perspective appears to be a contrarian to the majority, as recent initiatives by the William T. Grant Foundation and other national organizations have aimed specifically to expand the knowledge base on research utilization and bridging the divide between academic research and policy making.

To this end, an alternative strain of research around the two communities has more broadly focused on differences in characteristics and needs between those who create and distribute information ("supply side") and those who request and utilize information ("demand side"). In alignment with some of the previously mentioned literature, studies have stressed problems with the "supply side" of research, including it being too technical, too narrow, or

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timeliness to influence policy (Apfel & Worthley, 1979; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; Scott, Lubienski, DeBray, & Jabbar, 2014; Webber, 1987a). On the other hand, studies aiming to clarify the "demand side," underscore policymakers' decision, or indecision, to use research and their tendency to turn to preferred sources of information (Shakespeare, 2008; Tseng, 2012; Weiss, 1977, 1979), though some scholars have highlighted a comparatively limited understanding of this component of the two communities (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007; Tseng, 2007). Ultimately, Tseng (2012) suggested much of this research is underscored with a perspective that research utilization is truly mutually dependent, whereby information supplied must meet the expectations and needs of those in a position of demand, necessitating further work to understanding how to better connect these two sides.

Preferred Sources of Information

A body of literature that is closely related to the two-communities perspective focuses on the "demand side" of research utilization, and policymakers' preferred sources of information throughout the policy process. Ness (2010) provided an overview of the range of sources utilized by these individuals, including sources closely involved in policy development and enactment – such as legislative staff and fellow legislators – as well as other, more external, sources of information – including the media, ideological think tanks, national and issue-specific intermediary organizations, and academic researchers. Scholars in various disciplines have evaluated these findings, emphasizing the vast array of information sources that may influence the policymaking process.

For example, Webber (1987a, 1987b) emphasized that policymakers consider "legislative colleagues" as the most useful and frequently utilized resource and Hird (2005) mentioned nonpartisan policy research organizations as having a significant impact on legislators' access to

information. Krehbiel (1992) argues a contributing factor to the reliance on internal sources stems from the organizational structure of the legislature, which focuses on committee work and allows legislators to focus on several specific policy issues. However, beyond these "insiders," Webber (1987b) and Mooney (1991a) noted the role of "outsiders," such as constituents, other government officials, media, and academics, and, what Mooney refers to as "middle range" sources, such as interest groups and representatives from executive agencies. Mooney (1991a, 1991b) argued the preference for internal sources likely stems from their ability to "speak the same language, figuratively as well as literally" (1991b, p. 434), which helps in regards to understanding how to provide information at the most timely and effective fashion to affect the policy process. However, in citing Schramm (1971) and communication theorists, he suggested the other actors are further along a "continuum of proximity" and, therefore, does not preclude their influence, just limits it comparison to others closer along the scale.

In more recent work, the importance of communication was highlighted by studies examining "knowledge brokering," which discusses the information transition and exchange processes that connect decision makers, researchers, and policy actors (Daly, Finnigan, Moolenaar, & Che, 2014; Dobbins, et al., 2009; Frost, et al., 2012; Lomas, 2007). Successful knowledge brokering requires actors, who are a "trusted and credible" source that "understands the cultures of both the research and decision making environments," and are "able to find and assess relevant research in a variety of formats" (Lomas, 2007, p. 130). Dobbins, et al. (2009) explained that knowledge brokering can be "carried out by individuals, groups and/or organizations, as well as entire countries" (p. 1), ultimately with the aim of helping facilitate and disseminate research in order to influence decision-making. Although this work has developed in various fields, it suggests the importance of understanding policymakers' needs, akin to the

continuum highlighted by Mooney (1991a, 1991b), as a central aspect to becoming a primary source in the policymaking process.

An important type of actor that serves in this knowledge broker role, but remains external to the traditional policy process, are referred to as intermediary organizations. These groups serve in a boundary-spanning role, aiding in the transfer, compilation, and dissemination of information between actors in two sectors, such as legislators and researchers (Honig, 2004; Nutley, et al., 2007). As noted by Ness (2010), intermediaries are viewed as "trustworthy based on their familiarity with the state's political and cultural context" (p. 13), which allows them to navigate and work collaboratively with multiple sectors and exert some influence around the use of research in the policy process than their external position would traditionally dictate. Further, Lubienski, Scott, and DeBray (2011, 2014) emphasized the growing role of intermediary actors within the education sector, specifically, which they suggest has been a result of the rapid growth of state interest regarding several policy goals. An alternative explanation for the increased involvement of intermediary organizations comes from Henig (2013), who suggested the entrance of nontraditional perspectives into the education sphere broadly has led to an increased interest in these third party organizations. Nevertheless, there exists a limited understanding of the types of organizations that fall under this umbrella term, though recent work has investigated similarly positioned actors within the education policy arena and why they are increasingly effective.

For instance, a group of scholars have highlighted the central role of intermediary organizations in the production, promotion, and utilization of research around the adoption of "'incentivist education policies – reforms premised on the assumption that more effective education outcomes need to be rewarded for individuals and organizations" (Lubienski, et al.,

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2014, p. 138), such as charter schools, vouchers, and teacher merit pay, in the K-12 sector. Regarding the effectiveness of these organizations, they find intermediaries "engage in heavy promotion and dissemination of research and data, whereas researchers tend to be more conservative with their promotion" (Scott, et al., 2014, p. 82), which allows the empirical work to be received in a timelier, and potentially policy-influential, manner. Additionally, in discussing the array of organizations mentioned in their qualitative multi-case study, they highlighted a vast range including national and local groups, as well as grassroots organizations that are focused at the community level (DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott, et al., 2014; Scott, Jabbar, LaLonde, DeBray, & Lubienski, 2015).

A specific type of intermediary highlighted by Scott, et al. (2014) are think tanks. While previous work has considered the role of national ideological think tanks, such as the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation on federal policy (Dunlap & Jacques, 2013; Rich, 2004), Ness and Gándara (2014) constructed an inventory of state-level think tanks and noted their increasing prevalence and influence on state-level higher education policy. Though they find these organizations are especially involved on policies pertaining to state funding, cost, and affordability, they emphasize that state-level think tanks maintain a "robust 'supply' of information" (Ness & Gándara, 2014, p. 17). Consequently, it is feasible that these organizations provide research beyond these traditional content areas and have greater influence in the state-level policy process. In fact, considering many of these think tanks serve as preferred sources for politicians and policy makers in other arenas (e.g., economy and health care), it is possible that the influence of think tanks may extend beyond their stated provision of empirical research, since they are already viewed as a known and trusted source of information.

GUIDING FRAMEWORK: PRINCIPAL-AGENT THEORY

Principal-agent theory (PAT) provides a framework to better understand the relationship between two parties in a hierarchical and contractually established affiliation, and serves as the guiding framework for this dissertation. Per its namesake, underlying this concept is the view that a principal, who has limited time, specialized knowledge, or energy, contracts with an agent, who has these qualities, but may lack the resources to properly utilize their abilities effectively (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). It is the expectation of the principal that the agent will act with their best interest in mind, but the reality is that the agent's goals may not align with those of the principal. Consequently, the principal must incentivize action by the agent to ensure their goals align. However, because the principal lacks the time and capabilities for continual oversight, there exists the possibility that the agent will only work to the extent necessary to appease the principal – referred to as "shirking." Additionally, because they are more immersed in the minutiae of the work, it is likely that the agent will have more information than the principal at a given time – referred to as "information asymmetry." According to Kivisto (2005), due to the expectation that both parties will remain focused on self-interested goals, there is the potential for a fragmented relationship. While there are safeguards and other mechanisms for the principal to limit poor performance by the agent, referred to as "monitoring" behaviors, the existence of shirking to some degree is expected in a traditional principal-agent relationship. This section provides an overview of the growth and use of PAT and discusses previous higher education studies that have considered this theoretical lens.

Development of Principal-Agent Theory as a Policy Framework

The beginnings of PAT can be found in economics, and specifically the theory of the firm. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the theory of the firm is a long-established framework to

understand the interaction of firms within a marketplace. The theory of the firm, however, fails to consider the decision-making process within a firm, which is an inherent weakness. Specifically, questions arose regarding multi-goal firms and how the division of labor was reflected in the actions of various parties within the organization. In economic parlance, this "agency problem" stems from the perspective that each party's goal is to maximize its own utility (Ross, 1973), which establishes an inherently self-serving perspective on human action. Therefore, PAT was originally developed as a means to fill a gap in a theory and to better understand how contractual relationships within a firm were conducted between parties that have differing goals and levels of knowledge regarding a specific task.

A common relationship often utilized to explain the PAT framework is that of an investor and a broker (Jensen, 1983; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In this association, an investor (principal), who has monetary resources, but lacks an understanding of the investment market, contracts with a broker (agent), who has the specialized knowledge, but lacks the resources to invest. Within this relationship, a contract is established between the two parties, whereby the principal is expecting the agent to maximize their investment, while the agent is hoping to maximize this principal's investment as well as all other clients. Because the two parties have varied goals, there is the potential for difficulties to arise, which are exacerbated by information asymmetries inherent in this relationship. Specifically, since the investor cannot continually oversee every action of the broker, the principal must assume the agent is also seeking to maximize their original investment. However, due to the lack of continual oversight, the broker can undertake shirking behavior and do as much work as necessary to appease the investor, without devoting all of their time to this single individual. In order to ensure that shirking does not occur, the investor can utilize monitoring behaviors, which, in this scenario, could include

requesting reports and updates from the broker to establish that they are doing their job to the fullest. Based on PAT, it is expected that if the broker shirks too much or does not sufficiently support the goals of the investor that the contract will be voided and the relationship will end.

The economic view of PAT established two divergent bodies of literature. The first, referred to as positivist agency theory, focuses primarily on the contract itself between the principal and agent and aims to consider how to best regulate the agent's goal of maximizing their own utility, potentially at the expense of the principal (Jensen, 1983; Jensen & Meckling, 1976). This perspective highlights governance mechanisms, including establishing information systems and creating reward systems, to ensure the agent will be incentivized not to shirk, to minimize information asymmetries, and to maximize the agent's work for the principal.

The second body of literature, referred to as principal-agent theory, focuses more broadly on the relationship between the principal and agent and the contract that establishes their association (Eisenhardt, 1989). Issues including the potential for "moral hazard," which refers to a lack of effort on part of the agent, and "adverse selection," where a principal contracts with an agent that misrepresents their ability, are believed to be remedied by establishing a more optimal contract. Although this perspective is more mathematical in its justification, Eisenhardt suggests it is more flexible and can be utilized in other industries and relationships. Nevertheless, there remains the assumption that if the principal is not happy with the results from an agent, they can void the contract and turn to a different agent to establish an alternative option.

However, when Moe (1984, 1985) and McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) brought PAT into political science literature, they established a nuanced perspective on the theory, as they discussed the theory's utilization in public bureaucracies and government. Although Moe (1984) acknowledges that contracts in the economic sense are not evident in the political world, he

suggested there is an inherent principal-agent relationship and contract across the industry, including between voters (principal) and elected officials (agent). Specifically, he points to elected officials' responsibility to their voting constituency, as well as the information asymmetries that exist between the two parties and the elected official's specialized knowledge, which the voting population does not have. In fact, Moe suggests that information asymmetry in this scenario is far greater than in an economic market because the parties are significantly more autonomous, which exacerbates the possibility for shirking behavior by elected officials. In a different study focusing on the National Labor Relations Board, Moe (1985) highlighted that agents in public bureaucracies often have multiple principals that exert influence, which requires them to navigate between multiple goals, though it is unlikely that they will be able to appease all principals at a given time.

Further, because there is not an official contract between the parties, the principal cannot incentivize the agent to limit shirking behavior, beyond offering or revoking support, since the voting public widely cannot terminate the contracts of elected officials nor immediately find a comparable replacement. To this end, McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) introduced two mechanisms, referred to as "police patrols" and "fire alarms," as possible means for principals to respond to agent behavior in public bureaucracies. Police patrols refer to monitoring activity that is established within the inherent structure of the bureaucracy, including reelections and performance ratings. On the other hand, fire alarms refer to principals' ability to call attention to the failure of agents, such as via media and other quick response activities.

Principal-Agent Theory and Higher Education

PAT's entrance into higher education can be traced to McLendon (2003a), who argued there was limited work utilizing political science as a framework in higher education to

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investigate the influence of politics in the sector. Within this article, he mentioned PAT as a lens to investigate how governance structures influence policy adoption and implementation, and suggested the existence of a relationship between political appointees and their actions. Work by Kivisto (2005, 2008) and Lane (2007, 2012; Lane & Kivisto, 2008) further McLendon's work by highlighting examples within the higher education industry that can be examined via a PAT lens, including the interaction between public institutions and states and, more generally, classic questions in higher education centering on accountability and oversight.

Kivisto (2005; 2008) also noted some weaknesses in PAT, especially as it pertains to higher education. Similar to Moe (1985), he emphasized that higher education is a field where every agent has multiple principals influencing goal setting. To this end, Kivisto emphasized that PAT does not have a mechanism to take into account these additional principals and agents, as it inherently is concerned with only two parties. He also contended that the theory is entirely based on the assumption that individuals are innately self-interested and that that is the primary motivator for human behavior and action.

Nevertheless, there has been some work utilizing PAT in the higher education context. Some of the early work utilized the economic underpinnings of the theory, in line with the theory of the firm, to understand the relationship between higher education governance structures, policy adoption, and research funding. Toma (1986, 1990) suggested there would be greater influence of taxpayers on higher education policy adoption at the state-level with the existence of decentralized coordinating boards, because the citizenry will have be viewed as a large group of principals, rather than in states with autonomous consolidated governing boards that would create a mediating effect on their influence. Payne (2003), on the other hand, aimed to understand if having a member of the Congressional appropriations committee influences the

distribution of federal research funding. He argued that these politicians have responsibility for institutions within their district, as well as their alma mater, and, although against his original hypothesis, found that politicians undergo shirking behavior with their personal institutions, opting to direct funding towards the institution within their district. Payne suggested this is directly the result of PAT, where the politician has greater responsibility towards his constituency than his personally affiliated institution.

There was also some work conducted focusing on the political science basis of PAT. Although neither study directly discusses PAT as a theoretical framework, their findings and discussion center on core components of the theory. For example, Lowry (2001a) sought to understand if institutional pricing is affected by governance structure and means of trustee selection. He found individuals appointed or elected to a board made decisions that best served their appointing constituency. Lowry also noted that boards that had a larger proportion of individuals appointed or elected by state officials or the public had lower pricing than those boards with academics or academically appointed individuals. Again, this refers to core elements of PAT, whereby the agent (the trustee) is working to promote goals that best serve the principal (constituency that appointed them).

Nicholson-Crotty and Meier (2003) used Lowry's findings as their primary framework to investigate if governance structure influences the extent to which politics affects institutions. While their findings regarding the extent of influence of governing structure are inconclusive and dependent on other factors, they did find variation between consolidated governing boards and coordinating boards, broadly, which aligns with Lowry's findings. Specifically, they suggested that coordinating boards tended to be more influenced by state politics, which is a function of

consolidated boards having more formal authority and autonomy that shield them from gubernatorial and state politics influence.

More recently, Tandberg and Hillman (2014) investigated if performance-funding programs affect four-year degree completion across states. While their findings suggested limited influence on degree completion, they utilized PAT to suggest that states are establishing performance-funding policies to induce institutions to alter their practices to produce the best outcomes for the state. In other words, performance-funding programs can be viewed as a monitoring policy by the state to ensure that institutions are not shirking on their responsibility to graduate students and establish the workforce for the state. Simultaneously, the policy can be viewed as incentivizing action by institutions, which theoretically aligns with the economic perspective of PAT and the importance of incentives within the principal-agent relationship.

Beyond studies that have focused on governance structures and higher education policy implementation and adoption, an additional use of PAT focuses on the growing body of literature centering on research utilization in the policy process. Ness (2010) noted information as a central component to the PAT framework, specifically in regards to the issues that arise around information asymmetry. Lane (2007) used PAT in this manner to discuss the "web of oversight" in higher education that exists to mediate this issue, specifically for states with limited direct oversight. In particular, Lane highlighted the use of the media and policy briefs, among other sources of information, which can limit the asymmetry between states and institutions. Another use of PAT, in regards to research use, focuses on the "two communities" perspective (e.g., Birnbaum, 2000; Hearn, 1997), whereby researchers and policymakers are viewed as two separate groups that draw upon and use different types of information to inform their decision-

making. In this regard, PAT calls to question the intended audience for specific types of information, as well as mechanisms that principals use to demand information from agents.

Overall, the use of PAT in higher education remains limited, though there are avenues for future research. Specifically, as accountability and oversight remain essential elements to the study of higher education, the principal-agent relationship is well established within the field. For purposes of the current study, PAT calls to question the position of state postsecondary consolidated governing boards as an "academic cartel" versus an agent of the state. In particular, because they serve as both principal and agent to various stakeholders, depending on the stakeholder in question, it is feasible that members must weigh their motivation, which ultimately influences the policy process. Further, as there exists significant variation in appointment of members to these boards, both across and within state agencies, PAT may be able to highlight motivations of the individual versus motivations of the organization as a whole.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

With the goal of furthering our understanding of state agency boards and its members in regards to their role in the policymaking process, this dissertation follows a qualitative research design. More specifically, this study utilizes a multiple case study methodology to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter I. A broader explanation of the research design and case selection strategies, data collection and analysis techniques, and limitations of the study will be discussed in this section.

DESIGN STRATEGY

Qualitative research tends to focus on answering questions centering on "how," "what," or "why" (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014) and considers the broader context, including internal and external processes, which may influence findings (Maxwell, 2013). For purposes of this dissertation, a qualitative approach is most appropriate, due to the potential role state context and processes external to the primary activity of interest may play regarding this study's findings. Further, as the underlying goal of this study is to investigate how a specific organizational characteristic – appointment to a state's agency board – impacts a bounded activity – development and enactment of college completion policies – a case study method is a suitable methodology (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Moreover, considering the limited research directly investigating the impact means of appointment on state agency boards has on the state-level policy process, this study utilizes a multiple case study design (Stake, 2006; Yin,

2014) to allow for analytic replication within and across cases leading to more robust

conclusions.

CASE SELECTION

When conducting qualitative research, the selection of cases is a central component to the

research design. Referred to as purposive sampling (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014), or the concept

of the "quintain" (Stake, 2006), I aimed to identify cases that were bounded by a set of criteria

that varied in a way to contribute to the research questions that guide the study. The cases

selected were also framed with the goal of conducting a collective case study (Simons, 2009;

Stake, 1995), whereby findings from several cases together form a more complete understanding

of an underlying question. To this end, I selected two states (Georgia, and Nevada) for this

dissertation after considering three primary conditions: membership in the Complete College

America Alliance of States, retaining of a consolidated governing board state agency structure,

and means by which individuals are appointed to their state agency board. The two cases are

similar across the first two dimensions with variation regarding the third criteria, which is central

to the research questions that guide this study. More information about each state's fulfillment of

these conditions, as well as additional dimensions that may emerge as important to this study,

will be outlined and is also highlighted in Table 1.

Membership in Complete College America Alliance of States

As mentioned in Chapter II, Complete College America (CCA) serves as one of the

largest single-issue intermediary organizations currently involved in postsecondary education

and specifically focused on improving college completion. Established in 2009, as of January

2017, CCA has 43 members in its Alliance of States, including 35 different states, and requires

three actions to define their commitment to the association: (1) Set Completion Goals, (2) College and Report Common Measures of Progress, and (3) Develop Action Plans and Move Key Policy Levers. CCA has also outlined and advocated five "Game Changers" to increase college completion (CCA, 2013): (1) a shift to performance funding of public institutions,[8] (2) transformation of remedial education, to provide a parallel curriculum, (3) incentivizing full-time students to enroll in fifteen credits per semester, (4) structured schedules of class offerings to provide working students the ability to predict class availability, and (5) guided pathways to completion, whereby students can be tracked into disciplines and know when required courses should be taken. Beyond creating a bounded system to consider for case selection, considering this dimension also highlights a state-level commitment to improving postsecondary completion, due to the means by which membership is decided.

Specifically, in order to join CCA's Alliance of States, a state's governor, in partnership with the state's colleges and universities, pledges to make completion a statewide priority. Considering principal-agent theory guides this study, this feature is especially notable. In particular, by focusing on states that are members of CCA, there is an inherent commitment from the state governor to increase college completion statewide. As the governor has varied responsibility in regards to appointment across the two case study states, it is possible that this commitment may vary in its effect on decision-making at the state higher education agency-level, but does provide a baseline acknowledgement of college completion as a policy imperative.

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[8] CCA updated their list of game changers around November 2016, replacing performance funding with a goal of reforming "math pathways" at institutions. This new aim focuses on changing academic curricula to align math requirements more closely to a student's chosen program of study, rather than uniformly using College Algebra as the default gateway math course. For purposes of this dissertation, this change in platform had no effect on case selection, as both states were members in CCA's Alliance of States prior to this time.

Regarding the cases in this study, both states are members of CCA, though there is variation in when they joined and their perceived level of involvement with the organization. Georgia Governor Nathan Deal made the commitment to the CCA Alliance of States in August 2011 (State of Georgia, Office of the Governor, 2011). The Peach State has since been referenced in CCA's publications as an exemplar of the effectiveness of various game changers, including guided pathways to success (CCA, 2012, 2013) and corequisite remediation (CCA, 2016). On the other hand, Nevada joined the CCA Alliance as one of its original member states in February 2010 (Lake, 2010), but has rarely been mentioned directly in CCA publications.[9] Although the dissimilarity in CCA referencing each state will be considered in each state's case analysis, for purposes of case selection, the commitment to CCA alludes to both states prioritizing college completion as a statewide policy concern. In turn, this also suggests each governing agency board will have a baseline understanding of the postsecondary attainment movement and will be seeking information to influence policies around this agenda.

Retaining a Consolidated Governing Board State Agency Structure

While state agency structure varies across states, with McGuinness (2005) noting the three most common arrangements (consolidated governing boards, coordinating boards, and planning agencies), a primary difference among these organizations deal with the centralization of authority. As highlighted by McLendon, et al. (2006), the variation in this autonomy can influence the preferences of stakeholders, emphasizing the "academic cartel" of autonomous consolidated governing boards versus a closer association to state government and less autonomy that exists among coordinating boards, which could play a critical role in this study. In particular, some research (Rubin, et al., 2016) suggests that more structurally autonomous state agencies

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[9] Georgia and Nevada, along with fifteen other states, have been highlighted as supporters of CCA's "15 to Finish" initiative, though no publication has explicitly referenced either state in detail.

may minimize information asymmetry between state officials and colleges and universities, due to their role as a centralized hub for postsecondary education within a state. Therefore, considering the central role information plays in the current study, it became important to limit case selection to those that uniformly have similar agency structure and, considering the variation in duties of coordinating boards between states (McGuinness, 2005), consolidated governing boards became a primary requirement for cases selected.

The consolidated governing boards overseeing the two states in this dissertation vary primarily in the size of their boards and the number of institutions within their system. A nineteen-member Board of Regents governs the University System of Georgia (USG), which oversees 28 public four-year institutions. The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), formerly known as the University and Community College System of Nevada, has a thirteen-member Board of Regents and oversees three four-year institutions, four two-year community colleges, and the Desert Research Institute, which is a graduate-only institution focused on atmospheric sciences and hydrologic science.

Means of Appointment to State Agency Board

A central component of this dissertation focuses on how variation in means of appointment to state higher education agency boards may influence board members' perceived role and use of research in the college completion policy process. Therefore, in order to gain an understanding of the influence of this organizational characteristic, it was important that the cases vary across this dimension. In Georgia, each of the nineteen USG regents are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Georgia Senate to seven-year terms. Fourteen of the board members represent each of the state's congressional districts and five are appointed from the state-at-large. In Nevada, the thirteen NSHE regents are publicly elected to six-year terms and

represent each of the thirteen legislative districts. In both states, regents serve staggered terms, so there is never significant change on the board at a given time and organizational memory can be maintained. An additional common feature of appointment across the two boards is that any vacancy due to an unforeseen circumstance results in the governor naming a replacement. In Nevada, though, any regent appointed is held accountable to subsequent public election decisions, should they decide to remain on the board.

Case Criteria		Georgia	Nevada
State Higher Education Agency		University System of Georgia (USG)	Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE)
Institutions Reporting to Board		28[1]	8
Voting Board Members		19	13
Appointment		Governor w/ Senate Approval	Publicly Elected[2]
Regent Term Length		7 year terms	6 year terms
State Political Party Control	Governor	Republican	Republican
	General Assembly Majority	Republican	Democratic[3]
Policy Liberalism Index[4]		32	31
State Political Culture[5]		Traditionalist	Individualist

Table 1: Dimensions of Sample States

[1] Although currently overseeing 28 state institutions, when USG initially instituted the Complete College Georgia initiatives, there were 35 member institutions, which were reduced due to consolidation plans that predate the implementation of CCG.
[2] The Governor appoints members to Nevada's state board when there is an unexpected vacancy, which has led to the involvement of approximately half of the current board. However, following their initial appointment by the sitting Governor, all Regents are subject to reelection via public elections.
[3] The Republican Party held the majority in the Nevada General Assembly during the 78th Legislative Session in 2015 and 2016, before the Democratic Party retook control in 2017.
[4] Policy liberalism index was adapted from Gray (2013).
[5] Political culture typology was adapted from Elazar (1972).

Additional State Characteristics

Although not considered in the original case selection process, two additional state characteristics may emerge as influential on themes for this study: state political ideology and state political culture.

State Political Ideology

A potential emergent state characteristic that may influence this study's findings is state political ideology and party control within the government. As noted by multiple researchers, education plays a central role to society, including developing the knowledge base for civilization and ability to shape the opinions of individuals; however, varying political philosophies regarding how education should "best" function have resulted in competing goals for the sector (Fowler, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Spring, 2005a, 2005b). To this end, many suggest that divergent values ultimately underlie and provoke opposing positions between political parties. For example, Fowler (2013) highlights four groups of values – self-interest, social, democratic, and economic – that she perceives as influencing variation among various political ideologies in the United States. Regarding education, Fowler argues the conservative perspective suggests education should be as localized as possible, with minimal influence from the federal government, ultimately focusing on self-interested values regarding economic prosperity. On the other hand, the liberal perspective for education focuses on goals centering on equality and opportunity of intellectual and economic opportunity across the population.

Comparing state political ideology in Georgia and Nevada is striking as both currently have Republicans serving as governor but have different majority parties in the legislature, with Georgia maintaining a Republican-led General Assembly and Nevada's holding a Democratic majority. As will be discussed further in the Georgia and Nevada case studies (Chapters IV and

V, respectively), this difference is a bit more complex, too, as executive state officials representing both political parties have led each state in recent history. Further, while Georgia is commonly considered to be firmly a conservative state, Nevada has been historically viewed as a swing state. For example, the Democratic candidate has won Nevada's electoral votes for the past three presidential elections, whereas Georgia has been a firm supporter of the Republican presidential candidate since 1992. Therefore, it is possible that liberal perspectives may underlie policy decisions in Nevada, even though both states are, at first glance, Republican-led.

One caveat to this hypothesis comes from Gray (2013), who constructed a policy liberalism index based on state policy decisions in 2011 on four traditionally partisan issues (gun control policies, ranked strictest to loosest; abortion laws, ranked facilitative to restrictive; conditions for receiving benefits under Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), ranked facilitative to restrictive; and tax progressivity, ranked from those that tax the rich the most to those that burden the working class the most). Interestingly, Georgia and Nevada are ranked 32 and 31, respectively. Gray (2013) emphasizes that the index does not necessarily determine how liberal or conservative a state is overall, but rather highlights a state's "general tendency toward a conservative or liberal or middle-of-the-road position" (p. 6),[10] which would suggest the cases in this dissertation should align somewhat similarly regarding how political ideology influenced their policy decisions. Nevertheless, as the existence of a statewide college completion agenda is not in question, political ideology may emerge as most influential regarding the sources and types of information considered by state agency board members, as well as each state's underlying rationale behind their college completion goals and policies.

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[10] Georgia and Nevada were within ten spots from each other in the gun control policy (29 and 26) and TANF index (39 and 30), though there was more substantial differences in abortion laws (27 and 9) and tax progressivity (28 and 45).

State Political Culture

Besides the observable differences between the cases, it is possible that more fundamental and philosophic distinctions of each state may permeate decision-making. In order to capture this variation, I consider state political culture. Louis, Febey, and Gordon (2015) noted state political culture is embedded in society and, in citing Wirt, Mitchell, and Marshall (1988), represents "the backdrop of public preferences for behaviors and beliefs" (pp. 120-121). In particular, this includes a state's orientation toward the marketplace, expectation for the role of government, and perspective on who should be involved in government. Considering the interplay of politics and decision-making in this study, variation along this dimension may highlight underlying features that influence distinct decision in each state. In order to contextualize this dissimilarity, I turn to Daniel Elazar's (1972) three-factor typology[11] – individualist, moralist, and traditionalist – of which two are represented in the selected cases.

Georgia is classified as "traditionalist" according to this typology. Traditionalist states focus on a hierarchical perception of society and "confine real political power to a relatively small and self-perpetuating group drawn from an established elite" (Elazar, 1972, p. 99). Again, this culture is reflected in the way individuals are appointed to the state's public higher education agency, with the governor unilaterally selecting individuals to oversee the University System of Georgia. This systematized hierarchy may, therefore, influence how USG Board of Regents members perceive their role and the stakeholders they are most connected.

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[11] Although Elazar's typology has been considered previously in higher education research (e.g., Garland & Martorana, 1988; Gittell & Kleiman, 2000; Heck, Lam, & Thomas, 2014; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999), some political scientists have argued his classification is arbitrary and not a true empirical measurement (Erikson, McIver, & Wright, 1987; Nardulli, 1990). Consequently, I am considering Elazar's typology strictly for classification purposes and do not suggest his models are explanatory.

On the other hand, Nevada is classified as "individualist" in Elazar's typology. Of particular interest to this study, Elazar (1972) noted that this political culture emphasizes the "conception of the democratic order as a marketplace… [and] government is instituted for strictly utilitarian reasons, to handle those functions demanded by the people it is created to serve" (p. 94). Individualist states are viewed as seeking limited intervention by governmental agencies to encourage private initiatives and widespread access to shaping the marketplace. For purposes of this study, this perspective may suggest the decision to appoint individuals through public election serves as a means to represent a greater proportion of public interest.

DATA COLLECTION

Yin (2014) highlights six sources of evidence that are commonly used for case study research – documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts – and suggests the use of multiple forms of evidence to strengthen themes and findings within a study. This dissertation relies primarily on transcribed interviews with informants holding various positions from both states. Archival documents were used to complement the interview data. Lastly, pertinent video recordings, including meetings, speeches, and commercials, were available online promoting each state's college completion agenda and were considered for analysis. This section provides an overview of the identification processes and protocols utilized for this evidence base.

Identification of Informants

I identified interview participants for my dissertation in two ways. First, targeted informants were selected based on a preliminary review of various sources including: the governor's office websites, state governing agency strategic plans and websites, and media

coverage. In order to qualify for inclusion in this initial group of invitees, individuals needed to

serve a central role in the development and adoption of statewide college completion policies or

were positioned to be knowledgeable of the role of Board of Regents members in the policy

process. This identification process was supplemented by a snowball procedure, suggested by

multiple methodologists (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985),

which identifies individuals that may not have emerged from the archival documents reviewed

by asking already-identified informants to recommend other potential participants. Lastly, in an

attempt to ensure diverse perspectives were represented, interviewed respondents were also

asked to identify individuals that may have differing perspectives from their own.

Table 2: Distribution of Interview Participants		
	Georgia	Nevada
State Agency Board Members	4	5
State Agency Officials	4	3
Other State Officials	-	1
TOTAL	8	9

Multiple techniques were utilized to identify and contact 42 potential participants

between July and October 2016 between the two states. However, likely foreshadowing some of

the findings from this study regarding board members' preferred sources of research and

involvement in the policy process, I ultimately interviewed 17 individuals between Georgia and

Nevada. The interviewed respondents served in roles proximate to the state higher education

governing agency, including executive officers and members of boards of regents. In Nevada, I

was also able to interview a state official serving in the K-12 sector to provide additional context

to the role of the governor and discuss other prominent features of the state. It is also notable that

some of the agency officials interviewed recently served in an institutional-level capacity during

the development and adoption of statewide completion plans and discussed those perspectives as well. Table 2 provides additional information on the distribution of these respondents. Despite the low response rate, I achieved interview saturation in both states and also expanded my consideration and analysis of document and observational data as a result to provide additional contextual and background information.

Interview Protocol

I employed a semi-structured interview protocol for this dissertation. Framing each conversation around nine open-ended questions that were based on my review of the literature and guiding framework for this study (see Appendix A), I was able to explore common themes between participants. This interview technique also afforded the option to use probes and prompts as a means to follow-up and tailor each conversation to specific topics pertinent to specific respondents (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Individuals were sent a waiver of consent with their initial invitation that outlined the purpose of the study and their rights and responsibilities as a potential participant (see Appendix B). Interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed, with permission from each participant. The interview location was left to the respondent's discretion with most opting for their office and one choosing a local coffee shop. Every effort was made to conduct interviews in-person, but, due to scheduling difficulties, several needed to be completed over the phone. Follow-up questions were also sent electronically to two respondents after the transcription and analysis of their initial interview. All participants were offered the option of confidentiality through the use of a pseudonym or generalized position title. I also collected extensive notes during each interview on emergent themes and characterizations of the tone of the conversation. These interview notes were also considered when evaluating the transcribed data.

Documentation

While this dissertation relies primarily on transcribed interviews, archival documents served as an important supplementary form of data. In addition, documents were central in the initial identification of potential interview participants and helped contextualize state characteristics and provide background information on the status of college completion policies in each case study state. Document sources considered for this dissertation included: state higher education agency board meeting agenda and meeting minutes from 2009 to 2016 (including several PowerPoint presentations and other materials discussed at these meetings), state agency strategic plans, national, regional, and state intermediary organization reports, and local and national media articles. Most documents were accessed online through state agency, intermediary organization, and press websites, with the goal of collecting these archival materials directly from their original source. In total, I reviewed 182 documents from Georgia and 176 from Nevada, with an overall pagination range of one to 250.

Observations

Yin (2014) suggests event observation can help corroborate data collected from interviews and document research. Unfortunately, due to the timing of my study and interviews, I was unable to attend any applicable events first-hand. However, during interviews, I sought suggestions from respondents regarding archived events and videos related to the study and many suggested various archived meetings, speeches, and other materials that were appropriate to review for my study. In Georgia, observational data included over twenty videos of Complete College Georgia events from 2011-2016. For Nevada, I reviewed four videos created by NSHE promoting completion policies and Governor Brian Sandoval's State of the State Address from

2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017. Considering my observation notes with the analysis of transcribed interviews and documents, I was able to reach data saturation for this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

When conducting qualitative research, data collection and analysis should happen concurrently (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Consequently, I began the data analysis process following collecting an initial group of archival documents and completion of my first interview. For both interview and document analysis, I utilized both deductive and inductive approaches. As a deductive approach, I created an analytic framework consisting of operationalized elements of concepts related to the literature review conducted in Chapter II, including the role of state overseeing boards, research utilization, and principal-agent theory (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The resulting coding structure (see Appendix C) covers multiple categories including: 1) role of Board of Regents; 2) state college completion policy process; 3) factors related to research use; and 4) state characteristics that have been deemed influential on the policy process. In addition to analyzing data with *a priori* coding, I also used an inductive approach and considered emergent themes from the data collected, which was accomplished by capturing *in vivo*, local language consistent with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and using pattern matching techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded and managed interview transcripts, archival documents, and observation notes through Dedoose, which is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQAS) (Paulus, Lester, & Dempster, 2014). Besides being useful in the application of my coding structure, Dedoose provided additional analysis mechanisms, including memos and data visualizations, to find emergent and cross-case themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

VERIFICATION OF DATA

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this study, I employed techniques highlighted by multiple qualitative methodologists. For instance, Creswell (2014), Maxwell (2013), and Yin (2014) recommend several strategies to increase the validity and reliability of a qualitative research study, of which I plan on applying several of these. First, I triangulated my data collection efforts by utilizing a variety of data sources, including interviews, documents, and archived observations, and looked for converging themes and perspectives, which aid in the establishment of construct validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, I used member checking to discuss my findings with respondents, through the use of follow-up interviews and communication. Third, I considered and will discuss information and perspectives that arose that counter or oppose the themes outlined in my findings to establish internal validity. Fourth, I use a rich, thick description (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2006) to fully highlight aspects of my findings. Finally, according to Merriam (2009), Stake (1995, 2006), and Yin (2014), the use of a multiple case study method increases the potential generalizability of the findings beyond the cases involved and heightens the external validity of the overall project.

LIMITATIONS

In developing this study, I attempted to limit potential challenges and causes for bias, but weaknesses are expected. First, with any qualitative study, a central cause for potential bias centers on the fact that the researcher serves as the central instrument for collecting and interpreting data (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Simons, 2009). Specifically, it is important to consider my inherent biases that may influence the findings due to my involvement in all aspects

of the project (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2013). In particular, my personal beliefs and opinion about the involvement of politics in academic governance may result in my findings revealing a more critical perspective of certain states and agencies. I have also developed hypotheses for many central themes of this study due to other research projects, which may have initially influenced how I interpret the data.

Beyond the researcher serving as a potential cause for bias, there are also limitations that may affect my collected data and study. For example, my interviews required respondents to recall past events and, therefore, my findings are only as good as the memory of my participants. Additionally, because underlying my study is an understanding of motivation and politics, it is possible that some respondents were not entirely candid in their responses when being interviewed. Although I triangulated respondents' responses with documents and event observation to maximize accuracy, the possibility that those interviewed were not entirely truthful could be a limitation. Finally, the current study was limited by response rate. While data saturation was achieved through a total of seventeen interviews between the two states, it is possible that some of the non-responders may have experiences that counter the current findings. I attempted to remedy this concern utilizing various triangulation techniques, but it remains a potential limitation for the study.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGIA: A BOARD OF POLITICAL APPOINTEES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the role of the University System of Georgia (USG) Board of

Regents in the development and enactment of statewide college completion efforts. The first

section discusses underlying state characteristics, including features of the higher education

sector, which provide context for the later analysis. This is followed by an overview of the

development and current status of the college completion agenda in the state. Section three will

provide an analysis of the USG regents' role regarding statewide college completion policies.

Finally, this chapter concludes by presenting emergent themes from the Georgia case that

influence the role of USG regents around the state's policy process.

GEORGIA IN CONTEXT

Before discussing college completion in Georgia and the role of the USG Board of

Regents, this section provides background information for the overall case and highlights state

features that guide the later analysis of the case. Drawing on data collected from interviews and

supplemented by descriptive information, I will review four categories of state characteristics:

demography, economy, government and politics, and the public higher education sector.

Demographic Features

Georgia is the eighth most populous state in the nation and is continuing to grow

exponentially, outpacing the average population growth of the nation and other southeastern

states (Cornwell & Mustard, 2006). In fact, from 2015 to 2016, Georgia was ranked as having

the seventh largest growth in additional citizens from 2015 to 2016 (U.S. Census, 2016). Similar

to many other areas of the United States, the major demographic change in Georgia is the

shifting racial composition of the population. In particular, the Hispanic population in Georgia

has grown from 1.7 percent in 1990 to 9.2 percent in 2012 (Cornwell & Mustard, 2006).

Historically, Georgia has also maintained a large Black representation in the state population,

which the United States Census (2015) reported to be 31.7% in 2015. This ranked Georgia third

highest among individual states, behind only Mississippi and Louisiana, and almost 2.5 times

higher than the overall American population, which stood at 13.3% in 2015.

A second demographic characteristic that has received significant attention in Georgia

has been the influx of undocumented immigrants into the state. Estimates by the Migration

Policy Institute (2014), which considered data from the U.S. Census Bureau American

Community Survey between 2010-2014 and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program

Participation, suggested approximately 377,000 undocumented individuals reside in Georgia.

This estimate ranks Georgia as having the seventh highest population of undocumented

immigrants in the country, behind California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New

Jersey. State policymakers have become alarmed by this statistic and over the past decade have

enacted laws that some view to be directed specifically at this population.

Within the higher education context, Georgia policies have included restricting

undocumented students from enrolling at the top five public universities in the state and barring

them from paying in-state tuition at all public postsecondary institutions (Vasilogambros, 2016).

Although these policies are not central to this dissertation, a regent explained that underlying the

enactment of these laws was the legislature's goal of "prohibiting the use of taxpayer funds for

undocumented students." This respondent indirectly highlights a reoccurring topic and characteristic of Georgia policymaking, namely a focus on the economy.

Economic Features

Georgia's economy is based on the contributions of a diverse set of industries, including agriculture, real estate, entertainment, mining, energy, military, and tourism. Central to the economic landscape is Atlanta, which serves as the state's capital and a major metropolitan city and international hub for the Southeastern United States. The city also operates the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, continually ranked as the busiest airport in the country for both aircraft and passenger traffic (Federal Aviation Administration, 2016). Nevertheless, Georgia's economy has recently fallen when compared to the rest of the nation.

From 1990 to 2003, Georgia outpaced the national average regarding gross state product, median household income, and employment rate (Cornwell & Mustard, 2006). However, since the 2008 financial recession, Georgia has faced difficulties in recovering at the same rate as the rest of the United States. For example, Georgia's unemployment rate stood above 7% from late 2008 through August 2014, and only reached pre-recession levels in mid-2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Georgia's current unemployment rate has remained between 5.3-5.5% since 2016, whereas the national average has ranged from 4.6-5.0%. Although these differences are not as significant as elsewhere in the country, it is notable considering the favorable pre-recession comparison between Georgia and the nation.

A contributing factor to the unemployment rate in Georgia is the continued issues around educational attainment in the state. As part of a five state study investigating attainment strategies, Perna and Finney (2014) noted Georgia trailed the national average in high school graduation rate since the mid-1990s, with similar patterns for postsecondary participation and

completion. Although they mentioned Georgia has "improved modestly" (Perna & Finney, 2014, p. 65) in decreasing these gaps when compared to the national average from 1990 to 2010, its likely that Georgia's population remains undereducated for the workforce the state requires.

To this end, Governor Nathan Deal, who took office in January 2011, has focused a significant portion of his tenure on workforce development and improving the state's economy. Through tax reform and investing in education and state infrastructure, he has seen some success in improving the state's economy. According to Deal's (2017) official biography:

> Since taking office in 2011, Gov. Nathan Deal has led Georgia to become the No. 1 state in the nation for business for four years in a row – a first in Georgia history – and helped create more than 570,000 private sector jobs. In the last six years, Georgia's job growth has outpaced the national average while its population has jumped from 10th to 8th nationally… The state continues to grow local small businesses and attract top companies from around the world. During Gov. Deal's tenure, Georgia has become a global destination for companies in a wide range of industries.

Ultimately, although Georgia has had some difficulty since the 2008 recession, there has been notable attention and initiatives directed at improving the economy of the state from the governor's office.

Political Ideology and State Government

Georgia is commonly viewed to be a conservative state, primarily due to its geographic location in the Southeastern United States. However, Governor Deal's predecessor, George Ervin "Sonny" Perdue III, who took office in 2003, was Georgia's first Republican governor since 1872. Similarly, the Georgia General Assembly has historically held a Democrat majority in both houses. Control shifted in 2002, when Republicans gained the majority of seats in the Georgia Senate and, in 2004, they became the majority party in both houses. The Republican Party has since strengthened their control in the legislature, holding 38 out of 56 seats in the Senate and

119 out of 180 in the House of Representatives during the 152nd and 153rd sessions of the

Georgia General Assembly (Council of State Governments, 2015, 2016).[12] The shifting, albeit

conservative-leaning, political ideology of Georgia is reflected in Virginia Gray's (2013) policy

liberalism index, which ranks Georgia as the 32nd most liberal state regarding policy decisions.[13]

Some media pundits suggest Georgia is becoming a more centrist state politically, including

hinting at its potential as a swing state for future presidential elections (McLean, 2016). Notably,

Bill Clinton was the most recent Democratic presidential candidate to win the state in 1992, and

he won by a margin of only 0.59% of the vote.

Other than political ideology, an important aspect of Georgia's state government stems

from the powers of the executive branch. Most recently, Ferguson (2013) ranked governor's

power in 2011, which coincided with Nathan Deal taking office. Considering various factors,

including margin of victory, political ambition of the individual, term limits, and performance

ratings, Deal was rated a 4.00 out of 5.00 on personal power. In considering the institutional

power of the governorship, which evaluates the powers given to the executive officer by the state

constitution, statutes, and voters, Georgia was rated a 3.00 out of 5.00, with the highest marks for

budgetary power and political party control (Ferguson, 2013). Considered together, this rated the

Georgia governorship in 2011 a 7.00 out of 10.00, which ranked the state as having the 36th most

powerful governor's office. As Ferguson's rating considered the individual in office and an array

of policy items, an alternative metric was developed by Christakis (2009), which focused

specifically on the governor's role in the higher education domain. In comparing 33 states,

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[12] The current 154th Georgia General Assembly (2017-2018) has seen some additional change, with the Democrats gaining two seats in the House of Representatives and reducing Republican seats by one.
[13] A more detailed explanation of the calculation and meaning of this index are discussed in Chapter III.

Georgia ranked 17th in formal authority and 7th in informal authority.[14] The Christakis ranking

suggests the governor has limited powers based on state-mandated authority, but is viewed as

having a high level of power by those most closely involved in the postsecondary sector.

A final consideration regarding the state government centers on the legislative branch.

Hamm and Moncrief (2013) classify Georgia's General Assembly as a citizen legislature that

meets for no longer than forty legislative days each year. In 2011, 23% of Georgia's state

legislators were women, which is on par with the national average of 23.3%.[15] Regarding racial

diversity, the most recent data from 2009 described Georgia's legislators as 22% Black and 1%

Hispanic, which is higher in the former (8.5%) and lower in the latter (3.3%) than the national

averages (Hamm & Moncrief, 2013). The large proportion of Black state legislators is

attributable to the racial demographics of the state, though the current rise in Hispanic citizens

has yet to be met with similar representation in the legislature.

Georgia Higher Education Overview

Public postsecondary education in Georgia began in 1785 when the University of Georgia

(UGA) was chartered and became the "first state university in the United States"[16] (Thelin,

2011). Although students did not enroll until 1801, the early founding of UGA signified the

long-standing focus on higher education in the state. Currently, there are a total of 28 public

four-year colleges and universities, and an additional 22 technical colleges governed by the

independent Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). Georgia's four-year institutions

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[14] Factors included "formal authority" over the postsecondary budget, appointment responsibilities across the education sector, and influence over statewide higher education policy decisions, as prescribed by the state constitution, and "informal authority," which considered the perception of gubernatorial influence by campus and system executives.

[15] The National Conference of State Legislatures shows this number rose slightly to 23.7% in 2015, but was outpaced by the national average of 24.4%.

[16] There are conflicting histories regarding the first public university in America between the University of Georgia and the University of North Carolina, as UGA was founded first but UNC enrolled a student earlier (Thelin, 2011).

include four research universities (Augusta State University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and UGA), four comprehensive universities (Georgia Southern University, Kennesaw State University, University of West Georgia, and Valdosta State University), ten state universities (Albany State University, Armstrong State University, Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Fort Valley State University, Georgia College & State University, Georgia Southwestern State University, Middle Georgia State University, Savannah State University, and the University of North Georgia), and ten state colleges (Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Atlanta Metropolitan College, Bainbridge State College, College of Coastal Georgia, Dalton State College, East Georgia State College, Georgia Gwinnett College, Georgia Highlands College, Gordon State College, and South Georgia State College).

The University System of Georgia (USG) serves as a consolidated governing board[17] providing oversight and management of the postsecondary sector. Constitutionally-established with the Georgia General Assembly's passage of the Reorganization Act of 1931, the act created the Board of Regents to oversee the state's public postsecondary sector (Fincher, 2003). At the time of its creation, the eleven-member board oversaw 26 independently run institutions and represented the ten congressional districts with one additional at-large position. Board members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Georgia Senate. Although the appointment mechanism remains, the USG Board of Regents has expanded to include nineteen members, representing the fourteen congressional districts and five at-large positions. Regents serve seven-year terms and can be reappointed by the sitting governor, which one board member suggested

[17] TCSG serves as the primary avenue by which Georgia confers associate and certificate degrees and is overseen by the 23-member State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia. Similar to the USG Board of Regents, board members represent the fourteen congressional districts (with nine at-large seats) and are appointed by the Georgia Governor. However, because of USG's constitutional authority over the postsecondary sector, TCSG is viewed as an independent and supplemental governing body.

allows the board to "overlap various governor's terms, so that we're very independent" from the state government.

Members of the USG Board of Regents are charged with, as one respondent stated, "driving policy" and distributing funding for member institutions, among other responsibilities. A regent explained:

> We kind of look – give it a 30,000 foot view on where we need to head in education and make sure that things are being taken care of properly… There's mission creep [between institutions] and so we control that to some degree because… before [institutions] can have any new programs, they have to prove it to other schools in their area to make sure there's no competition and no duplication of programs, so that we don't have to spend money unnecessarily.

Additionally, the board is responsible for hiring a chancellor, who, the same regent noted, "is responsible for day-to-day operations, and… be our CEO that answers to the board, and in doing so, he can look at the entire system and see where we've got issues." Referred to by a different regent to be "much like a local school board and a school superintendent," from July 2011 through December 2016, the chancellor of the USG was Henry "Hank" Huckaby.

Among his many accomplishments during his chancellorship, one of Huckaby's most significant actions was a series of eight university consolidations that began in 2013.[18] Although the most recent mergers occurred under the direction of the newly appointed chancellor, Dr. Steve Wrigley, multiple regents noted Huckaby's original decision to consider consolidations as one of his most important and suggested it will be what he "will be most remembered." According to respondents and a USG press release (Millsaps, 2011), underlying these

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[18] Gainesville State College merged with North Georgia College and State University to form the University of North Georgia; Augusta State University merged with Georgia Health Sciences University to form Augusta University; Waycross College merged with South Georgia College to form South Georgia State College; Macon State College merged with Middle Georgia College to form Middle Georgia State University; Kennesaw State University absorbed Southern Polytechnic State University; Georgia State University absorbed Georgia Perimeter College; Georgia Southern University absorbed Armstrong State University.

consolidation efforts was the goal of "serving students better." As explained by a regent, "We're taking money out of administration and putting it into academics… I can tell you, if you are a Georgia Perimeter student and suddenly you could get a Georgia State diploma, I think that's a real step up for everybody."

The institutional mergers signify a broader organizational characteristic of USG, namely its extensive autonomy from the state government and other political stakeholders. A USG official explained, "The Board of Regents has such authority and autonomy that if [a policy] was going to be their priority… I think that they would have been able to sustain that, and those are not conditions that are evident in most states." Therefore, regarding consolidation efforts or other system-level decisions, USG can operate independently from the governor's office and legislature. Respondents suggested the constitutional autonomy, coupled with the regents' staggered term length, was intended to keep USG and the Board of Regents "apolitical," including, as one regent pointed out, "if you make a decision against the governor or the legislature you can't be kicked off." Nevertheless, regents acknowledged that state policymakers remain one of the main constituencies that the board must serve, as "their responsibility is to the state system as a whole":

> We have to attract the best faculty and staff, so we can't ignore their needs. The students are our customers. They have a choice where to be educated, and we know if they're educated here in Georgia they're more likely to stay in Georgia, and we want our best and our brightest obviously to stay here and help drive our economy. You have a responsibility to the taxpayers, people that no longer have students here, still pay taxes, and they expect to produce a workforce that's going to drive the economy and make the whole state better, and then we also have a responsibility to the legislative branch. You know, they provide our funding and we have to be good stewards of the money they provide to us. Inevitably that creates conflict, because every legislature is assigned a district. Every district probably is close to a university or one of our institutions, and so I think that's the reason that it's designed the way that it is so that it takes those political pressures out of the system, but we still have to be responsive and prove that we're being

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good stewards of the funds they allocate us to meet the educational needs of Georgia.

Ultimately, due to the board's autonomy and regents' terms outlasting their appointing governor, respondents suggested the existence of a buffer to mitigate the potential politicization of the board's decision-making.

On the other hand, respondents also acknowledged that regents are governor appointed and senate confirmed, suggesting that they cannot be entirely apolitical. Specifically, regents suggested the need for a collaborative working relationship with the governor and legislators. One regent explained:

> We're appointed by the governor and confirmed by the senate, and so we're purposefully designed to be independent, but he is the governor of the state of Georgia, so I wouldn't say trump is the right word, but when the governor speaks… I think we would have to really disagree with a policy and think it wasn't in the best interest of the students, and I guess it's unique, because I had an opportunity to work with a different governor, but it's never been that way with this governor. This governor has never told us you have to do it this way or you know, there's always been dialog, and he's always factored in our opinions before making a decision… I've heard stories where the governor wants it one way and maybe the regents saw it a different way, but it's very collaborative here.

A USG official also noted, "with all that authority and all that autonomy comes responsibility and accountability." They mentioned the USG board and system acknowledge that they "can't work in isolation… You still are a part of a broader state government framework." In particular, "Although most of what higher education needs to do and decides to do in terms of agenda and pursuit of that agenda, don't necessarily need legislation to be able to do it… [we] make sure that there's awareness of our priorities by the government." This respondent elaborated by mentioning USG connects their goals to broader state priorities, acknowledging that, although autonomous, they are still "a part of a broader public agenda… we work and sit alongside

transportation, and agriculture, and public and human services, and the healthcare

infrastructure… we can't work in isolation."

Besides organizational characteristics of the Georgia postsecondary sector, a final

important feature centers on the Georgia Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE)

program. Established in 1992 under Governor Zell Miller, this policy utilizes lottery monies to

provide merit-based aid, which includes tuition assistance (amount varies based on the institution

enrolled), to eligible in-state high school graduates attending Georgia public postsecondary

institutions for up to seven years or 127 credits. In order to qualify for HOPE, students must

graduate high school with a 3.0 average and, to retain the award, must maintain a 3.0 average in

college with a minimum number of credit threshold.[19] Since its establishment, HOPE has been

successful in, as a USG official explained, "stopping the drain of good people leaving the state to

go Vanderbilt, and Duke, and maybe the Ivy Leagues" and generally retaining the brightest

Georgia college-going students in state. Consequently, HOPE has been emulated across the

United States (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Levine, & Spence, 2008; Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar,

2006) and established Georgia as a higher education policy leader, originally regarding merit-

based aid policies but more recently in regards to completion initiatives.

COLLEGE COMPLETION IN THE PEACH STATE

This section discusses the development and current statewide college completion activity

in Georgia. First, I provide a narrative history of the events surrounding improving

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[19] The HOPE scholarship originally covered all tuition and fees and provided a book expense allotment but in March 2011, Governor Deal signed a law that altered HOPE to only cover a proportion of tuition and removing mandatory fees and the book allotment from the amount granted. The new version of HOPE also added academic rigor requirements for students to be eligible and remain in good standing for the award. This law also created the Zell Miller Scholarship, which covers full tuition costs, but has higher academic requirements for eligibility.

postsecondary attainment in the state. Then, I will offer a more in-depth discussion of current

policy solutions enacted in Georgia and how each was developed and considered by USG.

Narrative History Around College Completion Initiatives

The consideration of postsecondary degree attainment as a policy priority in Georgia

predated the beginnings of the national college completion movement. A USG official explained

that by the time Obama made his proclamation in 2009:

> The Board of Regents was already involved with a project they called "RPG." It was "Retention, Progression, Graduation rates." I mean, there was no sexy name to it, they just nicknamed it RPG, and there were probably two, three, maybe even four cycles into making that a point of emphasis. The campuses were reporting a little more regularly about what they were doing with regard to retention and graduation rates, and the board was making it a center piece of their meeting schedule, to have regular conversations around that.

This respondent added that "UGA and [Georgia] Tech were already involved with their own

unique aspect of what they were doing about RPG," which ultimately eased the system's

transition to a more formal, statewide initiatives.

In particular, in 2011, Complete College America (CCA) approached Governor Nathan

Deal early in his administration regarding joining their Alliance of States. Appealing to Deal's

prioritization of workforce development, as well as the state's higher education sector's

established interest towards a focus on improving RPG, Georgia officially joined CCA in August

of that year (State of Georgia, Office of the Governor, 2011). In announcing the state's

commitment to improving postsecondary degree completion, Deal revealed the "Complete

College Georgia Initiative" (CCG) and a $1 million grant from CCA to jumpstart policy

innovation and reforms. Underlying the CCG initiative were five areas of emphasis – 1) college

readiness, 2) improving access and completion for underserved students, 3) shortening time to

degree, 4) restructuring instructional delivery, and 5) transforming remediation – that required

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significant coordination between USG, TCSG, and the Georgia Department of Education (Rubin & Hearn, 2016).

USG member institutions were also required to outline institutional-level goals, currently implemented policies, and various metrics to inform the statewide completion goal through the submission of institutional plans. These campus plans were utilized to share successes across the system and state (Rubin & Hearn, 2016). As highlighted by a USG official, the previous system-wide focus on RPG benefitted the transition to this larger initiative: "We really tried to stress that this wasn't a new thing to the university system schools. It was a continuation and an acceleration towards an agenda that we had already made a pretty firm commitment." In fact, it allowed Georgia to "get out in front of a lot of the other states" regarding policy development and enactment. This respondent continued, "For instance, a metric that I would put to that, Georgia was the first state in the Complete College America alliance to have every one of its institutions put forth a Complete College Georgia plan as well as its evaluation plan year-to-year in terms of being able to monitor progress. It was shocking." A different USG executive echoed this sentiment, noting that Georgia was "around the 30th or 31st state to join [CCA]," which made their standing as the first to achieve this milestone even more impressive. Other respondents argued that contributing to Georgia's success was their decision to go "all in" with CCA from the beginning, making improving degree attainment the primary goal for the postsecondary sector.

Respondents from this study also emphasized the speed by which CCG went from initial announcement to driving Georgia's higher education agenda, which some suggested was due to the central role of Governor Deal. As a USG official explained:

> I don't know that I've observed too many governing or coordinating boards getting too far out of step with the governor that appointed them. I think that there is a watchful eye and a listening ear to broader directives, and you know, and take that to Complete College Georgia, it meant everything that the governor's office in

terms of relaying their priorities for Governor Deal's first term, and then it became [his] second term, [and] better, more educated Georgia was the center piece of his agenda. Well, that was perfect when we were looking to take our retention, progression, and graduation initiative, which was already a priority in Georgia, and then re-label that, rebrand it as Complete College Georgia, part of this national Complete College America framework. It helped tremendously that the governor was already there in lock step with us making more educated Georgia a centerpiece of his agenda and our agenda.

Besides the governor's influence on the USG regents and CCG directly, this respondent also explained how Deal's involvement impacted institutional response indirectly:

The governor has an education policy advisor on his staff, and that person has been central to the coordination, the collection, the evaluation of our campus annual reports and on their progress as it relates to Complete College Georgia, and that's been true of the university system as well as the technical college system. We have given those reports in the fall of the year to the governor, and I think it's helped our campuses to take that exercise even more seriously. I mean, it's almost a value added. You had their attention already because they were making their reports to the Board of Regents, and of course the presidents report to the board, and they go to the board for their resources and for policy directives, and then here you also have the added value that that report is also going to be reviewed by the governor's office. It gets everyone to take it a little more seriously, probably from the very beginning.

Given the constitutional autonomy of USG and the Board of Regents, the direct involvement of Governor Deal in establishing the CCG initiative was somewhat unique.

In addition to shifting policy priorities, CCG's enactment changed other features of Georgia's postsecondary sector. Respondents noted increased collaboration between USG and TCSG, which was previously lacking between the two independent systems. A regent explained, "We sat down with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the technical college system [board] on a quarterly basis, you know, with the board of education and the university system, and really talked about what are we doing to help meet the governor's plan." Again, due to CCG being the "governor's plan," these two separate systems had greater impetus to work together. In fact, a

USG official characterized the relationship between the two systems as "somewhat adversarial,"

but "Complete College America's effort… to work cooperatively with them to expand the

number of courses that would transfer, the articulation between the two systems, all of that came

together to greatly improve our relationship." There were also noted structural changes within

the USG system office, with one official describing:

> We restructured the academic affairs division to place Complete College Georgia
> firmly within this structure as a part of what we all do versus this initiative that
> kind of hung out to the side. So now CCG is a part of the academic affairs team. It
> reports up through the vice chancellor to the executive vice chancellor, and we
> feel, through that, we're helping structurally develop an approach that will enable
> whatever we do to not just flap out there in the breeze, but be embraced by all
> within our office as well as those within campuses, such as vice presidents for
> academic affairs and student affairs who will be impacted and whose participation
> and cooperation we will need moving forward.

Ultimately, these more fundamental changes to how Georgia's higher education sector operates

suggests CCG and the overall focus on degree attainment is more than just an immediate focus,

but rather is a long-term initiative for the state.

Policy Solutions

As part of the CCG initiative, USG has adopted several policies to support Georgia's goal

of increasing postsecondary degree attainment. While the following does not intend to serve as a

comprehensive examination of policies undertaken statewide since the national completion goal

was set, this section highlights the strategies most often covered by respondents in interviews

and discussed as being central to the overall statewide completion platform.

Improved Advising Using Predictive Analytics

One of the most widely discussed degree attainment-related policies nationally was

developed at Georgia State University (GSU) and is known as predictive analytics. Focusing on

improving student retention through the use of data and student advising, the beginnings of

GSU's policy can be traced to their 2011 University Strategic Plan. According to a document from GSU's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (2014), the university recognized that their undergraduate student body was "typified by large numbers of at-risk students," who are traditionally in most need of guidance to navigate a college pathway to completion. However, due to personnel shortages and organizational issues, many of these students were left unassisted. In response, GSU hired additional academic advisors, established a common electronic record system, and a campus-wide University Advising Council. Most importantly, though, the institution collaborated with the Education Advisory Board to develop and implement a web-based advising platform, which uses seven years of RPG data to "a) identify when students have gone off path for graduation, and, with proactive interventions spearheaded by their advisors, b) quickly get them back on track" (GSU OIE, 2014).

According to a report by New America, GSU's Graduation and Progression Success system (GPS) includes "more than 800 alerts aimed at helping advisors keep students on track to graduation" (Ewoko & Palmer, 2016) and has seen great success. Notably, GPS has led to over 50,000 in-person meetings between students and advisors, many more than previously occurring, which has resulted in students graduating faster (an average half a semester sooner) and in greater numbers (GSU's graduation rates have risen by 6 percentage points since 2013) (Ewoko & Palmer, 2016). Further, through the implementation of GPS, GSU has successfully closed the graduation rate gap for low-income, first-generation, and traditionally underrepresented minority students.

Considering the notable success of GSU, interest in predictive analytics has spread widely. In discussing this fact with a regent, they also noted the institution's rise in prominence:

> Georgia State is recognized around the nation for their retention programs, so we've studied what Georgia State is doing. Georgia State shares that knowledge

and the programs they have with our other 28 institutions. That's making a difference… just retention of students when they get in, let's keep them enrolled. Our advisors work closely with them… and I think that's great, because you know so many freshmen… suddenly you've got all this freedom. Mom and dad aren't looking over your shoulder saying, "Get up, go to school, do your homework." You're on your own… I think in the past, some schools, not necessarily in Georgia, but they say, "Well, if you don't want it, we've got somebody else that does," and they'll just replace you. Well, we don't do that in Georgia. We retain those students.

Through CCG's institutional plans, in particular, GSU's GPS system has been considered and adopted by other USG campuses. For example, this respondent provided an anecdote regarding another USG institution's use of a similar system: "I know at Georgia Gwinnett [College], you know, if you miss a class, your advisor knows about it, has probably contacted [the student] that night, and said, 'What happened? Why weren't you at English 101 this morning?' And you better have a good reason."

Beyond within-state policy diffusion, predictive analytics has also gained national attention. For example, CCA has been a strong supporter and promoter of GSU and predictive analytics as a policy solution. CCA (2013) has included predictive analytics as a central component of one of their "Game Changers" solutions, Guided Pathways to Success, which aims to position students into highly structured degree plans. They promote GSU as an example of how a GPS system can alert advisers when students fall behind to allow for early intervention and ultimately lead to degree completion. As a USG official explained, "Georgia State is this national model, and now they're one of the heroes that Complete College America talk about all the time… They've had people come from numerous other states looking at what they are doing." Additionally, Dr. Timothy Renick, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success and Vice Provost at GSU, is widely considered the architect of the GPS system and is a frequent presenter at CCA's meetings and workshops. Besides the involvement of CCA,

Renick has also furthered the exposure of GSU and their accomplishments around advisement, student retention, and student success through testifying before the U.S. Senate, multiple invitations to speak at the White House, and several instances of regional and national press coverage.

Corequisite Remediation

Improving developmental education has been another focus for Georgia, as highlighted by its position as a goal of the broader CCG initiative. To this end, USG turned to a CCA-supported policy solution – corequisite remediation. As discussed in Chapter II, corequisite remediation recommends students requiring developmental education to enroll in credit bearing courses that provide additional support, including tutoring or additional class time (CCA, 2016). It is argued that, through this process, underprepared students will be able to close the knowledge gap, while still gaining credit towards their degree, removing the additional time and cost for students to complete a traditional developmental education track.

For Georgia, considering corequisite remediation as a statewide policy was strongly associated with its membership in CCA's Alliance of States and support by Governor Deal. Starting in January 2013, two faculty-led task forces, which included representatives from USG and CCA, began work to construct plans to improve remediation for two key subject areas – Mathematics and English and Reading. These groups issued reports in the summer of 2013, which included the recommendation to utilize a corequisite approach for students in gateway courses. Then, a USG official explained, the system was provided "some grant support from [CCA]" to help implement some of these proposed recommendations, including corequisite remediation, at a small scale starting in 2014. This respondent explained the scaling of the program to become a system and statewide initiative:

Corequisite remediation started with five vanguard institutions, mainly access oriented state colleges who wanted to undertake this challenge to revamp developmental education, and so we did that with some grant funding and through the process we saw that the course completion rates in the credit bearing gateway classes have increased at a tremendous rate. And so we took those findings, we presented them to the board, and the board was very impressed. They saw that it was a worthwhile endeavor, and so based on that, what they did is passed policy that mandated that all campuses that offer developmental education would do so at scale, which meant that over 50% of seat offerings would be within a corequisite model. And so that's what we've gone to, and our first year results that we've seen have been just as impressive as the pilot results, so it seems to be a policy that has been worthwhile and with it we've seen a dramatic uptick in completions for students who are least prepared.

Corequisite remediation has established itself as a cornerstone to Georgia's higher education sector, and the state, in turn, has become a symbol of its potential as a policy solution. CCA (2016) even highlighted Georgia as one of its five "Bridge Builders,"[20] showcasing the improvement in completion rates of students following the adoption of the policy.

College Credits Earned, Without Degrees

Another policy central to the CCG initiative focused on non-traditional aged students. As one USG official explained, when Governor Deal and the system originally considered the postsecondary degrees needed to meet future statewide workforce requirements, "they realized that what we need as a state is 250 more credentialed adults above and beyond what we were producing" via the traditionally-aged college-going population. Consequently, USG developed two programs directed at attracting former postsecondary students, who earned credit but did not receive a credential. First, "Go Back, Move Ahead" was established to appeal to the "approximately 1.1 million working-age adults, or 22 percent of the state's population, who attended college for some time but did not finish" (USG, 2016). This program provides

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[20] This was a reference to a previous CCA (2012) document that suggested current remediation programs served as a "bridge to nowhere," referencing the poor degree completion rates for students who begin in gateway or remedial level courses.

interested students with a simpler enrollment process, a personal academic advisor, and an explanation of ways to transfer earned college credits, with the goal of finding an online or on campus program that would aid the student's ability to graduate in a timely fashion. It also established a call center and website to provide additional information and support to help interested students return to a USG institution. Interestingly, with the exception of the occasional special interest story (e.g., Staples, 2016), there has been little acknowledgement by Governor Deal, USG, or the media regarding the success of this policy.

A second initiative, known as the "Associate Degree you Deserve" (ADD) program, focuses on students who transferred out of an associate degree program to enter a bachelor's degree program, but failed to officially complete either. Referred to, more generally, as reverse transfer, this and similar policies aim to award associate degrees to students who complete a total of at least 60 credits across all enrolled institutions, usually with a minimum credit requirement completed at the associate degree-granting institution. In Georgia, a pilot program was conducted in 2015 of students who began at East Georgia State College, then transferred to Georgia Southern University or Augusta University. Of the 459 students identified as potentially eligible to receive an associate degree, 112 students (24%) applied and 101 students (22%) were ultimately awarded (USG, 2016). According to USG (2016), these results implied a "significant opportunity to award credentials to current and former students that demonstrates their level of educational attainment," which suggests it will be scaled to the larger system. However, as a regent explained, "We've instructed staff to start identifying those students... Now, how we're progressing as far as getting back to those people and get them to come back to school? I can't really answer that question." As seen with the percentage drop off from those invited to

participate in the pilot program to those who ultimately receive their degree, reverse transfer does not guarantee high degree yield rates.

15 to Finish

A final policy enacted as part of the CCG initiative focused on the number of credits students are enrolled. First utilized in Hawaii, "15 to Finish" focuses on having full-time students enroll in fifteen credits per semester. As discussed in Chapter II, motivating this policy is the belief that the longer a student is enrolled in a degree program, the less likely they are to graduate. The more standard 12 credits per semester also cannot ensure students will reach the 60 or 120 credits required for their associate's or bachelor's degree in the expected time period (two or four years, respectively). Consequently, this policy suggests it is critical for students to enroll in, at least, 15 credits to complete on time. CCA (2013) has been a major proponent of this policy since the organization's inception, naming it one of its five "Game Changers." Georgia, as well as other CCA member states, has since adopted the policy as a central component to their postsecondary completion agenda, utilizing CCA-developed flyers, postcards, and commercials to promote the policy.

CASE ANALYSIS

The following section focuses on research question 1 and aims to analyze the role of the USG Board of Regents on the statewide college completion process. In particular, I will review their involvement in the development of the policy agenda, adoption of specific policy solutions, and the means by which board members informed themselves and utilized information during the policymaking process. I will also consider how the USG regents being governor appointed influences these various roles.

USG Regents and the Policy Agenda

In conversations with respondents, the development and prioritization of the college completion agenda in Georgia was discussed primarily as a governor-led initiative. One regent suggested the majority of decision-making occurred between the state executive and USG chancellor:

> The way I remember it is it was really the governor's initiative, that he had done some background work and came to the chancellor, said you know, we've got to be a more efficient operation, and we've got to get more children -- more young people in Georgia through our system graduated to meet the needs of what our economy is going to be, and of course we're preparing people for jobs right now that we don't know if they're going to be there.

This regent did reference a previous working relationship held with the governor, but, in their words, "I don't know if he was talking to every regent as much as he was talking to me, but we were talking a great deal during that time, and I know he was talking to other regents too, but… his main conduit was the chancellor." Notably, this perspective aligns with how CCA has previously recruited member states, specifically through the governor's office in partnership with the higher education sector head. The limited involvement of the USG board at the agenda setting process is therefore possible, especially considering the board's previous involvement in the RPG initiative, which may have also functioned as acknowledging their support for a broader degree attainment-focused policy agenda.

Further, although the majority of decision-making around setting the completion agenda occurred after Governor Nathan Deal took office, some suggested his predecessor Sonny Perdue laid the groundwork that led to the agenda's quick development. One regent explained that Governors Deal and Perdue "have the same goals in mind… so when the new governor came on, he was all very much in line with just about everything that was already established ---

we recognized it, you know, pretty much independently what needed to be done. Some of our people were talking to the governor's staff to see what they thought about different ideas." Therefore, considering the established support for college completion-related activity throughout the system, the policy agenda process may have been more informal and not required significant involvement by the Board of Regents.

Once the agenda was in place, though, respondents suggested the autonomy of USG and the Board of Regents became a key factor in its quick implementation and proliferation. A USG official explained:

> One thing that's not been as important for Georgia's completion agenda was to have SREB or Lumina or Gates or even CCA coming in and vouching for the importance of this to constituencies… We don't have to persuade the House, and the Senate, and the governor for this to be a priority. We control this agenda from the Board of Regents. We can do what we want to do. If this is a priority, we'll pursue it.

Ultimately, due to organizational characteristics of Georgia's higher education sector, there was limited need to consider perspectives outside of the USG system when determining whether CCG and college completion, more generally, should be the centerpiece of the state's policy agenda. Consequently, although the Board of Regents did not necessarily serve a central role in determining the agenda for postsecondary degree attainment, it became their responsibility consider policy solutions and oversee the implementation of the governor's directive.

USG Regents and the Development of Policies

The USG Board of Regents had a limited role in the development of completion-related solutions enacted statewide, which can be attributed to two factors. First, some of the policies associated with CCG (15 to Finish and corequisite remediation) were adopted due to the state's involvement in Complete College America. Many of the policy details and decisions were made

beforehand and proven successful in other states, necessitating minimal involvement by USG

decision makers outside of adapting these policies to the Georgia context. Further, the

homegrown policies (predictive analytics) began at the institutional-level and were then scaled to

the entire system courtesy of the institutional plans submitted through CCG. Again, this policy

process required limited action by USG and the Board of Regents besides serving as a conduit

for information and policy flow. Overall, as one USG official mentioned, "Many of the things

that we put into place or started were directly flowing out of the Complete College Georgia

initiative, and we had enthusiastic support. I don't know that we ever had any push back in any

significant way." Ultimately, due to the substantial support across the state and higher education

system regarding CCG, this respondent's comments suggest that ideas associated with the

broader initiative were quickly supported. However, some suggested the completion agenda was

not reflective of the level of involvement by regents in the development of other policies.

For example, some respondents argued that regents had a limited role because the college

completion agenda uniquely falls entirely within the academic affairs domain. As a USG official

described:

> I think completion is unusual, in that they're generally different programs or
> approaches that have to be tried out. When we're getting into this, it's based on
> what we're hearing from our sister states, what we're hearing at national meetings
> through Complete College America, the Gates Foundation, Lumina, and others
> about best practices, and you quickly learn, okay, these isolated incidents, there
> have been successes. You have seen that teacher A has tried this treatment and it's
> worked, and we said well, how is that going to apply for our system, and to our
> institution specifically? And so you know, it takes some trial and error. It takes
> moving forward and giving this a go and seeing what the data might say, whereas
> in other situations… when [regents are] involved with fiscal policy or… capital
> projects, it might be a little more straight forward in manner regarding the way
> they act… We have a little more room in academic affairs I think to truly develop
> a hypothesis and a treatment that we run through our campuses and see what the
> outcome is.

This respondent also noted that regents perceive system staff to be "content experts" in academic affairs and, therefore, rely on them to drive decision-making. Other USG officials made similar comments with one noting, "[Regents] feel like they're on the hook in terms of legal and fiduciary risk and responsibilities" and their expertise is not on the "academic side of the house." A third USG official also mentioned, "Most discussion meeting to meeting was done by the staff within the academic affairs committee, and then various initiatives we would discuss from time to time in the full board meeting." Ultimately, even among regents involved in the academic affairs committee, there was a reliance on USG staff to drive the development of completion-related policy initiatives.

On the other hand, some respondents suggested regents serve primarily in a triaging capacity between the state government and higher education sector and, through this role, are directly involved in the development of policy. As one regent explained, when the governor or legislature notes a policy concern:

> The Board of Regents is the one that's tasked with fulfilling the needs to get the job done. The governor does not have any day-to-day [responsibility]… other than his proposal that we do [something]. At that point it's turned over to us, and we're doing the best we can to get the message out and accomplish those goals, so… once the governor has a plan put together… his people speak to our people and the chancellor, and then… the chairman typically can say "look, here's what we need to do. We want to move this forward" and then the board and chancellor task staff members to get on the project and start working towards implementation.

As this respondent described, the regents' role primarily focuses on translating goals into action and working with the chancellor and chancellor's staff to determine appropriate solutions.

Although the regents are not involved in the direct development of policies, they are still involved in the broader discussion of solutions. For example, one regent summed up the sources of policy development in the USG system:

I think a lot of the ideas come from the regents. Some of the ideas come from the staff of the regents. Some of the ideas come from the public. You know, you get ideas from all kinds of places. It's not unlike the state legislature, the Congress of the United States where you get ideas from the staff on the colleges themselves and you get it from the staff, and like I said, you get it from the regents. All of our ideas certainly don't come from the regents.

Further, following a policy's enactment, regents play a role in overseeing their success, which necessitates knowledge of details of policies. A regent noted, "We monitor the metrics for Complete College Georgia – progression, retention, and graduation rates – the different metrics that we need to make sure that we have a high functioning system." Through these monitoring efforts, this respondent also noted the board's role in "identifying best practices and really praising those best practices, and facilitating knowledge transfer to other institutions." Consequently, while board members may not be as central in the policy development process, regents still serve an important role in the oversight of policies, as well as a translator between the state government and higher education sector. As a USG official explained, "They're a policy board. They're a governing board. They're not an implementation board."

USG Regents and the Use of Research

A final component of the policymaking process investigated in this study centers on how USG regents use research to inform their decision-making. Although there were few references to the Complete College Georgia initiative, and improving degree attainment broadly, most respondents emphasized the use of information by regents as they determine the value of enacting policies proposed and, more generally, deciding the direction for the system. In fact, one regent recalled a meeting with another regent and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, where "they made the statement, which I was very flattered by, they said, 'Of all the governing bodies [we] had met with [you] were two of the best informed regents that [we] had

talked with'… and [we] aren't any smarter than the other 17 [USG regents], I assure you." Other

regents echoed an interest in staying well informed with higher education trends within the state

and across the country noting, "It's a good amount of time that you spend as a regent."

Some respondents suggested USG regents' interest in information is equally a function of

the individuals serving on the board. Emphasizing the caliber of occupations and backgrounds of

regents, who include CEOs of major corporations, lawyers, business leaders, and former

legislators, a USG official explained:

> Many of these people are natural leaders, they've been active learners and
> engaged in their industries for some time, what I'm seeing, and I think it might be
> an individual characteristic as much as anything. With that type of individual,
> once they decided they're going to spend their time in this manner, they don't like
> to waste time, and they truly do engage and become active learners, and they have
> very good minds and ask very sharp difficult questions.

In other words, because USG regents are successful and deeply involved in their personal lives,

they approach serving on the board in a similar manner, and demand being as well informed as

possible.

Preferred Sources

USG regents noted a variety of information sources utilized throughout the policy

process. Overwhelmingly, though, respondents mentioned the critical role of the chancellor's

office and staff in supporting decision-making by providing research, data, and important

perspectives. For example, in discussing the consolidation efforts around campuses, one regent

explained:

> Our staff, we have a remarkable staff… They'll give us very concise reports,
> executive summaries if you would… on the consolidations they'd list North
> Georgia College, and then they'd list Gainesville College, everything about them,
> maybe 15 bullet points on each one that were similar, and then from that they
> would extrapolate what the anticipated savings were, and anticipated savings were
> secondary to how can we better serve the student… So those are the type things

we considered, but the staff drives so much of that with the information that they give us. There's no way, as I said earlier, that we would know that without staff helping.

A different regent echoed a similar thought, and suggested the USG staff is helpful beyond state and system-level information:

> I get papers on particular hot topics… and reading about that and talking to other people, and finding out how they handle this in other states, and I don't believe you've got to try to invent the wheel every time -- reinvent the wheel every time something comes up. I think a lot of times you can turn to other states that have had that same problem, and I ask the question sometimes, "Who is the best state in the country in handling this?" Let's go talk to them. When I say let's go talk to them, I don't mean I go talk to them, but the staff does.

Together, these responses emphasize the importance of the USG system staff as the primary and preferred source of information for regents.

USG staff also supported these comments, with one official suggesting a key aspect to their role is "stewarding a regent's time" regarding information and data provision. In particular, because of the occupations of regents, respondents suggested the system must maximize the regents' exposure to topics in a limited timespan. One USG official mentioned the system office was "surprised and amazed" former board chair Kessel Stelling, who is the Chairman and CEO of the financial services company Synovus, "finds as much time to crowd into his schedule for us" and that they are "fortunate to have access to him as much as we do." A different USG official also suggested the existence of a "culture" at USG where:

> … a whole lot of information gets passed on to the regents about budgetary issues and about HR issues and so forth… [and] the dissemination to the regents about academic information is much more ad hoc, so if there is an initiative going on, information about that particular initiative will be brought to the board, and it tends to be really precise, really honed in terms of that information.

Consequently, USG officials play a critical role in triaging information to maximize the regents' time. For instance, a respondent mentioned the system's communication office sends daily "communication clips that were online… [including] things nationwide in the higher ed area that we think it's important for them to see, so we can stay connected on a day-to-day basis and they have some understanding of what's going on nationally." Although individuals representing the system office and higher education sector, generally, were noted as primary informants, they were not the only source of information discussed.

One regent noted "being a regent is a very high visibility position, so you get a lot of calls." This sentiment was cited by multiple respondents and highlights another source of information – the Georgia citizenry. A regent provided an anecdote: "When I go to a Rotary meeting… I'll have probably, on average, five or six people come up and tell me something about education, either a success story of their children or a need of their children, maybe where we're failing or where we're succeeding, and I think all regents take that into account, but we get bombarded with it." This respondent did not discuss the outcome of these interactions, namely if these conversations result in any change, but a different regent suggested these conversations are often focused on voicing an opinion, especially "if we're dealing with a controversial decision… the name change in Augusta or, you know, undocumented students." This respondent continued by noting, "If it's something that's really controversial that needs to be aired, we want to hear their concerns and let everyone know we're listening." In fact, as the interviews for this study occurred during a controversial presidential hire at Kennesaw State University,[21] one respondent

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[21] In October 2016, Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens was named the next president of Kennesaw State University (KSU). Although supporters noted his deep roots to the KSU area, detractors were concerned about the lack of transparency during the search process and "his ability to represent the interest of all students, particularly those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender" (Stirgus, 2016). Following the announcement of Olens being the sole finalist, there were several protests and demonstrations on KSU's campus and at a USG Board of Regents meeting.

mentioned their answering machine was filled with messages "from Kennesaw State students that aren't real complimentary." But, they continued, "That's okay. I know where they're coming from, but you can't let those types of things drive your decisions. You've got to look at the big picture, what's best for the students, what's best for the institution."

Although regents acknowledge the opinions of these various constituencies, they do not necessarily drive decision-making or directly inform action. One regent explained, "I do think it's our responsibility to hear parents' concerns and the community's concerns, but really that is the role of the institution town and gown. That's the role of the [institution's] president to make sure he has that relationship." A different regent noted, "we recognize the students' concerns, but then again, I don't feel the tail should be wagging the dog." Ultimately, these unsolicited perspectives were not discussed in the same way as the USG system staff and other higher education officials and, therefore, may not be as effective in influencing broader system-level decisions.

Regents also highlighted the role of intermediary organizations and other third-party groups in providing research reports and general information. As one regent described:

> We get a good bit of information from different people. Here's Georgia Budget and Policy Institute that talks a lot about how we should do our budgeting, and I hadn't had a chance to read it yet. I got it in the mail this morning, and I'll go over that. Here's something on the P3 (Public Private Partnerships) initiative I'll go over before the day's over. So we get a lot of external [documents].

In particular, this respondent acknowledged the extensive amount of unsolicited materials these organizations send, with the presumed hope of influencing a regent's perspective. A different regent mentioned, "We all stay abreast of the national trends in education you see in popular press," but continued by stating, "Now am I reading academic journals? No. I have enough to keep the lights on around here to do that." Therefore, although intermediary organizations and

media may directly influence a regent's perspective, it is less likely that empirical evidence will be as readily consumed and considered.

Weissian Research Use Typology

In considering Carolyn Weiss's three-mode typology for research use (described in greater detail in Chapter II), respondents for this study emphasized USG regents utilize information primarily conceptually (changing how they think about a policy or problem) or instrumentally (resulting in changes in behavior). On the other hand, respondents did not provide examples of regents' political use of information (tactical use of research to support predetermined policy positions), which may reflect their limited influence on ideological or politically based decisions. For example, one of the most political higher education decisions in Georgia has been a policy restricting in-state tuition opportunities for undocumented students, which one regent explained, "The state law prohibits the use of taxpayer funds for undocumented students. So you know, for that issue, that's up to the legislature. If the legislature wants to tackle that and change what the law is, then we'll adhere to the law, so we're sticking with what the law is." Besides undocumented students, though, Georgia higher education is generally less ideologically driven, which may be attributed to the autonomy of the system removing significant opportunity for politics to enter decision-making and limiting the potential tactical use of information.

Several respondents did mention examples of the conceptual use of research. In particular, conversations with stakeholders and various interactions with institutions were discussed as shaping regents' perspective on a policy. One regent explained, "When I was chair, I always made time to go sit down with the students and have town halls and listen to them. I had many meetings with undocumented students to hear their concerns, because I never wanted them

to feel like their voice wasn't heard." This respondent continued by explaining their duty to be

"responsive to [state legislators] and to the governor, because they are elected officials"

representing the opinions of the larger citizenry. However, besides providing perspective, it was

unclear how this information translates into action by the regents.

A regent also mentioned the importance of interaction with institutions to shape the

board's view on the current status and needs of the system:

> I've gained a lot of my knowledge is interacting… with the presidents. I think that's a great thing about our system is ultimately the hiring and firing authority is with the board of regents, so the presidents, you know, many of them will come in and schedule times throughout the year and come and sit down and talk and tell us their priorities and you know, what they think is going right and give us advice on what's not going right. Our legislative counterparts… I spent a lot of time meeting with them and trying to understand their concerns, which leads me to go back and ask USG staff how are we addressing this? What's our plan? And we interact with institutions at all different levels through the committee process. I mean the institutions will present the program that they would like to see implemented and set forth their objectives. We'll have opportunities to question them and through that kind of Socratic dialog you have knowledge transfer.

Besides physical interaction with individuals on campuses, regents also discussed the extensive

literature received from Georgia's colleges and universities. One respondent explained, "I get

magazines… [from] every institution, I look at them every time I get them. Just go through to see

what's happening. That happens to be Augusta University and I looked at it last night probably

for 45 minutes just kind of reviewing what President Keel is doing there, what programs he's

starting, how the students are reacting. It's very informative." Although these communiqués may

not result in actionable decisions by regents, institutions are aiming to shape the board's

perspective and share their successes.

In discussing information being used instrumentally, USG regents primarily mentioned

anecdotal stories with individuals as influencing action. One respondent explained:

> I had a former student at Fort Valley State University that had a problem, and he had it for a long time, and he contacted me, and I contacted who I thought could maybe work it out and they in fact worked it out… I tend to think nobody really ever listened to him much, but in fairness to Fort Valley State it was kind of a convoluted story he told me over the telephone and I couldn't exactly follow everything he was trying to say, but when you put it in writing and focused on it, had to put it in writing and it was worked out, you know, it wasn't a big… public policy issue, but it was big to him.

Although on a small scale, the regent noted their interaction with the student was important and necessitated intervention, which ultimately resulted in a policy change. Other respondents provided similar examples, though a different regent suggested information led to a larger policy change:

> A friend of mine, who is heavily involved in education, has a daughter in the university system. She was having a terrible time getting a transcript transferred and being able to sign up for an online course. Well, I got on the phone with the college that was in question. They discovered from that conversation a pretty big weakness they had… and within 48 hours they had it remedied because this wasn't the only young lady that was affected by it – there were others they found out, but… I guess they didn't know who to talk to, which is a shame, but luckily this gentleman knew to call me. I'm a little bit like a state congressman even. I've got my constituency around here, and they know that if they have a problem they should call me… When [citizens] have a problem, they should go to their regent… we all respond to our constituency.

These excerpts suggest board members are responsive to anecdotes from constituency members and those with personal connections, which can, in turn, lead to policy change. Notably, both of the examples provided were at the institutional level and, across all interviews, there were no references to a situation where a regent changed system-wide policy in a similar way.

EMERGENT THEMES

The final section of this chapter discusses two themes that emerged when considering Georgia's broader college completion agenda with the role of the USG Board of Regents. First,

the timing of the national movement to focus on degree attainment aligned well with policy concerns of USG and the broader Georgia government. Further, due to the constitutional autonomy of Georgia's postsecondary sector, focused efforts around this single directive allowed for quick implementation. Second, although the USG Board of Regents was established to be structurally independent from the state government and serve as an apolitical body, board members remain associated with the governor, state legislators, and other influential decision makers, which ultimately influence their role on postsecondary processes.

Right Place, Right Time

A central theme from this case centered on the timing of the national college completion movement, which coincided with an already established focus on "retention, progression, and graduation rates" (RPG) in Georgia. In particular, as of 2009, USG regents were already requesting institutions to report degree attainment data and seeking ways to improve these metrics across the system. By consequence, colleges and universities were in the process of enacting policies and programs to support these goals. As mentioned by a USG official, these siloed pockets of policy innovation "explained our ability to accelerate and make progress quickly" following its membership in Complete College America and establishment of the CCG initiative. In particular, through CCG's campus completion reports, USG shared and disseminated already proven campus policies (predictive analytics) across the system and could consider CCA promoted solutions (15 to Finish and corequisite remediation) as supporting an established policy agenda.

Additionally, the constitutionally provided autonomy of the USG Board of Regents and system further expedited the decision-making and policy process. As a USG official points out, unlike other states that:

> … need all those external groups to come in and almost be a part of their bully pulpit to try and persuade the leadership to make this a priority, you know, of the legislative agenda or the governor's agenda. We don't need that here. Our board was already firmly on the completion agenda. We were firm about what our research says the five or six focal areas are, most pressing challenges are in terms of degree completion. We're going to pursue that agenda.

Although this respondent noted USG's use of CCA's completion metrics "for some benchmarks to kind of get some sense about where our state colleges were relative to where our research universities might be on a given subject," the system was able to work independently without the need of external support from the state government.

Nevertheless, the national college completion agenda also appealed to Governor Deal's focus on economic and workforce development. Although the USG Board of Regents does not directly report to the state government, a regent explained, "The governor let it be known that we needed to move along with [CCA], and his initiative, and the legislature's that we need to address [postsecondary degree attainment]." Therefore, although USG was established as an apolitical body (more on this later), the vocal support of state officials undoubtedly factored into the system's decision to pursue the completion agenda further. Ultimately, the national college completion movement, emergence of Complete College America, and Governor Deal's focus on Georgia's economy served as a perfect storm to associate with USG's already established focus on RPG. However, with the enactment of CCG, which primarily extended current initiatives, the potential role of the USG Board of Regents in the policy process was limited beyond its existing narrow function around academic affairs.

Apolitical, but Not Lacking Connections

Although USG's autonomy is aimed at creating a governing body lacking connections to the state government, a second emergent theme questioned how apolitical nature of the system.

Considering the regents are entirely appointed by the governor and confirmed by the legislature, there are understandably ties between board members and state politicians and policymakers. A regent explained, the Board of Regents was formed to create:

> …separation from the executive powers and legislative power through the Board of Regents, well, that sounds wonderful on paper, but as a practical matter, the governor appoints you. The governor appointed me. The governor appointed the other 18 of us. Some governor liked us and had confidence in our abilities to maybe mirror his agenda somewhat, but to navigate the waters of education.

Other respondents made similar comments, including a USG official: "Whoever [the governor] is will rarely appoint somebody that they don't already know or have confidence in, respect, whatever. So there will be some leaning that they're going to support the governor's initiatives." On the other hand, it was suggested that the governor's direct involvement with USG regents and interference with their decision-making was described as "minimal." For example, a regent mentioned, "I remember the governor… talking to me one time about one real hot topic, and that was closely divided, but I find beyond that, I've had very little of that, very little. It's less than you'd probably think." Nevertheless, preexisting associations between the governor and board members may preempt the need for state officials to become directly involved in regent activity.

Some respondents also argued the close ties between the state government and USG regents are expected and beneficial for the state. A USG official stated:

> I think in a major way that makes a lot of sense if you're going to have one centralized board, and the governor is going to help drive this agenda, I think it can be very helpful to have a board who is cooperative with those policies, and what I would compare it to is if a new president comes in and he or she has the opportunity to choose their senior level cabinet, who are going to be their major helpers along the way to enact what they want as policy reform.

In other words, although the USG was created to serve in an apolitical role, the reality is that if they were not, at least, partially aligned with the state government, it is likely that significantly

less would be accomplished. Further, a regent suggested, "We are really doing what the governor has asked us to do, and so we need to be responsive to their needs, but also sometimes to provide a buffer for emotions not to rule the day, and so… I see it as we aren't doing our role as regents if we aren't responsive to the legislative branch… and any time they have concerns, I think you see us move pretty swiftly to address it." Therefore, besides being able to work successfully towards statewide goals, maintaining a relationship with the state government provides a form of checks and balances on governor and legislature decisions.

Besides connections to the state government, individuals selected to serve on USG's board of regents tend to be well known within the state of Georgia. As a USG official explained:

> The people who are chosen for the Board of Regents, it's a very prestigious assignment. It's an assignment with a lot of power and a lot of responsibility, and I think you have a lot of natural leaders that are put on that board, and I think… that these leaders have proven themselves, you know, in a variety of different ways, because they have to make tough decisions, and they have to be willing to stand by them… It's a very public process, and you can't shirk from whatever you decide you're going to do.

This respondent continued by emphasizing that regents in Georgia "are fairly high profile in their respected areas and communities." A different USG official even mentioned a group of former public officials that were appointed to the board following their service to the state: "For example, Regent Larry Walker, he was in the legislature for 30 years. Back when Roy Barnes was governor, he appointed former Governor Joe Frank Harris to the board. I know a number of years ago there was a legislator, senator from… Augusta area that was on the board." Because of these high profile backgrounds, a respondent noted "regents are concerned about their neighbors and their communities… because they're going to have friends, and they're going to have neighbors asking them about X, Y, or Z," which may influence decision-making. This

perspective was also highlighted by board member's use of anecdotal conversations as a catalyst for policy action and change.

Respondents also suggested these informal relationships signaled a more significant characteristic of the regents, namely that they are respected and influential in the state. A USG official explained:

> I think that who your board members are… has a lot to do with how seriously the decisions of your board are taken. You've got highly respected citizens of your state that are on your board, individuals that have the respect, people that they've got the ability to get the governor and get leadership on the phone if they need to get them. People certainly with some influence. It goes a long way to the decisions of the board being taken seriously and you being able to plan long term to make commitments long term to deal with tough issues.

This respondent continued by suggesting, "You never want to have someone appointed to your board that that's the most important thing that they do in their life… That is a bad sign. We've got a lot of members of our board that are very accomplished, and their day gigs are very impressive. Their entire identify is not tied up in having an appointment on the Board of Regents." From their perspective, the fact that USG regents are effective in their private lives signals personal characteristics, like commitment and drive, which will translate to success for the system. In conversations with regents, this hope seems to be a reality, as one regent noted, "I've been a regent now for six years, never missed a meeting, and I'm not unusual. That comes up, where somebody has to miss a meeting, and we understand that, but it's very rare. Everybody puts the regent position as a priority in their life and takes it very seriously." Ultimately, as a different regent emphasized, "We're doing this out of the goodness of our heart. We're doing this because we want to help Georgia."

CHAPTER V

NEVADA: A BOARD OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the role of the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Board of Regents in the development and enactment of statewide college completion efforts. Before discussing these actors' roles, I first review underlying state features to contextualize this case, including the higher education system and other state-level characteristics of Nevada. This is followed by a summary of the development and current status of college completion initiatives in the state. I will then provide an analysis of the regents' role regarding statewide completion policies. The final section discusses emergent themes from the Nevada case and how these factors mediate the NSHE board's role in the state's policy process.

NEVADA IN CONTEXT

In order to provide background for the overarching case of college completion in Nevada and the role of the NSHE Board of Regents, this section highlights underlying features that undergird the later analysis of the case. Utilizing a combination of interview data and descriptive trends, I discuss four state-level features: demography, economy, government and politics, and the public higher education sector.

Demographic Features

The demography of Nevada is rapidly changing. Over the past 50 years, there has been extensive expansion in the population of the state. For example, in 1970, the federal census listed

fewer than 500,000 Nevada state residents, but had grown to over 2 million by 2000 (Hulse, 2002a) and amassed an estimated population of 2.9 million as of 2016. In fact, the United States Census Bureau (2016) reported Nevada experienced a 1.95% increase in population between 2015 and 2016, which was the second largest percentage growth in the nation,[22] signifying the continued growth of the state.

Respondents in this study suggested two contributing factors to this sustained population growth. The first is Nevada's emergence as a destination for "snow birds." As a NSHE official explained:

> "Snow birds" are the elderly folks that are from the East and from the Midwest, places where it snows and the weather is crappy. And they [move] here. They already paid for their home. They're in their 70s and retired… And so the weather is nice except for when it's super hot in the summer and that's when they go back to their home state.

A second feature contributing to the increase in population is what has been referred to as the "Californication" of Nevada, due to the movement of Californians into the state. One NSHE regent suggested as many as "half of Nevada's population is from California… with Northern Nevadans [coming] from the Bay area and Southern [Nevadans] from Southern California." As will be later discussed, these two subpopulations have had far-reaching influence in shifting expectations and political attitudes across the state.

Besides population growth, the Californication of Nevada has also been attributed to shifts in racial and socioeconomic composition across the state. A Nevada state official explained, "Over the course of 50 years, we went from predominantly White and predominantly affluent… to a majority minority student [aged] population in a state that's increasingly poor." This respondent suggested that because Nevadans tend to originate from outside of the state,

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[22] The only state to experience larger percentage growth in the 2015-2016 year was Utah (2.03%) and Nevada remained the only other state to face an increase above 1.9% (U.S. Census, 2016).

moving primarily due to economic opportunity, the population is shifting towards a majority

minority more rapidly than most other regions of the nation.

Although experiencing incredible growth and change in its population, Nevada still ranks

as the 16th least populous state in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This points to a

population that has not reached a saturation point in urban areas, which traditionally results in

suburban development and expansion. For Nevada, this has led to the population being

concentrated primarily in its two major metropolitan areas – Reno and capital city Carson City in

the North and Las Vegas in the South – though the population differences across the state goes

beyond these metropolitan areas. As one NSHE regent noted, "You have the North and the South

and the inner city regions and the outer, you know, the suburb regions and the 'cow counties' as

they call them in Nevada, with the ranchers and farmers, and the resort areas." Ultimately, this

geographic characteristic has developed into a regionalist focus by many Nevadans, which, while

originally caused by economic factors, has become a point of consideration that transcends all

aspects of state policymaking.

Economic Features

While economic factors traditionally play an important role in determining which policies

are prioritized and how a state develops overall, Nevada has subsisted historically on unique

industries that have had indelible ramifications evident today. *The Economist* (2010) noted this

when they described Nevada as "founded on mining and re-founded on sin – beginning with

prizefighting and easy divorce a century ago and later extending to gambling and prostitution."

Although the latter arrangement is what the state is currently best known, Nevada's beginnings

as a mining state are deeply rooted – as seen by their "Silver State" moniker. Nevertheless, a

shared aspect of these industries is their reliance on a non-resident population to drive economic

growth. An NSHE official provided the following anecdote, which emphasized the recent turning

point in the internal perception of Nevada's economy and the realization that change was needed:

> The casino business has grown steadily from '31, when casinos were legalized, but… in Las Vegas, people will focus on the opening of the Mirage Casino in 1989 [because] it was the emergence of the integrated resort and brought together two businesses in Las Vegas that were operating in parallel. One is the convention business and the other is the casino business... And it's the emergence of that that [caused] the rapid expansion of Las Vegas and… changed the economy… so, rather than being an economy that supports the casinos, it became an economy that was building these integrated resorts… From '89 to the recession in 2008, you had 20 years of massive construction and, in Nevada that meant two deceptive components to the economy… [First,] you always had people moving. They were buying new houses. They were buying cars. They were buying washing machines… The second piece is that a big, big part of the economy was construction – building the casinos, building the houses that people were moving to – and when that came to a halt in '08, it highlighted that the economy wasn't sophisticated enough.

Several respondents offered similar accounts surrounding the Great Recession. They mentioned

Nevada still has yet to meet pre-recession levels regarding job hiring, resulting in high levels of

unemployment, which they attribute to the state's reliance on the tourism industry.

Some respondents also noted the limited skills necessary to obtain employment in the

prominent industries in the state, which they suggested has left Nevada with a longstanding

postsecondary education attainment issue. An NSHE official explained:

> You can get a really decent paying job without any type of [postsecondary] credential – you only need a high school diploma. I think some of the casinos now make that as a requirement but not all of them do and you can make a nice middle class income parking cars at The Wynn… The majority of the employment that is within Nevada is non-degreed. Yes, you need to have certain skills but you can go to bartending school and get your certificate and if you land someplace like The Wynn or Caesar's Palace, you can do really well.

Consequently, when the financial recession occurred and the tourism industry took a significant

setback, many Nevadans were unqualified to find employment that required advanced education

or a more diverse skillset. Several respondents even argued this issue was indicative of a larger

and more fundamental view of education in Nevada, with one NSHE executive explaining it as a

"significant college going culture problem." Compounding the postsecondary attainment concern

are longstanding frustrations with the K-12 sector in the state, which one NSHE regent described

as a "mismanagement of rapid growth… [and] lacking the infrastructure in place to deal with an

increasingly poor and diverse population." In their view, the "leaky" and "weak" K-16 pipeline

has left high school graduates unprepared to enter postsecondary education, resulting in an

underdeveloped workforce. An NSHE official even attributed the "underperforming secondary

[education] system" to the lack of interest by companies to enter Nevada to help diversify career

opportunities.

Since taking office in 2011, however, Governor Brian Sandoval has tried to remedy this

situation. In particular, his platform has emphasized expanding workforce opportunities and

rectifying economic issues, as seen by his first economic plan in 2012 entitled, *Moving Nevada

Forward: A Plan for Excellence in Economic Development*. Sandoval's (2012) economic plan

emphasized the need to expand the number of high-quality jobs available for Nevadans through

various levers, including expanding opportunity through education, and many believe he has had

some success. For example, in his most recent State of the State Address, Sandoval (2017) noted,

"Since 2011, [Nevada has] recruited 204 companies that have made $14.5 billion in capital

investment and accounted for 15,000 initial jobs, growing to 38,000 jobs within 5 years." A

bellwether event that skews many of these advancements came in September 2014, when Tesla

Motors announced their plan to build "Gigafactory 1" outside Reno.[23] According to media

coverage, this factory alone was expected to create "3,000 construction jobs, 6,500 factory jobs

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[23] Sandoval offered $1.3 billion in tax breaks and other incentives to Tesla for up to 20 years in exchange
for the contract (Chereb, 2014).

and 16,000 indirect jobs once completed" (Chereb, 2014). Nevertheless, Sandoval and other officials have leveraged the commitment by Tesla to encourage other companies – including Apple, eBay, and Hyperloop One (Sandoval, 2017) – to enter Nevada and inject much needed economic growth. All of these efforts have been championed as key to revitalize Nevada's economy and diversify job opportunities for citizens.

Political Ideology and State Government

Nevada has long been considered a swing state, with similar levels of political support for both Republican and Democratic parties. Some respondents for this study suggested that contributing to this characteristic are demographic and ideological differences that align geographically with Northern Nevada's (Reno and Carson City) tendency to vote Republican and Southern Nevada (Las Vegas) leaning Democratic. Highlighting this stance, Virginia Gray's (2013) policy liberalism index ranked Nevada as the 31st most liberal state regarding policy decisions.[24] Similar to Georgia, Gray's rating suggests the state is comparatively moderate but leans conservative in comparison to the rest of the nation. In fact, Republicans and Democrats have held majorities in both houses of the Nevada State Legislature in the past ten years, though the majority party tended to hold less than ten additional seats (Council of State Governments, 2013, 2015, 2016). Similarly, Governor Sandoval is the third consecutive Republican to hold that position since 1999. Yet, between 1970 and 2000, Nevada had a Democratic governor 24 out of 30 years and has voted for the Democratic candidate for the United States Presidency in each of the past three elections and five of the past seven elections.

Besides political ideology, additional characteristics of the state can be gleaned from the powers of the executive branch. When Sandoval first took office in 2011, Ferguson (2013) rated

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[24] A more detailed explanation of the calculation and meaning of this index are discussed in Chapter III.

him a 4.50 out of 5.00 on personal power[25] and the governorship generally 3.00 out of 5.00 on

institutional power[26] for a total 7.50 out of 10.00. In comparison to other states, this ranked

Nevada as the 18th most powerful governor's office in the country when considering all aspects

of their authority. Christakis (2009) created an alternative measure of governor's power,

specifically considering the higher education context. Factors included the governor's "formal

authority" over the postsecondary budget, appointment responsibilities across the sector, and

influence over statewide higher education policy decisions, based on the state constitution and

other legislative mandates. He also included "informal authority," which considered how

institution and system-level leadership perceived the influence of the governor on the budget,

and appointment and policy decisions. According to his measurement, which compared 33 states,

Nevada was 32nd and 29th in formal and informal authority, respectively. The Christakis ranking

suggests the governor has a low influence on the public higher education overall and, as will be

discussed, is explained by various characteristics of the Nevada higher education system.

A final component of the state government is the legislative branch. Hamm and Moncrief

(2013) categorize Nevada's General Assembly as a citizen legislature that meets for 120 days

every odd year. In 2011, 29% of Nevada's state legislators were women[27] and, in 2009, Black

and Hispanic legislators constituted 11% and 8% respectively (Hamm & Moncrief, 2013).

Although these proportions were above the national average at the time, and continue to be

today, respondents from the study mentioned that representation of these traditionally

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[25] The personal power index considers attributes of the individual, including: margin of victory when they won their seat; political ambition of the individual, based on their position immediately prior to governor; where the individual is in their term and if they are term-limited; and performance ratings.

[26] The institutional power index considers the powers given to the governor by the state constitution, statutes, and voters, including: the extent voters can elect state-level officials; the governor's ability to appoint state officials; tenure potential for governors; control over the executive budget; veto power; and party control over other government branches.

[27] According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, this has risen to 33.3% as of 2015.

underrepresented groups in the legislature has remained stagnant, which is important considering

the changing racial demographics and population growth in the state. In regards to higher

education, their primary responsibility centers on allocating the state appropriations to the state

postsecondary system.

Nevada Higher Education Overview

Public higher education was constitutionally established in Nevada with the opening of

the State University of Nevada (what is now the University of Nevada, Reno) in 1874, about ten

years after the state gained statehood. Currently, there are a total of eight public postsecondary

colleges and universities in Nevada, including three four-year institutions, four two-year

community colleges, and the Desert Research Institute, which is a graduate-only institution

focused on atmospheric and hydrologic sciences with campuses located in Las Vegas and Reno.

Of the four-year institutions, two are classified as research universities – the University of

Nevada, Las Vegas and University of Nevada, Reno. The third four-year institution is Nevada

State College, which was established in 2002 (Knight, 2002). As discussed at an NSHE Board of

Regents meeting, one goal in creating Nevada State College was to "relieve the pressure on the

research universities, especially in regards to students transferring from community college, by

serving as the sole public postsecondary institution in the state focused primarily on awarding

undergraduate degrees."

All eight institutions are managed by a single state agency – the Nevada System of

Higher Education (NSHE). Originally referred to as the University of Nevada System, it was

renamed in 1992 as the University and Community College System of Nevada to acknowledge

the "growing importance of community colleges" to the state (Hulse, 2002a, p. 1), and was

changed to its current moniker in 2004. Established by the Nevada State Constitution (Article XI,

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Sections 4-8), a thirteen-member Board of Regents manages NSHE and is responsible to set statewide postsecondary policy, maintain the system's budget, and, as of 2011, set tuition over for Nevada's entire public system of higher education. The Board of Regents also selects a chancellor, who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the system. A regent's term lasts six years and there is no limit to the number of times an individual can serve on the board. Terms for regents are also staggered in order to maintain organizational knowledge.

Nevada's open meeting laws serve as a notable limit to regents' power. In particular, one NSHE regent voiced frustration around its impact on the financing of the sector:

> We, as the board of regents, have to go through the open meeting law in everything we do. The legislature is not – they don't have to use the Nevada open meeting law. So it's a bit of a challenge because the people we have to negotiate with, we can't negotiate with on the same playing field because they can do it through [private] collaboration and we can't. If three of us have lunch together, or four of us have lunch together, we're violating the Nevada open meeting law. So, it's a strange dynamic.

Previous research has noted the limiting factor of open meeting laws in higher education (McLendon & Hearn, 2006), specifically around board communication. However, considering the importance of state appropriations for public higher education, this regent's perspective highlights an important constraint on the NSHE board's ability to direct the sector.

A second unique characteristic to NSHE is the means of appointment by which individuals join the Board of Regents. Nevada is one of only four states that elect its board members by popular vote, and the only state to do so in a system where a single board is responsible for all of public higher education (Hulse, 2002b). An important caveat to this feature occurs when a regent's seat is open unexpectedly or off term. In these cases, it is the governor's responsibility to appoint a replacement for the vacancy. The newly appointed regent must then

run for reelection when the term ends, should they wish to keep their position. As of 2017, over

half of the thirteen regents were originally appointed to the board by a governor.

The Nevada State Constitution mandates this distinct governance characteristic (Article

XI, Section 7):

> The Governor, Secretary of State, and Superintendent of Public Instruction, shall
> for the first four years and until their successors are elected and qualified
> constitute a Board of Regents to control and manage the affairs of the University
> and the funds of the same under such regulations as may be provided by law. But
> the Legislature shall at its regular session next preceding the expiration of the
> term of office of said Board of Regents provide for the election of a new Board of
> Regents and define their duties.

An NSHE official explained, "In order to change the [state] Constitution it has to go through

two consecutive sessions of the legislature and a vote of the people." In NSHE's history, there

have been two attempts at changing the Board of Regents appointment mechanism and only

once, in 2006, was it able to reach a popular vote. Nevertheless, from these attempts and failures

at changing the appointment mechanism, it is apparent that opinions around maintaining a fully

publicly elected board is mixed.[28]

In his discussion of the role and influence of public governing boards, former president of

the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, David Longanecker (2006) highlighted

one such challenge:

> Political problems have arisen – some regents place the state's needs above the
> parochial interests of their specific communities and institutions, while others do
> not. As a result, historic battles between Las Vegas and Reno have impeded

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[28] In March 2017, Republican assemblyman Ira Hansen entered bill AB331, which seeks the creation of a
second governing agency to oversee Nevada's four community colleges. Underlying this proposal is the
belief that the two-year sector is not being funded fairly in the current one agency structure and that a
more complex governance arrangement could lead to greater competition and, ultimately, more equity
across the sector (Snyder, 2017). Although the bill is expected to have difficulty succeeding, the proposed
new agency would be a nine-member governing board appointed by the governor, with one member from
a private business and a representative from a labor union, which is a significant departure from NSHE's
current means of appointment.

rational planning, regarding both research capacity and expansion of undergraduate education at the state's two major universities… Even when the regents have worked together to move forward a positive agenda for the future, they have found it difficult to work with other critical stakeholders, such as the governor and legislature, because sharing power and decision-making often feels like an abdication of their constitutional responsibility (p. 101).

Due to their means of appointment, NSHE regents act akin to state representatives in the sense that they represent districts and have a voting constituency, whose perspectives and needs are expected to guide decision-making processes. Longanecker's comment suggests this could serve as a potential obstacle for the board to act as a unit, especially in light of longstanding regionalist tendencies in the state. Further, because the board is not directly accountable to the governor, there is not as clear of a relationship to the state government, as in other states, making statewide efforts more difficult.

On the other hand, respondents noted a key benefit to having an elected board was diversity in thought and perspective around how higher education can be improved in the state. An NSHE regent explained:

There's no real commonality among the elected boards, like there would be among individuals appointed by a person. And you have some states where you've had governors in office for quite a few years so maybe they elect or appoint the entire board so boy, they're all Republican or Democrat or whatever and they all tend to think conservative or liberal or whatever the bend is of the governor. So I think when you have an elected board, and we're elected regionally, so you have differences in the region… So I think in that respect you do get a big variety of opinions.

While this regent previously emphasized the "steep learning curve" for first-time elected officials, with the potential added difficulties of understanding norms in the higher education sector, they suggested that the current appointment mechanism aligns with the culture and philosophy of the state, where judges and other school boards are also publicly elected.

Besides organizational factors within the state, an important higher education policy in Nevada is the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship (often referred to as the Nevada Millennium Scholarship). Established in 1999 and modeled after Georgia's HOPE scholarship, according to a state official, the program aims to keep the "greatest minds that are deleted [from] our state to stay in our state." Administered through the State Treasurer's office, in order to be eligible for the Millennium Scholarship, a student must: 1) graduate from a Nevada high school, 2) complete high school with at least a 3.25 grade point average and pass the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination, and 3) must have been a resident of Nevada for at least two of your high school years. However, unlike HOPE, respondents were critical of the usefulness of the program. For example, one NSHE official suggested, "over 40 percent of [scholarship recipients] need remediation in math, science, and English," due to the issues in the K-12 sector. Notwithstanding, other respondents voiced greater concern around the future of the scholarship:

> The primary source of original funding for the Millennium Scholarship was tobacco dollars. Well, guess what? The tobacco dollars are going down so they put a provision into state law where in addition to the tobacco dollars there's unclaimed property dollars. But still periodically when they do their analysis, they realize, we're about to run out of money… I think it was in [2011], that was the last infusion of general fund dollars to the Millennium Scholarship. And that was $10 million. As of right now, the current analysis by the treasurer's office is that we will not be able to continue the program beyond fall '17.[29]

Nevertheless, in considering the overall landscape of higher education in Nevada, the Millennium Scholarship has played a key role in retaining students that may consider leaving the state, which is a concern due to the geography and demography of the state.

For instance, an NSHE executive lamented that their "proximity to California is highly problematic… [because] the UC schools are drawing a huge population [of Nevadans]" annually.

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[29] In his most recent State of the State Address, Governor Sandoval (2017) stated his plan to contribute an additional $20 million to the program.

The same respondent continued, "there are folk who are now third-generation Nevadans, who came because of the casino business, who were essentially Los Angelinos, and whose kids went back to UCLA or USC [for college]" because their family has stronger connections to those institutions. An additional result of this influx of non-native Nevadans has been a diverse and, often poorly conceived, public perception of comparison institutions for Nevada higher education. One respondent explained:

> Lots of people have moved here from the Midwest from New Orleans and Texas, from Detroit or places like that. They are second, third generation alumni of Wayne State or Michigan State or something and that's their comparison and so part of our challenge as a state with a transformed and relatively new population… The comparisons aren't the typical network that's already there, just more concentrated. But it's comparisons to higher education to wholly different systems, wholly different institutions, wholly different cities and cultures.

Consequently, on top of retention issues, the geography and unique population residing in Nevada has placed added pressure on institutions, and public higher education overall, with unrealistic expectations regarding attainment rates and other benchmarking measures.

COLLEGE COMPLETION IN THE SILVER STATE

The following section reviews the development and current status of statewide college completion initiatives in Nevada. I first provide a narrative history of the events surrounding improving degree attainment in the state. This will be followed with a more in-depth discussion of the current statewide policy solutions enacted across Nevada and how each was developed and considered by NSHE.

Narrative History Around College Completion Initiatives

In reviewing NSHE Board of Regents meeting agendas, college completion has been an often-discussed topic, though primarily indirectly. During their April 2009 meeting, for example,

in reviewing instructor summer term salaries, Vice Chancellor of Finance and Administration Dr. Mike Reed discussed considering the "needs of the campuses to offer summer programs in a way that is productive to the students and that will allow for completion of degrees in a reasonable time." Similarly, in a June 2009 meeting, regents discussed the potential use of distance education as a cost-saving strategy, but considered poor completion rates as an important factor in determining whether to pursue it as a policy across the system. In fact, it was not until their September 2010 meeting, which coincided with announcing Complete College America's (CCA) interest in including Nevada in a pilot completion academy, that improving college completion was discussed directly as a statewide policy directive.[30] According to other sources though (Klaich, 2010), Nevada officially joined CCA's Alliance of States in February 2010, when Governor Jim Gibbons and NSHE Chancellor Daniel Klaich jointly committed to making college completion a priority for the state.

Nevertheless, the completion academy served as a critical event in the development of Nevada's focus on completion. Joined by seven other CCA members (Arkansas, Hawaii, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia), each state sent a delegation that included state agency leadership, policymakers, and campus leadership representing both four-year and two-year institutions to a three-day workshop in October 2010. Based on a previously submitted self-assessment of strengths and opportunities to advance a completion agenda, CCA officials provided technical assistance and advocated for four policy strategies for each state to consider: 1) performance-based funding, 2) remediation, 3) structure and innovative delivery methods, and 4) time to degree (Klaich, 2010). While the completion academy solidified what ultimately became CCA's "Game Changers," for Nevada the retreat offered solutions that the state would

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[30] A broader review of media revealed institutional-level programs, specifically at the College of Southern Nevada and several community colleges, though these initiatives never rose to statewide policies nor were they attributed to Complete College America's policies (Lake, 2010).

consider for statewide implementation and signaled the beginning of a shift in the higher

education policy priorities for the state.

The election of Brian Sandoval as Governor in 2011 also contributed to the change in

policy and has been an important long-term influence on Nevada's focus on college completion.

In his first State of the State Address in January 2011, Sandoval (2017) emphasized the poor

graduation rates across the NSHE system – "Graduation rates after six years at the state's public

two-year colleges range from a high of 20 percent, to a dismal low of only four percent. Our

four-year institutions have graduation rates below 50 percent" – and granted greater autonomy to

NSHE and the regents, most notably by setting tuition levels. Sandoval (2017) explained,

"Universities and community colleges must develop a more strategic focus that connects degree

programs and the state's economic development efforts… As we increase autonomy, we will

also increase performance indicators so that graduation rates, completion times, and access are

measures of success." As an NSHE regent explained, underlying the Governor's charge was "to

focus on, in a very public way, sharing with potential students, and [current] students that we

want them to finish and then stay in Nevada and be long-term contributing vital members of the

workforce and to raise their families here and to start the circle over again."

To this end, NSHE (2011) released a new strategic plan in 2011, entitled *The State and
the System: NSHE Plan for Nevada's Colleges and Universities, Combining Excellence and
Austerity to Attain Success*. The goal of this document was to emphasize the importance of

higher education for the future of the state and outline actionable goals to improve degree

attainment. In particular, the thirteen-page document highlighted several areas needing reform

and potential strategies for improvement including: reexamining how institutions are funded and

policies around student tuition and fees; establishing strategic and measurable goals and

reporting results to the citizens of the state; ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, while focusing on the excellence of the system; reevaluating financial assistance and scholarship programs for low income students and their families to aid in their long-term success in the state; establishing closer partnerships between NSHE and various parties (e.g., the State, high schools, and business and non-profit sectors); and increasing accountability of NSHE throughout the state to citizens, students and faculty, the Governor, and legislators (NSHE, 2011). Notably, the strategic plan included all four policy areas emphasized by CCA during the fall 2010 retreat (performance funding, remediation, delivery methods, and reducing time to degree).

In speaking with respondents about the state's long-term relationship with CCA, most spoke highly of the intermediary's role in influencing the policy agenda and discussion. An NSHE official even explained, "We often give credit to CCA [for non-CCA related policies] because CCA has name recognition in the state, so when we go forward and say 'hey, this is something that's recommended by CCA' they listen." One drawback from Nevada's extensive involvement with the organization has been what was referred to as "CCA fatigue," where campuses, in particular, have become "tired" from the numerous initiatives attributed to CCA and the sets of data and analyses needed by NSHE and other interested parties.

A follow-up document released in 2015, *Expanding by Degrees: NSHE's Role in Building a New Nevada*, served as an update to NSHE's 2011 strategic plan. While championing their successes in the previous four years, including joining CCA, implementing performance funding, and instituting the "15 to Finish" campaign, NSHE (2015) acknowledged that there remains significant work ahead to meet the future workforce needs of the state, highlighting the entrance of Tesla. The report pivoted in topic at the end, though, noting the need for greater investment in public higher education in Nevada and announcing a "moderate growth" in

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NSHE's budget in order to reach the next stages in expanding postsecondary degree attainment.

Interestingly, there was minimal media coverage of this updated strategic plan, though there

remained a focus on the state's continued support and need to improve degree attainment.

Since 2015, NSHE has had few obstacles to their focus on completion. However, since

May 2016, the NSHE chancellorship has been in flux, due to the forced retirement of Dan

Klaich, who allegedly misled legislators regarding questions around higher education funding

and financing in the state (Barnes, 2016). Respondents suggested this development has resulted

in a tense relationship with the governor's office and legislature and has necessitated NSHE to be

more reserved in policy decisions that oppose specific legislators and state officials. An NSHE

official lamented that the "irony of all of [this] is that before the former chancellor was separated

from employment, the discussions with the governor's office [around NSHE's direction] were

incredibly positive." Nevertheless, in his most recent State of the State Address, Governor

Sandoval (2017) reiterated the state's commitment to postsecondary degree attainment

completion as a policy priority:

> Today, only 30 percent of Nevadans between the ages of 25 and 34 have
> completed some level of postsecondary education. My vision for our state is to
> put all Nevadans, regardless of age or circumstance, on a career pathway toward
> success. We can make that vision a reality by investing in higher education,
> closing the college attainment gap, expanding dual enrollment and growing career
> opportunities. While many of these programs have been available for some, they
> are not yet accessible for all, due to financial barriers or other factors. My
> workforce agenda proposes removing those barriers, so that every student, in
> every classroom, has every opportunity to succeed. Our effort to prepare a modern
> workforce begins with out postsecondary institutions.

Sandoval (2017) also voiced support for the expansion of higher education, including the

development of a medical school at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a college of

engineering at the University of Nevada, Reno. Ultimately, although the state government and

NSHE are currently not on the best terms, Sandoval's actions suggest postsecondary education will remain an overall priority for the state for years to come.

Policy Solutions

Within the broader college completion narrative, NSHE has developed a set of policies to support Nevada's goal of increasing postsecondary degree attainment. Although the following does not provide an exhaustive list of initiatives undertaken since 2009, it does highlight the solutions most often discussed in respondent interviews and emphasized by media accounts.

Performance-Based Funding (PBF)

Following the 2011 Legislative session, NSHE began developing a new funding formula for their public higher education system. Finalized by the 2013 Legislative session, the new model considered institutional performance as a primary metric and replaced the previous enrollment-based formula. As explained by an NSHE regent:

> … when I first got on the board of regents, we funded institutions by the numbers of enrollees. Whether or not they were successful, whether or not they really could be successful. You know, it was a big push just to enroll the numbers of students and they were paid on FTE students are enrolled. And so the push was not to get, have the students successful. The push was just to get anybody enrolled and then they'd get their FTE [funding]. About three years ago we changed the funding formula completely and now we fund it on completion. So it changed the whole way that the administration and the faculty and everyone really look at getting students through. It really changed the whole outlook on it.

This respondent underscored an often-discussed thought around the utility of PBF. Namely, holding institutions accountable for their completion rate will encourage efforts directed at improving attainment, which, without such pressure, would result in maintaining the status quo. While many question the validity of this perspective, in a state like Nevada that has historically trailed national attainment rates, a PBF formula equally serves as a signaling effect regarding the state's commitment for improvement.

The specifics of Nevada's PBF model are somewhat unique, in that the percentage of state funding allocated based on performance metrics was set over the course of four years. Starting with fiscal year 2015, "five percent of the institution's base formula funding was set aside and could be earned back by achieving performance targets. The carve-out amount [increases] each year by five percent until 20 percent of the institutions' appropriated funding is subject to the 'Performance Pool' in fiscal year 2018" (NSHE, 2015, p. 3). An NSHE executive explained, unlike other state models, Nevada did not have any new money introduced to support performance, so they took a "carve out" from each institution's base allotment. This respondent noted, unsurprisingly, "Institutions didn't really like it. If it was new money, I think it would be a different dialogue. But, it feels punitive to them. They're like, 'I've already earned those dollars in the base formula and you're making me earn them again?'" However, according to multiple respondents, the adoption of a PBF model has led to measurable progress and is "changing behavior" on campuses regarding the attention given to completion. Nevertheless, NSHE officials noted additional policies were needed beyond PBF to further influence change in institutional and student behavior.

Focus on Credits

A focus of several completion initiatives in Nevada has been academic credits. One of the main strategies instituted across NSHE institutions has been capping the number of credits required for a degree. In reviewing programs across the system, one regent explained, "we had some two-year degrees that [required] 78 credits… [and] there are exceptions, things like nursing and some of the medical fields, but whenever possible, we've limited it to 60 credits for two-year degrees and 120 credits for a four-year degree… so we have encouraged them not to have extra unnecessary credits." In fact, to further pressure students to complete their degree program, a

different regent noted, "we instituted a policy whereby when they get to a certain amount of credits then you have a fee on top of your normal tuition for credits taken after the certain number." According to respondents, this policy was aimed specifically at "perpetual students," who, as a regent described, continually change "majors and then get financial aid or they get veterans' benefits… And they keep going until they get close to getting a degree and then 'oops,' they change their major… or they'll just take classes all over the place that don't actually lead to a degree." Similar to PBF, this policy ultimately aims to induce action by a party, who in this case are students, by threatening a penalty, such as an additional fee.

In order to support students to reach these credit limits in a timely manner, Nevada has been involved with CCA's "15 to Finish" initiative since 2014. As discussed in Chapter II and IV, underlying this policy is the perspective that it is possible to increase the likelihood of a student graduating by shortening time to degree and acknowledging that traditional twelve credit semesters cannot ensure they will complete their degree on time. As described by an NSHE official, Nevada adopted the program "wholesale throughout the entire system. Each of our institutions have a '15 to Finish' program… We had t-shirts and we had social media contests with students about how to campaign for it." Although the 15 to Finish program has only been in effect for two academic years, respondents noted some positive trends. An NSHE official explained:

> The original data that we presented to the board, if you're in less than 12 credits in your first semester, at the community colleges the graduation rate was 2.6 percent. That means barely three out of 100 part-time students. Think about that. That's 97 that don't… compared to over 22 percent if they did take 15 credits… We're seeing a compression where that 2.6 is now 3.0 and the 22 percent for 15 credits or more, it's more like 30 percent now. So what's happening is other policies are having an impact in addition to just enrolling in 15 credits. And I think it all goes towards what we're trying to create in this state, which is a culture of completion.

While this respondent suggested 15 to Finish is a part of the larger completion agenda of Nevada, based on interviews and a review of pertinent documents, it serves as a central component to improve the state's attainment rates overall.

Nevertheless, the 15 to Finish initiative has been met with opposition across the state. In particular, an NSHE official noted they have been receiving feedback that "this is not a model that works for community colleges" because of the type of students that enroll (e.g., adult and working students). These students are more inclined to attend part-time and, due to work schedules or financial constraints, do not have the ability to take fifteen credits in a given semester. A compounding issue that has arisen, since this initiative became an NSHE-wide program, is some state and institutional financial aid has started requiring enrollment in a minimum of fifteen credits to qualify. The University of Nevada, Reno, for example, states on their financial aid website that institutional awards and most scholarships require enrollment in at least 15 credits per semester. In December 2016, a column was written for the University of Nevada, Reno student newspaper, *The Nevada Sagebrush*, questioning if this policy change will negatively effect degree attainment for working adults because of their inability to qualify for these additional sources of funding (Spacek, 2016).

Need-Based Financial Aid

Nevada established the state's first need-based grant program for the 2015-2016 academic year, known as the Silver State Opportunity Grant (SSOG). In order to be eligible, a Nevada resident must be a degree-seeking student, enrolled in at least fifteen credit hours, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and have an Expected Family Contribution of $8,500 or below. An NSHE regent explained the goals of the program:

> The Silver State Opportunity Grant is our first need based grant and it only goes to full-time students to kind of help students who for financial reasons couldn't

take a full load. If they want to go up to that full load, we'll give them the money to help make the difference there. We get that the biggest hurdle isn't the tuition cost in Nevada. It's they've got to work full time because they've got rent, they may have children. We've got a lot of non-traditional students, not just in our community colleges, what's one of the differences in Nevada is, you know, our largest university has a huge proportion of non-traditional students.

Considering the concerns around 15 to Finish as limiting working students ability to receive adequate financial grant aid, SSOG has been viewed as a potential solution by providing additional funding to students who would otherwise be unable to enroll full-time. Only in its second year, SSOG has already been considered a success. Specifically, because awardees are required to enroll in fifteen credits, NSHE officials suggested there has been a noticeable improvement in retention and completion when comparing SSOG recipients to those of similar academic caliber.

However, akin to funding concerns around the future of the Millennium Scholarship, respondents voiced similar thoughts about SSOG. An NSHE official suggested the legislature might ultimately need to choose between the two financial aid programs or, as they described it, a proverbial "Sophie's Choice." This respondent voiced their concern that "giving money to poor kids is not really that sexy for legislators, whereas an entitlement that gives a little bit of money to everybody, I think they'll actually prefer that." On the other hand, respondents noted data had shown the immediate positive impact of the need-based grant and were hopefully optimistic that the legislature will "find money to also support SSOG."

CASE ANALYSIS

As with the Georgia case, this section focuses on research question 1 and discusses the specific role of the NSHE Board of Regents on the statewide college completion process,

including the crafting of the overarching policy agenda, development of specific policies, and

their preferred sources of information and how it was utilized during the policymaking process. I

will also consider how the appointment of NSHE regents via public election influences these

functions.

NSHE Regents and the Policy Agenda

In discussing the regents' role in college completion becoming a state policy agenda

priority, reports from respondents were mixed. One regent suggested that the board played an

integral role from the beginning:

> The chancellor's office, at our direction, started providing data to the board on what it would take for us to be able to implement or develop and implement a [college completion] program. And the board directed the chancellor's office to become a member of the CCA and to report back to [the board], as to what that meant and what that would entail for our institutions. Then, the chancellor's office… put together the data for us to take a look at, so that we would be able to come up with a policy.

A different regent recalled the completion initiative "was presented to [the board] by the

chancellor." A third perspective came from an NSHE official stating, "[Nevada's] involvement

in CCA did not come from the board, it came from the governor." At first, these differences in

accounts are perplexing, as a traditional role of any state's board of regents is determining the

policy agenda for the sector. In fact, multiple respondents emphasized that it is the board's job to

"set policy." However, through interviews with regents and other NSHE officials, it became

apparent that Nevada state law limits these traditional duties for regents.

Specifically, respondents emphasized Nevada's open meeting law as restricting the

opportunity for board members to discuss initiatives, including those related to college

completion, outside of scheduled meetings. A regent explained:

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The open meeting law has a tremendous effect on how we do business and how we make a decision. And who we're able to talk to and how we're able to do it… You don't want backroom deals but you would like to be able to bounce some things off of people at times… You don't have the opportunity to sit down and bounce ideas off of each other and come to a consensus about something before you're right there in front of the public. It cripples the conversation sometimes.

As the NSHE board of regents only meets seven or eight times per year on average, the open meeting law can severely limit an individual regent's opportunity to be influential on all aspects of NSHE policies at all times, or even have the opportunity to collaborate with other board members toward a given goal. Therefore, it seems likely that the genesis of college completion policy agenda occurred outside of these scheduled meetings, resulting in the varied perspectives around the role of regents and the beginnings of the policy discussion.

One caveat to the influence of the open meeting law on the role of regents is board leadership. Because the open meeting law only applies when a certain quorum of representatives of the board are present, the board chair and vice chair, as board leadership, can serve as spokespersons for all regents without triggering the requirements of the open meeting law. Consequently, according to one regent, the board chair and vice chair are more involved in the day-to-day operations of the system than other regents. Further, the board chair is primarily responsible for creating the board agenda, which allows for him to "shape [the agenda] in the way he sees fit." Although respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of the board chair's leadership, this reality highlighted what several regents referred to as a "top heavy" structure that limits individual regents' opportunity to influence NSHE's broad policy direction.

NSHE Regents and the Development of Policies

The role of NSHE regents in the development and implementation of completion-related policies has overall been limited. For example, the primary completion policy in Nevada

discussed by respondents – the 15 to Finish initiative – was adapted directly from Complete College America's policy platform. Although respondents noted regents were consulted regarding the introduction of the policy, board members had limited input in the development or direction of the program. Similarly, in regards to the performance-funding model, the regents suggested metrics and approved the final formula, but, as described by a regent, the board relied on the chancellor's office to determine potential policies for the system to consider and research possible changes to current policy:

> I think in many instances, [the chancellor's office] were the ones that were up on the latest literature and the latest initiatives throughout the nation. So I think the chancellor's office and the vice chancellors were the ones that really brought [policies] to our attention. And, you know, told us about things like Complete College America and 15 to Finish... but when they brought it forward to us, they encouraged us to embrace it and we did, so I think we work in concert together on ways to make it all work.

Notably, based on traditional expectations for boards of regents, the level of involvement described by this respondent is expected, as the chancellor's office and staff tend to be more involved in the detailed aspects of policymaking and day-to-day decision-making for the agency.

Some respondents suggested that the minimal influence of regents around college completion is a function of the area being affected by the policies. An NSHE official explained, "for academic affairs [issues], I feel like a lot of the policy changes are born out of the system office, the chancellor's office, [because] we have a research team that is using data to continuously look at ways that we can be better, do better, serve our students better. And that's their primary job, this team of people." In other words, because academic affairs serves a central role to the higher education sector, NSHE has individuals focused on this functional area that are familiar and knowledgeable with the current research and trends, allowing regents to focus on other issues and concerns. However, even though board members are not involved in all aspects

of policy development, regents remain active in the final decision-making process. For example, this respondent continued by noting the importance of the academic affairs committee, which include a "smaller committee of regents that is sort of an offshoot of the larger board," as that is where "a lot of policy decisions are coming from." Ultimately, an NSHE executive explained, "[Regents] are not very engaged in the nitty-gritty of policy except from the perspective that they often decide that there's something that they've heard about or encountered that really ought to be taken up."

For instance, respondents noted the greater role of NSHE regents on institutional-level policies, which, in part, was discussed as a function of their position as an elected official and willingness to speak with interested constituencies. A regent noted, from their perspective, a primary responsibility of the board is to "report back to the citizens of Nevada as a whole… [and] to make sure that Nevada gets as much as it possibly can from the state dollars and family dollars and the student dollars that are invested in our system." Therefore, it is of little surprise that multiple respondents emphasized regents' willingness to speak with various interested parties to ensure the system is running as well as possible. An NSHE official explained:

> Our regents are all accessible, and you know, they can be emailed or called. But the regents are people too. They have friends and some of their friends work at our institutions and so yeah, do they get ideas from the folks that are either disgruntled or even have just good ideas that they want to, you know, share and hopefully that will rise to the top to be an actual policy change? I think that happens. And then sometimes… they have a neighbor or a friend or someone that has a problem that is, you know, trying to understand why does this happen. Why don't we do this way or a student transferring from another state and what issues they might have? But people are pretty savvy and if they don't like the answers that they get from the provost [or]… their advisor, and it rises on up and they don't get the resolve that they want, they email regents and then regents are like, 'oh, well, why do we do it this way?'

While one respondent suggested the focus on constituents may be equally a function of the "newly competitive environment… being brought to campuses" due to the increasingly crowded higher education marketplace, there was agreement that NSHE regents tend to face greater "pressure for customer service improvements than in most systems." Ultimately, the focus of appealing to interested parties appears to be akin to other elected officials connecting to their voting constituency, but for NSHE regents this has led to instances of policy development and change at Nevada's institutions.

A final component to the NSHE board's influence around policy development and implementation stems from features of the individual regents. Considering the variety of areas that the board oversees, respondents noted the advantage of having a "medical doctor before and as we were dealing with creation of a medical school" or an individual with a "family trust [that is] the same size as our system trust, so he understands the financial dynamics very well." Besides occupation-based knowledge, institutional affiliation was also discussed as helping lead to policy development. An NSHE executive noted "regents, who have strong alumni ties to their respective institutions, sometimes get policy ideas from their involvement in their alumni board or… informal relationships they have with at our institutions." Lastly, personal characteristics generate interest in specific policy action. An NSHE official provided an example:

> We have on our board currently a regent that… has a couple of disabilities and so what has happened as a result of his leadership is there has been an increased focus on students with disabilities… That particular regent asked, 'are the disability resource centers on campus open after hours?' Just a simple question like that, something I had never thought of… I actually had to research and find out what are their hours? Are they open on weekends? Are they open for non-traditional students or for folks that are in living centers and come to class in the evening times?

They explained that this regent's initial concern for disabled students has led to changes in institutional policy across the system, ensuring these students have access to needed resources at times when they were previously unavailable. Ultimately, although the regents were limited in their role around the development and implementation of college completion policies, they do play an involved role in other policy areas.

NSHE Regents and the Use of Research

A final area of the policymaking process of interest to this study focuses on research utilization and how NSHE regents consider forms of evidence in their decision-making process. Overall, respondents noted the essential role of information throughout the development and deliberation of policies. One regent explained:

> One [scenario] can be a regent reading the Chronicle of Higher Ed and says 'Hey, staff, look into this.' Or, it can be staff goes to a conference or learns about [an idea] and says 'Hey, I've got this idea. They flesh it out with the chancellor and bring it to [the board] and say 'what do you think?' Or, it could it could be a regent or two saying, 'Hey, I heard this idea. Staff, can you look into it and see what you think it would do for [NSHE]?' They flesh it out then and bring it to the whole board.

Although respondents noted that there is no prescribed expectation for the extent or sources of research utilized by board members, characteristics and experiences of individual regents emerged as influential factors.

Preferred Sources

Regents consider a range of sources to frame their decision-making according to respondents. The most widely mentioned information provider was the chancellor's office and staff. As the NSHE staff primarily serves the board of regents, this was an expected finding. One regent explained:

[The chancellor's office] does a lot of the research. They do the nitty-gritty. You know, they have the staff and they have to do the research and of course, we're an elected board and so we're not full time. We're just an elected board. So we do what research we can but most of them have other jobs and other obligations so we have to rely a lot on data and information that comes through the chancellor's office.

This respondent emphasized that regents' service to NSHE is supplemented by their primary occupations and other commitments. Although the employment of board members varies, ranging from partners at law firms to retired education administrators, there tends to be a lack of time to devote to conduct in-depth research on topics. Consequently, a regent noted, they "get briefing papers from [the chancellor's office] as part of our [meeting] agendas. They do very, very well at giving us basically both sides of an issue" to help inform decision-making. A different regent suggested this reliance on NSHE staff is a function of broader, more fundamental, characteristics of Nevada: "We believe in having citizen governing boards. City council's part time, county commission's part time, the legislature's part time. So that means the staffs are the ones that really control the information." Respondents also noted NSHE data and research tends to be supplemented by other sources of information.

First, there are intermediary organizations, including professional associations and policy organizations. Considering Complete College America's integral role in the development and execution of Nevada's completion agenda, regents viewing the organization as a reliable source of information is unsurprising. An NSHE official explained, "I think the board's perception of the importance of college attainment… it's changed. And so now you say 'CCA,' and they're like 'oh, okay, well maybe we should look at that.'" This respondent suggested that CCA has name recognition for the regents, which is primarily due to the organization's connection to the governor's office. Regents have also attended CCA's convenings, which one respondent noted,

provided a "good sounding board" to discuss and deliberate policy solutions and ideas with Nevadans representing various sectors (e.g., legislators, K-12 educators, institutional leadership) as well as individuals from other states.

Two other organizations that were discussed explicitly as information providers and helpful in the policy process were the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). An NSHE official noted the state's "long relationship" with NCHEMS, which most recently included consultancy work in 2014 to determine ways to improve the state's community colleges. Although this partnership has been shaky since completion of that project,[31] a regent mentioned the resulting report was useful in "[informing] our funding formula in a very positive way." Although less controversial, as the regional compact of the western states, WICHE has served a significant role in providing benchmarking metrics for Nevada to shape policy, including graduation and transfer rates and setting tuition and fees.

Regents also noted their involvement in professional organizations, such as the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). Regents emphasized that these organizations provide the opportunity to network with representatives from other states to understand new policy solutions and decision-making processes, which can then be considered and adapted to the Nevada context. One regent also highlighted these organizations as helpful for new regents to understand "higher education

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[31] In 2014, NSHE hired NCHEMS to determine ways to improve the state's community colleges. However, after NSHE officials disagreed with NCHEMS's findings, which cast the board of regents in a "very negative light," the report was not released system-wide. Instead, Chancellor Klaich edited the findings to be more positive and provided them specifically to the president of the College of Southern Nevada (Barnes, 2015). This event served as a turning point that ultimately led to Klaich's ousting and had respondents in this study suggesting NCHEMS may no longer be a willing participant in future consulting work or source of information.

governance and what is the role of a trustee and what you should and shouldn't do." Finally, although these organizations are primarily recognized as professional associations, they also produce significant policy-related research, which NSHE regents acknowledged as informing Nevada decision-making.

A related source of information to intermediary organizations is the popular press. Regents noted their familiarity with the Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed, and other education-focused news outlets, with multiple respondents emphasizing that they read these publications "every day." According to a regent, the board also has a system in place whereby when "any regent sees an article in the paper, be it in Georgia or L.A. or New York or Chicago or whatever… they'll request that the board office send the article to all regents," with the goal of ensuring all regents "have an opportunity to get the same information."

Various higher education stakeholders also have a strong influence among NSHE regents, including the provision of information. One regent explained, "Of course the presidents when we talk with them and we talk to students. I think all of [the regents] get out to talk to students as much as we can, and get a feel for what the campus is like. It's nice to go on campus, listen to students, get their opinions." Besides developing policies as a function of these constituencies, there is evidence of broader information flow and response by NSHE board members. A regent explained:

> I'm sure all regents or trustees run into this situation, where someone will contact you directly... but being an elected body, I think we probably view this in a little bit different role than some of the other trustees because we have constituents out there that elected us. So you have to listen to them. And a lot of them are parents. A lot of them are students. A lot of them are faculty members. And they're all your constituents besides being, you know, educators or students. And so you have to listen and take it all into account… And you often can't answer their particular question, but you can tell them you'll look into it or you'll pass it on to someone. Or I often tell someone that calls me whom to call. You know, call the dean of students or call the director of financial aid or whatever their particular

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problem is. I'll tell them where they need to go because sometimes they're on the phone, they've dealt with a student work and they're getting no answers... So I think in that way we listen and we direct people to where they should go to get a problem resolved, not so we can do it ourselves.

Because these various higher education stakeholders also serve as citizens that elect the board members, NSHE regents are willing to listen and advocate for these different populations.

NSHE board members also highlighted personal connections as a key mechanism for information. As one regent explained, "The board is made up of long-time Nevadans who are, for the most part, active in their communities. You know, we have former city council members on the board; we've got others that are active in politics and nonprofits." Consequently, through their non-NSHE related activities and personal backgrounds, individuals and perspectives external to the higher education sector may influence regents. Further, because each board member maintains unique networks, their access to information can vary. For example, one regent noted:

I've been here 36 years. I was active in the student government and that's how I got a passion for the potential of the board of regents in higher ed. Then, I was on the alumni board… I've worked with multiple presidents. I know how to navigate the campus and I am well known and I think fairly well respected. So I can sort of work within my own channels… a lot of regents complain that they don't have the access to the presidents that they feel they should have. I do… I function differently because I know how to get information.

Although this respondent explained that they do share important perspectives with the rest of the board, the differences in access to certain stakeholders, such as institutional presidents, likely influences how regents consider various policy issues.

Weissian Research Use Typology

Turning to the Weiss three-mode typology, similar to the Georgia case, it was suggested by respondents that NSHE regents use research primarily in either a conceptual or instrumental

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capacity with minimal reference to political use. Generally, discussions around research

utilization with respondents focused on regents being informed about institutional, state,

regional, or national trends and policies, which were occasionally translated to policy action.

In reviewing the conceptual use of research, multiple regents emphasized the role of

anecdotal stories and conversations with stakeholders as influencing their perspective on a topic.

One regent explained:

> When you have a student or a parent or a faculty member directly engaged and
> you're listening to their story and how they feel, that's what you're here for. You
> govern them. So their feelings often have more of an effect. You can't always
> change it. And many times their requests aren't legitimate. But it still makes you
> think.

This respondent highlighted these conversations as shaping their opinion on a topic primarily due

to their position within the higher education sector. Although they do not suggest these

interactions will result in policy change, it does influence their perspective. A different regent

had a similar thought, noting, while conversations with constituents have influenced their

opinions on policies, "I don't know that articles or research has." As the first respondent

discussed, the impact of anecdotes centers on its ability to connect a story to a person, which

more traditional forms of research does not provide. However, when discussing information

being used instrumentally in the policy process, a different theme emerged.

Specifically, respondents mentioned, besides NSHE reported data, policy briefs and

reports from intermediary organizations and other groups as the primary sources of information

that effect policy change. For example, a regent mentioned they read an article by ACCT

outlining policy priorities and questions that trustees must know about their institutions and

"need to be looking at" moving forward. The board of regents took those ten points and "held a

workshop in January of 2014 to start the discussion [with the institutions]. And what we're doing

now is we're refining those metrics for each of the universities." The goals of using this data are to hold institutional leadership more accountable and help define the board's relationship with its colleges and universities, which a regent stated was unclear:

> We're to the point now, where we are establishing the metrics for each of the presidents and institutions. They present to [the board] once a year, publicly… so we can define what success means [for them]…. It's been a slow evolution, but over the last couple years, we've gotten to that point… It provides a better picture for the president and for the board to define what is success. The presidents crave this, as does our board, because historically… we struggled with this role. [We don't] know if it's a management board or a governing board and so people who haven't sat on boards before struggle with that and some people who have sat on them struggle.

In discussing the benefits of implementing these metrics, this regent also highlighted a second data source the board was considering in development of this policy – specifically, Arizona State University President Michael Crow's presentation to his board. As this regent explained, "Crow's presentation to his board has his metrics… You can see at a glance how he's doing. I mean to me, that's all we can do as a governing board… Look at [metrics] to determine success." Besides institution-focused policies, regents did not emphasize instrumental use of research, suggesting that for system-wide decisions, they more often are on the demand side of the information flow process or strictly consider NSHE provided materials.

EMERGENT THEMES

This final section will discuss three themes that emerged from connecting Nevada's completion agenda and the role of the NSHE Board of Regents. First, there are distinct differences in the role of regents in regards to the college completion agenda and other policies enacted in the system. Second, due to their appointment via public election, regents serve in a role akin to state representatives, which also influences various aspects of diversity on the board.

Finally, Nevada's open meeting law has created an environment that limits regents' ability to collaborate and discuss policy, resulting in a "top-heavy" structure among board members.

Academic Affairs is a Unique Focus

A key finding from this case analysis was a limited involvement of NSHE regents generally in regards to the development and implementation of Nevada's college completion agenda and policies. Some of the initiatives enacted were developed in other states and adapted to the state context (15 to Finish) or were developed in-house, with the NSHE chancellor's office pushing the policy forward (performance based funding). Although the regents did play a role in particular aspects of these policies, such as determining the metrics for the PBF formula, the majority of decisions around setting a completion-focused agenda and intricacies of the policies were made outside of their purview. Notably, Governor Sandoval and his predecessor played a significant role in pushing for the attainment agenda to align with the workforce needs of the state and long-term economic development plan. Respondents suggested that this is due to the nature of college completion focusing on the academic affairs sector, implying that the regents' role is squarely focused on more traditional duties. As one regent emphasized:

> My job as a regent is to be one of thirteen to hire and fire the chancellor, and to hire and fire presidents. My job as a regent is also, in the policy arena, to coordinate the activities of our eight institutions… Not management. And then the last job that I have as a regent is that I am responsible for ensuring that the citizens of Nevada receive… [the] best return on their state investment.

Nevertheless, regents still play an important role for NSHE and the state's higher education sector in other policy arenas. In particular, in serving the citizens of Nevada, regents aim to ensure students have the ability to succeed and institutions can run as well as possible. Regents play an important role in relaying stakeholder concerns to appropriate offices and in considering system-level changes, which they ascertain from sources internal and external to the

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system, ultimately with the goal of improving the overall experience for students, faculty, and staff. As one regent noted, they will not "interfere with [the] management" of institutions, but will work with campus leadership to make sure that they have the resources available to serve their constituencies the best way possible.

A Fully Elected Board of Pseudo-State Representatives

Central to the dynamics and role of the NSHE board of regents is the fact that they are entirely publicly elected. Although a governor appointed approximately half of the current board members originally, the unique means of appointment to serve as a regent in Nevada has shaped who is represented on the board and their relationship with the Nevada citizenry. In particular, NSHE regents suggested their role was akin to serving as a state representative because they are elected by district and are "accessible to our constituency." Respondents noted, however, that publicly elected positions in Nevada are the norm and plentiful, many of which are viewed as more important than serving as an NSHE regent. For example, one regent mentioned:

> Churchill County, Nevada elects something called the 'Mosquito Abatement Officer.' It's what it sounds like – it's a mosquito catcher. I think that is held in higher esteem as far as the office holder in Nevada than a regent… Nobody knows who their regent is, but if someone does have an issue and wants to look it up, they can find [out].

Other respondents made similar comments, suggesting most Nevadans neither know who their district's regent is or what their position entails. Further, a regent provided an anecdote regarding the voting process, emphasizing Nevadans' limited interest in understanding the position:

> On Election Day, [voters] go through all of the national posts, the state posts and then all of our judges are elected. So you go through a gazillion judges and nobody knows who half of them are. And then you go through school boards and you go through board of education… and the regents are just about last. And by the time they vote or get down to the regents it's kind of like, 'oh, gee, which one?' You know, make a checkmark. And quite often, the general public doesn't research a member of the board of regents.

Nevertheless, should a citizen run into any issue regarding NSHE or higher education, they will find a regent to contact. As one regent explained, "we're here for the entire state. We're here for the entire system. And we need to make sure that the system is working for citizens."

To this end, respondents also highlighted the influence of conversations with higher education stakeholders and anecdotes on board decision-making. As one regent emphasized, "they're all your constituents besides being, you know, educators or students and so you have to listen and take it all into account." This willingness to interact and appeal to Nevadans is likely the result of regents serving as elected officials and, as a regent discussed, "it's up to you to get yourself reelected… it's not up to the governor… they don't endorse you or anything like that." In other words, because regents are not political appointees, there is greater need for them to appeal to their voting population in order to retain their position.

Respondents did mention the negative aspects of maintaining a fully elected board. In particular, one regent emphasized, "We've had people who had no business being regents… They were disruptive and they were bad regents." This individual continued by suggesting these former regents had limited knowledge of higher education and were using the position, as a different regent explained, as a "stepping-stone… They're very much looking at the political side of the [position], what's going to happen. They're looking at reelection. They're looking at higher offices." Referred by several respondents as "political opportunism," it was argued that these varied goals negatively impact progress within the system and decision-making by the board. Even among current regents, though, respondents suggested the absence of a unified perspective on the role or goals for the board. An NSHE official explained:

> It runs the gamut of on one extreme, regents who feel that they are responsible to
> their constituency and in such a way that they are okay with being called

micromanagers of presidents… They feel it is their responsibility as a public servant to get into the minutia of what presidents are doing and what their staff are doing and that they need to hold them accountable… On the other hand, we have regents who feel as though their role is just to support the work that presidents are already doing, that they view presidents as experts on their own, who really only need the official support… from a policymaker such as a regent.

Some respondents suggested these issues could be alleviated with a shift to a partially appointed board. It was their perception that adding governor intervention would help the regents towards a unified goal and perspective of their role.

On the other hand, some respondents noted value in having publicly elected board members. Specifically, it was suggested that there is greater diversity of perspective and thought among regents, including varied occupations, backgrounds, and political ideology. A regent mentioned:

There's no real commonality among the elected boards like there would be [when] someone is appointed by a person… you have some states where you've had governors in office for quite a few years, so maybe they elect or appoint the entire board, so they're all Republican or Democrat or whatever and they all tend to think conservative or liberal or whatever the bend is of the governor.

In fact, as an NSHE officer noted, with their current board appointment mechanism, there are two regent archetypes that are unrepresented:

Ironically because our folk are elected, there are not that many politicos. There are people who have aspirations but not folk who are already ingrained in the political system… We don't have anybody like that on our board and we really haven't had that many people like that, at least since the state's gotten really big. And then the second are very big business leaders, you know, sort of people who run big companies or wealthy companies and that sort of thing… We don't have anybody like that on our board. Our board is one doctor, three lawyers, one of whom is a lobbyist [and a] small advertising company head.

This respondent suggested that removing these traditional trustee archetypes is important in a state like Nevada, where politics and goals are changing. Notably, although neither respondent

argued these benefits preclude Nevada from considering moving away from a fully elected board, diversity in perspective and serving as a "buffer" from the state government were viewed as positives that could be lost.

Open Meeting Law Constrains Regent Involvement

A final emergent theme centers on the influence of Nevada's Open Meeting Law. NSHE regents noted the limitations this regulation creates in regards to collaboration and discussion outside of scheduled meetings for board members. Additionally, the legislature is not bound by the law, which serves as an obstacle that regents must consider in collaborating with state lawmakers around policies. There was also trepidation around the potential separation of power between the board's leadership and the rest of its members. As one regent discussed, "One of my concerns is that the individual regent doesn't have as much input as they might on some other boards or structures because it's so top heavy with the chancellor and the chair doing so much. Now, sometimes the model is different if the chair wants it to be." Therefore, the involvement of all thirteen members of the board is at the chair's discretion, but often results in imbalanced roles in the decision-making process.

On the other hand, some respondents explained the open meeting law is aimed to allow the Nevada citizens to be cognizant and have the opportunity to participate in the policymaking process throughout all aspects of the state. For example, in describing the goals of the open meeting law, an NSHE official explained:

> You cannot have these closed-door opportunities to create policy in a vacuum without some element of transparency being there. And while you may not agree [with the policy] at least you were at the table to be a part of the discussion, to tune in and to understand why it is so and why they made these decisions... I think while you may not like the outcome, there is value to being a contributor to the process to know that you were there when they were, you know, discussing 15 to Finish and while you may not agree with it, at least maybe you got on the record your concerns and gave them something to think about.

The open meeting law's purpose, as described in this excerpt, serves as a similar explanation for the rationale behind the publicly elected board of regents. In particular, both policies aim to provide Nevadans a voice in processes that otherwise would be unavailable. The question ultimately centers on the continued utility of these arrangements in a rapidly growing and diverse state like Nevada.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The previous two chapters examined the involvement of higher education governing

agency boards in the state policy process around college completion in Georgia and Nevada.

This final chapter will return to the three research questions guiding this study, which were

formally stated in Chapter I, and consider themes from the two cases to draw broader

conclusions. First, I will consider the University of Georgia (USG) and Nevada System of

Higher Education (NSHE) Boards of Regents regarding their role in determining the policy

agenda, development and implementation of policy, and use of research in the policymaking

process around college completion. I will then analyze how the different appointment

mechanisms to join the statewide board in the two cases influences regents' role and association

with state executives and other state officials. Finally, I will consider the utility of principal-

agent theory to understand the themes and findings from this dissertation, with respect to the

relationship between state governments and state agency board members and the regents' role

around policy decisions. This will be followed by a discussion of practical and conceptual

implications of this dissertation's findings, and conclude with remarks regarding state boards of

regents and the policy process.

STATE REGENTS AND THE POLICY PROCESS

As was highlighted in the case analysis for both Georgia and Nevada, regents had an

overall limited role in the policy process around college completion. Although state-specific

characteristics influenced the board's function (e.g., constitutional autonomy and Nevada's open meeting law), there were also common themes across the two cases that are attributable to the broader role of state regents on the higher education policy process.

College Completion as an Anomaly

Respondents in both states suggested college completion as a policy directive emerged and was dealt with differently than other higher education efforts. In particular, Obama's (2009) statement steered the issue to a national focus and the involvement of numerous intermediary organizations, such as Complete College America, resulted in proven policy solutions becoming readily available for consideration across the country. Consequently, college completion required less in-state involvement in its promotion as a policy agenda area and in the development of possible solutions. Indeed, although respondents mentioned regents are explicitly tasked to "set policy," because of the widespread focus on the national directive, board members were revealed to be less involved specifically with the college completion movement.

College completion existing centrally in the academic affairs domain was an additional factor limiting regents' involvement. Unlike other policy foci, such as financial budgeting or personnel hiring, academic issues were noted as residing outside of regents' knowledge base and expertise. Although boards are tasked with overseeing these various policy areas equally, respondents in Georgia and Nevada suggested regents rely more on agency staff to serve as "content experts." Consequently, even the locally conceptualized ideas and solutions developed in a specific state were mentioned as traditionally "born out of the system office" rather than the board. Nevertheless, respondents reiterated that regents have the final input regarding enacting policy solutions and setting system direction and, therefore, are not entirely absent from academic affairs-related policy discussions.

The Power of Committee Work

Regents were involved in each state's college completion platform primarily through committee work, which emerged as an important and influential aspect of board participation in the policy process. In particular, respondents pointed to the academic affairs committee as serving as the location where many completion-related solutions were initially presented, discussed, and considered for statewide enactment. While agency officials and staff were mentioned as leading the conversations in committee, regents remained present in the dialogue and participated by promoting issues that they felt "really ought to be taken up." Therefore, depending on the individual's knowledge and interest on a topic, board members could choose to exert some influence on the state's policy agenda and the promotion of specific solutions.

Although this dissertation focuses on a specific sector and different type of governing body, the importance of committee work aligns with Krehbiel's (1992) study that underscored the importance of organizational characteristics of the federal legislature on the policy process. He argued this operational structure results in legislators becoming informed primarily on topics pertaining to their assigned areas and relying on other assemblymen and staff to advise decision-making in all other policy domains. Notably, respondents for this dissertation mentioned regents' committee membership changes often throughout their tenure on the board, which differs from the federal government. Therefore, it is possible that board members may become more broadly informed on all policy areas over time, but future research should consider how these assignments may directly or indirectly mediate regents' policy involvement.

Confidence in Agency Staff and Anecdotes for Information

In discussing board members' use of research, respondents in both Georgia and Nevada emphasized that regents considered grounding decision-making in information and data to be

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important. Although there was variation in the extent of how different forms of information were utilized between the two cases, two sources emerged as being the most widely considered: agency staff and anecdotal stories and conversations with stakeholders. While the scope and utility of the perspectives gained differed between these preferred sources, respondents in Georgia and Nevada noted the effectiveness of these types of information in driving the policy process and influencing change.

Overall, individuals associated with the chancellor's office and agency served as the most often discussed source of information for board members. Agency staff was mentioned as providing "concise reports" to regents and viewed as being "up on the latest literature and the latest initiatives throughout the nation," which ultimately led to policy decisions and conversations around college completion and other foci. Respondents argued that the provision of data and research to board members is also a primary responsibility of agency staff, reinforcing their central role in the transmission of information. Notably, the research and data supplied from this source was mentioned as being utilized for primarily system-wide decisions and initiatives. Consequently, agency staff can indirectly influence all public institutions and the broadest array of stakeholders with the information provided.

A second source of evidence used by board members was anecdotal information originating from various parties, including those with connections to the postsecondary sector and the general citizenry. Respondents in both states noted unsolicited communication from current students, student's parents, alumni, and others connected to institutions were a daily occurrence. Because board members' contact information is publicly available, individuals with any concern, regardless of severity, are able to correspond with regents, though respondents noted they provide varying levels of attention to these communiqués. For example, regents in

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Georgia and Nevada recalled situations where a conversation with a distressed student or parent, especially those with personal connections to the board member, served as a catalyst for institutional policy change (either to resolve a single issue or campus-wide). Regents also mentioned occasions where personal exchanges led to a broader understanding of an issue that influenced their own perspective on a topic. Yet, Georgia board members also suggested the "tail should not wag the dog" and that their responsibility to the state is to consider the broader agency's plan, rather than the concerns of a few individuals. Ultimately, although the effectiveness and utility of this form of information varied, it is notable that when questioned regarding evidence directly influencing a regent's opinion or action, respondents in both states often referred to these informal conversations.

Previous literature provides some explanation for respondents emphasizing their reliance on agency staff and anecdotal communication to inform decision-making. In evaluating federal legislative decision-making processes, several researchers suggested the existence of "insider" and "outsider" perspectives among data sources, each providing unique benefits to the policy process (Hird, 2005; Mooney, 1991a, 1991b; Webber, 1987a, 1987b). Insider information included concise briefs and interpretations of larger ideas, and was traditionally provided by fellow legislators and legislative staff. It was explained that these informants spoke the same language and had the same goals as the policymakers receiving the information, making it easier for research to be translated into more easily understood and policy relevant text. In comparison, outsider information was provided by individuals unaffiliated with the legislature and provides a nuanced perspective on broader themes influencing the policy process. Considering the current study, the agency staff was described as providing insider information while the anecdotal communications offer an outsider perspective.

There were other sources of information mentioned by respondents in both states, including intermediary organizations and the popular press. Nevertheless, when compared to agency staff and anecdotal information, the utility and effectiveness of these other forms of evidence in affecting policy varied greatly between the two cases. For instance, Complete College America was mentioned by respondents in both states as influencing the statewide policy process and the supply of information that guided decision-making. However, respondents from Nevada noted a greater reliance on this organization to advocate specific policy solutions and guide the state agenda than in Georgia, where CCA has served in a more supporting role. Likewise, respondents from Nevada emphasized the utility of the media as a means to understand regional and national trends, whereas respondents from Georgia discussed a more statewide focus around information. Notably, in neither state was empirical research mentioned as impactful on regents' decision-making. Although this finding is unsurprising due to the "two communities" literature, it does signal the importance for researchers to translate their work into laymen's terms and a more policy-focused form in order to influence the policymaking process.

INFLUENCE OF APPOINTMENT MECHANISM

A characteristic that guided the case selection process was a consideration of how individual members join a state's postsecondary agency board. In Georgia, the nineteen USG regents are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. In comparison, the thirteen NSHE regents are all publicly elected. Considering the equally limited influence of board members on the college completion policy process in both states, the appointment mechanism was not found to mediate the regents' role further. However, variation in means of

appointment emerged as influential in two distinct ways: aspects of diversity of the regents and working dynamics of the board.

Diversity of Backgrounds

When comparing the two cases, variation in appointment mechanism was discussed as influencing the backgrounds of the individuals serving on the board. In Georgia, respondents mentioned the caliber of USG's board members regarding their leadership ability, work experience, and association to the state. USG officials emphasized the "prestigious" nature of serving the university system and that that results in a certain type of individual to be considered and ultimately appointed as a regent. Specifically, USG regents tend to be CEOs, lawyers, business leaders, and former legislators in their professional lives and view their time on the board as a way to serve the state and the people. Although USG regents made reference to personal connections to the governor prior to appointment, which likely contributed to their selection for the position, the stature of the individuals serving suggests the USG Board of Regents is a respected organization that is sought out to join.

Those serving on the NSHE board, on the other hand, include individuals with more diverse backgrounds. One respondent even mentioned there being "no real commonality among the elected board." While there are some board members whose occupations are in a similar echelon as UGA regents (e.g., lawyers, doctors), respondents noted the lack of "politicos" and "very big business leaders" serving on the board. In fact, there were several NSHE board members that were current or former higher education and K-12 education administrators, which was noticeably lacking on the USG board. This can be attributed to the fact that individuals in Nevada are opting to run for elected office, rather than being appointed by a state official. Consequently, there is a larger pool of potential regents in Nevada than in Georgia, with

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individuals choosing to serve in this specific role. Yet, this less stringent vetting process also results in a wider variety of capability and aptitude for the position. Notably, one current NSHE regent emphasized that there have been some previous board members "who had no business being regents" and other respondents who mentioned individuals running for NSHE regent as a "stepping-stone" to begin a political career in a different public office.

Besides occupation, means of appointment was also mentioned as impacting other aspects of diversity on the board. For example, although neither USG nor NSHE regents are required to disclose political party affiliation, respondents alluded to greater ideological variety in Nevada than in Georgia. This aligns with comments from Longanecker (2006) and Pusser and Ordorika (2001) who suggested individuals appointed by state officials tend to align with the politician's perspectives and goals. To this end, Georgia respondents noted the preference of the governor to select regents who "mirror his agenda" in order to ensure the postsecondary sector aligns with broader state goals. On the other hand, Nevada's publicly elected board provides greater opportunity for a range of viewpoints to be represented, since there is less external pressure and direction from the state executive.

Collaborative vs. Individual Working Environment

A second area influenced by in means of appointment centered on the extent to which regents worked together, as well as other dynamics of the working environment. In particular, there was variation in how prominent individual regents were to institution and system-wide decision-making and policies. For example, Nevada respondents offered several examples where individual NSHE regents focused on specific issues and sought change, such as the availability of disability resource centers or contributing to the establishment of a medical school. Although there were similar efforts noted by USG regents, where an individual regent influenced an

institutional or system policy, these tended to be reactionary to a communication or concern by a stakeholder. On the other hand, NSHE regents identified a need within the system and worked towards its change. In comparison, most of the initiatives discussed by USG respondents focused on a concerted effort by the system and board working together, such as around completion, or reacting to state trends and data, like institutional consolidations.

This variation in working environment can be attributed, in part, to the difference in appointment mechanism. In particular, because NSHE board members are publicly elected they must appeal to the voting public to ensure the longevity of their time in the position. As such, sitting regents have a greater need to prove that they are contributing to the system in order to appeal to voters and validate their reelection. In comparison, USG regents do not have the added political pressure or concern around reelection influencing their actions, and consequently do not need to seek out policies to change. To this end, NSHE board members suggested their position was like serving as a state representative because they are connected to a district and must be "accessible to our constituency." USG regents, on the other hand, did not agree with this classification of their position because they are not elected officials and consider their role to be entirely "apolitical."

Notably, there are state and system characteristics that could also contribute to this variation besides appointment mechanism. For instance, decision-making by the NSHE board was discussed as being siloed due to the state's strict open meeting law. In particular, the board chair and vice chair were mentioned as having more power and being more involved in day-to-day operations of the system than other regents, resulting in a "top heavy" structure. Consequently, it is possible that other regents are intentionally seeking out other projects because they cannot be as invested in primary concerns of the system. There are also notable differences

regarding the caliber of the USG system and NSHE system. Specifically, because USG is viewed favorably nationally, there may not be as much change needed than in the NSHE system, which is seeking to improve itself and is striving to raise its national reputation. Returning to a previous theme, the regents in the two states are also different along several characteristics that may result in varied levels of availability to undertake these smaller projects. Specifically, the work experience and occupations of USG regents versus that of NSHE regents may contribute to board members' likelihood to pursue policy action singlehandedly.

UTILITY OF PRINCIPAL-AGENT THEORY

The final topic examined by this dissertation is principal-agent theory (PAT). Described in detail in Chapter II, PAT serves as a framework to understand the relationship between two parties (a principal and an agent) in a hierarchical and contractually established relationship. Within this theory, there are four key components: agents, principals, information asymmetry, and monitoring behaviors. Table 3 provides a summary of how these features align in each state including the primary agents and principals involved with respect to the state postsecondary agency board, and a high-low comparison of the existence of information asymmetry and monitoring behaviors. The table is followed by a more detailed discussion of each component of the framework as it relates in each state. Finally, I assess the overall utility of PAT to explain the findings from this dissertation, the relationship between state boards and state governments, and regents' role in the state policy process.

Table 3: Dimensions of PAT for Agency Boards and Appointing Constituency		
	Georgia	Nevada
Agents	State Agency Board	State Agency Board
Principals	Governor	State Citizenry
Information Asymmetry	✓	✓✓
Monitoring Behaviors	✓✓	✓

Agents and Principals

In considering PAT for this dissertation, the state agency board serves as the agent in both Georgia and Nevada. Similar to the elected officials described by researchers using the political science-based version of PAT (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; McLendon, 2003a; Moe, 1984, 1985), the state agency board can be viewed as serving the constituents that placed them in power. To this end, the principal in Georgia is the state governor and in Nevada is the voting state citizenry, with the appointment mechanism serves as the contract between the two parties

A requirement of the principal-agent relationship focuses on the agent having time, specialized knowledge, or energy that the principal does not. In both states, this feature is established through the regents' connection to the system office, which provides extensive information, and the regents' constitutionally established power to govern the postsecondary sector. Although there was variation between the states regarding regents' capability to utilize this specialized knowledge to affect change, board members' duties to govern the postsecondary sector far outweigh the capability of their respective principals.

Information Asymmetry

Another component underlying the principal-agent relationship is the existence of information asymmetry. This is a situation that arises due to the agent being more immersed in the day-to-day operations and decisions of the organization. PAT suggests that the principal is

not as informed as the agent, since they are not involved in the day-to-day minutiae of the organization, and are reliant on the information that the agent provides. In considering the two cases, a few trends arose that provide insight into this feature.

Respondents in both states suggested the general population is unaware of who serves on the board and specifics of their role. For Nevada, this suggests the citizenry electing regents are unaware of the decisions board members are making and the information they acquire, creating an environment where the principal and agent have an uneven understanding of postsecondary decision-making. Although Georgia respondents made similar comments, since the citizenry do not serve as the principal for the regents, the information asymmetry between principal and agent is unaffected. Further, the governor, who acts as the principal for Georgia regents, appoints and often has preexisting relationships with the board members, which likely limits the potential for information asymmetry. Specifically, USG regents may interact with the governor more frequently, whether as a board member or a private citizen, increasing the possibility for the principal to become knowledgeable of the agents' actions.

Information asymmetry is also influenced in the two cases by the power and positioning of the respective principal. In particular, since the principal in Georgia also serves as the state executive, there is greater likelihood that they will be considered for statewide higher education decision-making than the general citizenry in Nevada. For example, considering the college completion agenda, the governor in Georgia was involved in the state's membership in Complete College America and aligning the postsecondary education sector to the broader state goals, whereas Nevada's citizens were not. Consequently, although there are similarities regarding the existence of information asymmetry in the two cases, Nevada presents a more uneven relationship between principal and agent than Georgia.

Monitoring Behaviors

As a means to lessen opportunities for information asymmetry, it is expected that principals will utilize monitoring behaviors to follow the actions of the agent and ensure that goals are met. A noted method to oversee agent activity is the media (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984), which serves as a key method for the board of regents' actions to be followed as well. Although indirectly involving the NSHE board, an example that arose in this study was the questioning and ultimate removal of NSHE chancellor Dan Klaich (Barnes, 2016). It was the involvement of the media that helped uncover these issues and brought it to the public's attention.

Georgia and Nevada also offer the opportunity for the principal to monitor the agent through public board meetings. Specifically, since USG and NSHE meetings are planned months in advance, any interested party can attend and observe what the regents are doing and policies being considered. Therefore, a principal in either state can witness first-hand the agent's decision-making process and status of the postsecondary sector. The principal can also voice their concerns, or seek to replace board members, if the agent is shirking their responsibilities.

There are also state-specific monitoring mechanisms of note. In Georgia, the governor's office was mentioned as receiving copies of each campus's "annual reports and on the progress as it relates to Complete Georgia," which added political power to the completion directive from the board and allows the governor to keep track of the agenda system-wide. The governor was also noted as contacting regents directly about key issues and, through the appointment mechanism, was able to ensure that like-minded individuals were serving on the USG board. In Nevada, the state's open meeting law allows for transparency in decision-making and action. Respondents emphasized the policy's ability to remove "closed-door opportunities" and allowing

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all interested parties to "be a part of the discussion." These features provide additional

opportunities for the principal to monitor the actions of the board to ensure that they are working

towards their goal.

When comparing the two cases, there are more efficient and accessible monitoring

mechanisms in place for the principal in Georgia than Nevada. For example, although the open

meeting laws are universally applicable to the board of regents and NSHE system, individuals

must take steps to maximize the possible monitoring capability of the law. Considering many

respondents suggested the public's limited knowledge of the regents' role, it is unclear how often

this mechanism is utilized. Further, while NSHE regents and officials suggested the open

meeting law influences their ability to collaborate and contribute to the system, monitoring

behaviors in Georgia were discussed as more ingrained into the system. Specifically, due to the

governor's appointment responsibility, the board is inherently tied to the state executive, with

individual regents often having preexisting relationships with the governor. Although this

mechanism alone does not provide a supplementary mechanism to ensure the board is working

towards the state's goals, it preempts potential shirking behavior before it occurs.

Principal-Agent Theory's Utility

In considering the relationship between state agency board members and their appointing

constituency, the principal-agent relationship was evident as were most of the other framework's

features including information asymmetry and monitoring behaviors. Regents in both cases

discussed a preference to make decisions and use information that would appeal to the

constituency responsible for their appointment, further emphasizing the motivating expectations

of the principal-agent relationship. For example, USG regents remained attuned to the desires of

the governor throughout the development and implementation of Complete College Georgia and

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associated initiatives. Similarly, NSHE regents conducted themselves in a manner to appeal to the general citizenry, since the voting public determines board member's reelection. While regents in both states considered perspectives from other stakeholders during the policy process, such as public citizens in Georgia or the governor in Nevada, it was the constituency in charge of appointment that was prioritized. Consequently, differences arose when comparing the two cases when considering the relationship between state agency boards and the state government.

In Georgia respondents noted regents rarely go "too far out of step with the governor that appointed them" and emphasized the importance of having a board that is "cooperative" with the policies and goals of the state government. Although respondents argued that this does not equate to the board blindly following the objectives of state officials, USG regents mentioned the importance of being "responsive" to state officials' goals. Multiple regents also discussed preexisting relationships and political connections with the governor prior to joining the board, which further links the state agency board to the state government. For example, one respondent questioned whether Governor Deal "was talking to every regent as much as he was talking to me" because of a previous connection. While respondents did not suggest the governor is directly involved in all USG decision-making, there was evidence that the state executive may be more influential through board appointments than the autonomous and "apolitical" structure that some respondents described.

In comparison, NSHE regents primarily discussed the indirect involvement and influence of state officials. Although respondents highlighted that a governor initially appointed over half of the sitting board members, because "it's up to you to get yourself reelected," state officials tend to not maintain close associations with regents like in Georgia. For instance, NSHE regents made few references to personal connections with state politicians and legislators that could

indirectly influence the postsecondary sector. On the other hand, respondents did suggest that the governor's broad goals regarding postsecondary degree completion influenced the direction of the system, though this may be attributable to the unique nature of the current completion agenda. Specifically, Nevada's membership in Complete College America signifies a commitment by the governor's office to focus on improving college completion across the state. Considering this feature with the national directive towards this policy goal and it is possible that the governor may play a more central role in decisions connected to this specific initiative than other higher education concerns.

In many respects, PAT can explain this variation regarding the involvement of the state executive and other state officials. Since the governor serves as the principal for USG regents, board members are more responsive to his needs and goals. Although Georgia respondents emphasized the apolitical nature of the board, which prevents regents from being removed if they "make a decision against the governor," there were noted connections and associations between board members and the state executive. In comparison, because the governor does not serve as the principal for NSHE regents, there is less formal reliance on the state executive by the board to guide decision-making. Instead, NSHE regents directed efforts towards appealing to the general citizenry since they play a central role in reelection.

However, when considering PAT as an explanatory tool for the regents' broader role, several limitations exist. For instance, one of the main issues of PAT highlighted by Kivisto (2005, 2008) is its inability to consider multiple principals and how a single agent navigates these various perspectives. Although the findings from the current study acknowledge that multiple principals influence the decision-making process of regents, there is not a mechanism or metric built into the framework to gauge this variation. Put differently, although the governor

and general citizenry influence both Georgia and Nevada regents in different ways, the PAT framework cannot recognize this feature due its focus on a two-party relationship. Further, there are other sources of information, such as intermediary organizations and the agency office, which were also mentioned as affecting regent decision-making that cannot be evaluated within PAT's narrow framework.

Additionally, state agency boards exist in a unique position as both a principal and agent in the policy process. While this dissertation focused primarily on the board members acting as agents to the principal that appointed them, it is important to consider regents are also positioned as principals to the state governing agency and postsecondary institutions. Consequently, when evaluating the existence of information asymmetry asymmetric, it is unclear if regents maintain the most complete understanding of decision-making than other parties involved. For instance, although the Georgia governor is not as centrally involved in the daily operations of USG as the regents, board members are also not always present. In fact, in both cases, one of the primary duties of the board is hiring a chancellor, who is explicitly charged and "responsible for day-to-day operations" of the agency. To this end, if board members are considered within the broader scope of their responsibilities, regents can be viewed as the principal with the chancellor serving as the agent. Considering the chancellor is more involved in daily decision-making, it is feasible that they have a more complete understanding of the agency than the regents.

Despite these limitations, PAT held significant academic purchase for this analysis. In particular, because the focus of the analysis was framed primarily in the relationship between the board of regents and their appointing constituency, PAT was able to consider how variation in characteristics of the principal alters the actions of the agent. Although there are certainly features of the framework that limits its utility in all aspects of higher education, it offers some

explanatory power that other theories do not. Specifically, considering variation in the appointment mechanism, there is evidence that supports a publicly elected board mediates the influence of the state government in decision-making because regents are more inclined to be concerned with the voting citizenry than the state government.

IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation's focus on a qualitative comparative analysis of the USG Board of Regents and NSHE Board of Regents contributes to a scant body of empirical work examining state regents and governing agencies. By investigating the role of board members in the development and implementation of policies related to the national college completion movement, findings from this study also have both conceptual and practical implications. In particular, this dissertation found state regents had an overall limited role in the policy process, regardless of board appointment mechanism. Respondents emphasized the influence and importance of state agency staff and board committees in driving decisions around academic affairs-related policies, which mitigates the direct role of the regents. This finding helps explain studies that have previously argued board appointment has little influence on a state's likelihood of policy adoption (Kaplan, 2004), since the regents themselves are less involved than previously assumed. Further, the limited role of regents calls into question other work that has suggested political appointment onto state boards can lead to better higher education performance (Minor, 2008).

Findings from this study also confirm and build upon previous research that argues politically appointed board members tend to have preexisting associations with their appointing constituency and will align their decision-making accordingly (Lowry, 2001a; Pusser, 2003;

Pusser & Ordorika, 2001). For example, Georgia regents, who are selected by the governor and confirmed by the senate, noted preexisting relationships with the state executive and the occasional communication with governor regarding various policy initiatives. Additionally, in considering board members' preferred sources of information, there were few comments regarding the utilization of research from intermediary organizations or the consideration of perspectives from the general citizenry or media. These insights were more prominent following comparisons with the publicly elected NSHE board. In particular, although board members considered the perspectives of state officials in their decision-making process, NSHE regents primarily focused on aligning the postsecondary system with broader state goals instead of implementing specific strategies suggested by the governor. Nevada respondents also considered a wider variety of research and information, which further limits the potential direct influence of state officials.

The utility of principal-agent theory was also considered in this study. Although some researchers question the explanatory value of this framework in a complex system like the American higher education sector (Kivisto, 2005, 2008; Moe, 1985), findings from this dissertation suggest PAT is effective in understanding specific contexts within the broader organization. For instance, as one of the main limitations of the theory stems from its inability to consider the interaction and influence of multiple principals on a single agent, it is important to appropriately frame a study within a subsystem or a specific principal-agent relationship to consider the framework appropriately. To this end, features of PAT were identified in this dissertation by focusing primarily on the association between state agency board members and their appointing stakeholder. Additionally, by using a qualitative research design, this study was able to indirectly consider the influence of other potential stakeholders, such as the state citizenry

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in Georgia or governor in Nevada, which adds an alternative way to consider the influence of multiple principals on a single agent.

Findings from this dissertation also make important practical inferences for policymakers and researchers, alike. First, regardless of appointment mechanism, across both states, regents rely on agency staff to supply trend data, state and regional comparisons, and were discussed as being the actors most centrally involved in the development of policy solutions. Consequently, intermediary organizations and researchers seeking to impact system or statewide policy should acknowledge this flow of information to ensure their work is received by the most influential source to affect the greatest change. Future research should also consider how differences within state governing agency characteristics, such as research capacity and personnel, influence the mediating role of staff towards these external perspectives.

This dissertation also found empirical studies and academic journals were not considered extensively throughout the policy process. While this finding is in line with previous research investigating how policymakers utilize information, it remains notable considering the current study's framing within the higher education sector, rather than focusing on federal or state officials, and the resulting proximity to the researchers supplying this type of research. To this end, academics and other researchers must make concerted efforts to translate their scholarly work into more policy relevant forms and language if they are hoping to influence policy decision-making.

The unique nature of the current national directive around improving college completion emerged as another key finding with several implications. First, between the extensive involvement of intermediary organizations, such as Complete College America, and President Obama's call for action across the country, a focus on degree attainment has shifted traditional

powers and policy efforts at the state level. In some states, including Nevada, this has led to increased gubernatorial and legislative interest in public higher education that has rarely been seen previously. Consequently, the various actors involved and decisions made leading to this focusing of the higher education policy agenda may provide an effective model for policymakers to shift future statewide goals. On the other hand, based on the extensive time and effort placed into college completion-related activities, it is likely that degree attainment will continue to serve as a central policy goal across the United States, unlike other initiatives that did not last.

Finally, the close connection between the state government and boards of regents was notable. Among Nevada's publicly elected board, there existed connections to the governor and local state officials that transcend their unique appointment mechanism. Similarly, although respondents in Georgia repeatedly noted USG's "apolitical" and autonomous structure, the potential source of influence from state officials was clear. Therefore, considering other situations nationally, such as controversial presidential hires in Iowa and North Carolina or the tenure debate in Wisconsin, there is evidence that supports concerns of politicians influencing higher education beyond traditional limits of their power and responsibility. While this may present obstacles for the future of some traditional postsecondary education features, most notably academic freedom, it is critical for academics and other institutional stakeholders to acknowledge the existence of these external influences and consider how to work with, possibly contentious, political ideologies and officials.

CONCLUSION

Despite state agency boards' central role in the operation of public higher education, their membership and various responsibilities are not as well researched or understood as other

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stakeholders. In examining the boards of regents for the University System of Georgia and Nevada System of Higher Education and their role in the policymaking process around statewide college completion, this dissertation sought to contribute to this scant body of literature. Although findings suggest board members had an overall limited role in the focusing of the policy agenda or development of solutions, other emergent themes were notable. In particular, the influence of the mechanism for appointment influenced various aspects of the individuals serving as regents, such as their diversity in backgrounds and their preexisting connections to the state government, as well as how they approach their role, specifically with respect to the information sources they consider.

Nevertheless, due to the unique nature of the current college completion movement, there remain areas where future research should be considered. In particular, respondents noted regents' more central role in domains that connect to their day-to-day lives, such as finances and personnel hiring, which may provide further insight into how decision-making occurs among the board. Additionally, although the two cases investigated were selected through purposive sampling, there remain characteristics among governing agency boards that were not considered for this dissertation, including the influence of having mixed appointment mechanisms, retaining members of the faculty or student body to serve on the board, or the inclusion of *ex-officio* state officials on the board, as well as variation in governing agency types (e.g., consolidated governing boards, coordinating boards, planning agencies). Ultimately, considering the central role public boards of regents serve in governing postsecondary education, it is imperative that more research is conducted on how they operate and ways in which various constituencies and stakeholders can inform and influence their decision-making.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How would you characterize the role of [state governing board] in [state]?

2. What do you consider to be the primary responsibility of members of [state governing board]?

3. As public higher education has many interested parties both internal and external to the sector, how does the [state governing board] and its members navigate these various standpoints?
   a. Georgia: What are your thoughts on the role of legislators around higher education policy in the state? What about the Governor?
   b. Nevada: As NSHE is currently the only state agency board that is fully publicly elected, how do you view this as influencing their perspective? What is the role of the Governor regarding the NSHE Board of Regents?

4. As increasing postsecondary attainment rates have become a central policy concern nationally, how did college completion become a part of [state] policy agenda?

5. How would you characterize the role of [state governing board] in the adoption of [college completion policy]?
   a. Would you characterize this as a standard example of their role?

6. What a policy arrives at [state governing board], what is the process taken by Regents to inform themselves about the merits of the initiative?

7. Are there any sources of information or organizations that Regents tend to consider when reviewing a new policy?

8. Can you think of a time when research changed the position Regents took on a given policy decision?

9. Do you have any additional thoughts on the role of members of [state governing board] regarding college completion policies in [state]?
   a. Are there any individuals you would recommend I speak with who may have an alternative perspective on this topic?
   b. Are there any upcoming events I should observe?
   c. Are there any documents you would recommend I review?

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INVITATION AND CONSENT

Institute of Higher Education

<<DATE>>
<<INSERT NAME>>
<<INSERT ADDRESS LINE 1>>
<<INSERT ADDRESS LINE 2>>

Dear <<INSERT NAME>>:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Institute of Higher Education at The University of Georgia with a research interest in higher education policy and leadership. I am writing to request your participation in a research study dealing with members of state higher education governing boards and their role in the policy process.

The general purpose of my dissertation is to examine the role of higher education governing board members on the state-level college completion policy process. Specifically, I would like to better understand how board members: (1) perceive their role regarding the state policy process around college completion and (2) consider information and research as influencing this opinion. By furthering the understanding of the role of state governing board members in informing higher education policy decisions, this study may have practical benefits for policymakers working with these state agencies, as well as help contribute to the dialogue around overseeing agencies in higher education.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a 30 to 60 minute interview with a possible additional follow-up interview. While there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed, confidentiality will be guaranteed to the extent possible. With your permission, the conversation will be recorded to help remember what was said during the interview. The audio files will be destroyed once they have been fully transcribed, and only I will have access to the recordings and transcripts. Unless you would prefer to be mentioned by name, your confidentially will be maintained by using a pseudonym (such as, <<INSERT PSEUDONYM>>) for this study and any subsequent projects that utilizes this data.

Of course, your participation is voluntary. You can stop taking part at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. No foreseeable risks or discomforts are expected, though there may also be minimal potential benefits for you personally from this study. However, the potential benefits to humankind may include a better understanding of postsecondary governing boards and their role in the state-level public policymaking process.

If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at PGRubin@uga.edu or my faculty sponsor Erik Ness at eness@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this research study. If you would be willing to make the time to participate, I would be truly grateful, as I know your perspective will add value to the study.

Sincerely,

Paul G. Rubin
Ph.D. Candidate

APPENDIX C

CODING SCHEME

First Level	Second Level	Third Level
Board of Regents	➢ Means of Appointment ➢ Role in CC Policies ➢ Role – Other	➢ Principal-Agent Relationship
College Completion	➢ Policy Process ➢ Policy Solutions ➢ Role of CCA ➢ State Policy Agenda	
Good Quote		
Key Actors	➢ Governor ➢ Institutions ➢ Legislators ➢ Other State Actor ➢ State Agency Officers ➢ State Agency Regents	
Off the Record		
Other Higher Ed Policies	➢ Access/Diversity ➢ Financial Aid/Support	
Research Use	➢ Information Flow ➢ Preferred Sources	➢ Academic Work ➢ Anecdotes ➢ Higher Ed Agency ➢ Institutions ➢ Intermediaries ➢ Media/Press ➢ Other States ➢ Unsolicited Information
	➢ Weiss Use	➢ Conceptual ➢ Instrumental ➢ Political
State Characteristics	➢ Educational Attainment ➢ Higher Ed Financing ➢ Higher Ed Governance ➢ K-12 Sector ➢ Political Ideology ➢ State Demographics ➢ State Economy/Workforce ➢ State Uniqueness	