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Thwarted Ambition

The Role of Public Policy in University Development

Michael N. Bastedo

Paradoxically, Massachusetts is the home of a world-class system of private higher education and a struggling system of public higher education. The influence of private higher education and persistent indifference by state government repeatedly thwarted UMass's ambition to increase its stature on the national scene. The result was a "boom or bust" cycle of financial support that made rational planning and institutional expansion extremely difficult, exacerbating the university's late start toward world-class status.

The history of higher education in Massachusetts is, at its heart, a paradox. Widely regarded as the cradle of education in the United States, Massachusetts is the home state of Horace Mann, the well-known promoter of public education as the foundation of democracy and informed citizenship. The state is also renowned, beginning with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636, as home to a slew of world-class private universities and liberal arts colleges. Less well known is the history of its public colleges — the nation's first public college, Framingham State College, was established as a normal school in 1839. Yet the state's public higher education system has always been relatively impoverished compared to other states, serving a minority of the state's own students and ranking near the bottom of measures of state financial commitment to higher education.

The nineteenth century history of Massachusetts public higher education can best be characterized as a quest for legitimacy, as the state sought to minimize its commitment to the system and campuses sought to expand beyond their limited role to promote agriculture and teacher education. Competition over mission and resources hit its peak at the turn of the century, and never completely resolved. Would Massachusetts strive to have a public university sector as renowned as its private sector? Or would it rely upon that private sector to facilitate spending in other areas of the state economy?

As the twentieth century progressed, the state began to acknowledge and even expand its commitment to the public system, recognizing that its

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economic future largely depended upon the educational attainment of its workforce. The University of Massachusetts was formally established in 1947, and a complete system of higher education was forged in 1965. Finances and enrollments surged dramatically in the 1960s and 1980s. But when the state's economic fortunes declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the state's obligation to its public university proved to be quite fragile.

Thus while the state's financial outlays increased substantially over the twentieth century, over the short term the public system often existed in a "boom or bust" cycle, where large increases in appropriations were allocated in times of surplus, and dramatic cuts were made during recessions. Rational planning and institutional ambition were often forced to take a back seat to damage control, political opportunism, and financial survival. Rather than providing adequate resources for the state's booming enrollments, prescriptions were made for reforming the state's governance structure. The mere existence of the public system itself was often an open question. Overall, as a result of the influence of a world-class system of private higher education and hostile factions in state government, the University of Massachusetts has been thwarted in its ambitions for nearly 150 years, resulting in endemic conflict that has prevented the state from receiving the full benefits of its public higher education system.

Early History, 1863–1965

The Massachusetts Agricultural College was founded in 1863 by state leaders in agriculture who were friendly to higher education. The first president, Henry F. French, was a New Hampshire lawyer and farmer with no experience as an educator, but was known regionally as the author of *Farm Drainage* (1859) and for several articles in *The New England Farmer*.[1] For its first four years, the state refused to provide any funds for the college, forcing it to rely solely upon the return from its federal land grant and its own efforts to secure private support. After negotiating with a number of interested towns in western Massachusetts, the college settled in the town of Amherst, which had agreed to a local tax to fund the college and secured additional financial support from wealthy farmers. The college opened in October 1867 with a curriculum that focused on the natural sciences and agriculture, but which also included modern subjects such as languages and social science. The first students spent weekday mornings in course lectures and afternoons performing manual labor on the farm.

Although the state would provide some funds in the late 1860s for buildings, it remained committed to a policy of "independence" for the new college.[2] The state provided an endowment of $350,000 to meet its legal obligations under the Morrill Act, but refused to provide annual support. To

confirm its policy of independence, the state relinquished its power to fill vacancies on the school's board of trustees. Simultaneously, as the public's early interest in the college faded, first-year enrollment dropped to fewer than twenty students in 1875. Due to a national depression, income from the land grant was falling as well, leaving the college in serious danger of collapse. A state conversation ensued about the future of the college, with suggestions ranging from demoting the college to a trade school to giving it away to nearby Amherst College. The state governor suggested closing it altogether. The college persisted, but as late as 1892, it enrolled only eighty-eight students and employed only twenty-four faculty.[3]

Despite its slow start, the college's trustees and alumni rallied around the college, and state support reluctantly followed. The composition of the student body was transformed as public higher education became popular among the emerging middle class. By 1905, only one-third of the students came from farming families, while half had fathers in business or the professions.[4] By 1911, M.A.C. had expanded to 23 departments, but it was still dominated by agriculture and the applied sciences. Horticulture alone consisted of five departments, and the division added poultry science in 1911 and rural engineering in 1916. Pressure was rising to create a more traditional public university in Massachusetts, and in 1909, a well-known businessman, Edmund Dana Barbour, presented a petition to the state legislature for the creation of a public college in Boston.[5] An act approving the plan was passed in 1910, with the impossible provision that $600,000 be raised from private sources. Governor Eugene Foss then killed any future funding for a state university by supporting merit scholarships for students to attend private universities.

In 1914, a new governor was inaugurated who directed the Board of Education to study the formation of a state university again. The proposal alarmed many of the private universities in Boston. "To duplicate the abundant facilities which Massachusetts already possesses in her different privately endowed colleges and universities would be a wasteful step and is one not likely to be taken," said the Harvard alumni magazine.[6] Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell appeared before the legislature in February 1915, to argue that a state university would be an institution only for "poor boys," reflecting the lack of quality high school education in the state and needlessly duplicating the academic programs already available at private colleges. These views were echoed in a 1915 editorial in the *Journal of Education.*

> A poor boy can go to Harvard, can work his way through, can live on onions and cabbage if he chooses; but when he is through, his diploma is as aristocratic as that of any student. But if he went to a State University in Massachusetts his diploma would have blazoned across its page "from a poor boy's college." All education in Massachusetts is aristocratic. . . . A State University

> in Massachusetts would always be the poor boy's college and poor boys would not go there. They would sooner do janitor work, live on stale food, for the sake of having an aristocratic diploma when they are through. That is the Massachusetts of it. Our Western friends cannot understand it. They are democratic. They like the democracy of a State University. To them there is a heartiness in it that we cannot understand any more than they can understand the headiness of our Massachusetts ideal. [7]

Due to these arguments, and the high cost of starting a new university, the proposal died in a legislative committee. To add insult to injury, in 1918 a constitutional amendment brought the college back under government control, ending the state's policy of independence. Various proposals for a state university were made throughout the 1920s and 1930s, to no avail.

A doubling of federal research funding for the campus, through the Bankhead-Jones Act of 1935, convinced President Hugh Potter Baker to join an ongoing campaign to create a University of Massachusetts.[8] Campus and alumni leaders lobbied the legislature and executive branch for university status, but were met mostly with indifference. Hopes were dashed with the beginning of World War II in December 1941, as war issues became the highest priority for lawmakers and conscription cut enrollment. Once the war was over, however, public and legislative interest in a university had changed dramatically. There were large numbers of young people whose college education had been postponed for the war, the college-aged population was increasing dramatically, and the G.I. Bill gave veterans a free education in any college chosen. Public awareness of the need for technology and professional education had risen with the importance of these technologies in the war effort. Support came from labor groups, war veterans, and farm bureaus. A bill creating the university was signed into law on May 6, 1947, making Massachusetts the last major industrial state to support a public university.

Imagining a World-Class Public University, 1960–95

The name change was a step forward, but the weakness of the public sector persisted into the 1950s. As late as 1950, public colleges served only about 10 percent of total state enrollment in higher education. By 1960 this had grown to merely 16 percent, at a time when 59 percent of college students attended public campuses nationally.[9] This lack of access forced the college to impose extremely high admissions standards. In the 1950s, UMass had lower admissions rates than both Boston University and Northeastern.[10] At its height in 1957, President Jean Paul Mather could claim that UMass had the most stringent admissions standards of any public university in the nation. As a result, UMass students had a higher average family income

than students attending all of the private urban universities in Boston except Harvard. UMass would use these characteristics to fuel its ambition to build a world-class public university that would compete with its private counterparts.

The 1960s brought a degree of growth unseen previously in the state, and with it rising ambitions for the University. John Lederle, a professor of public administration at the University of Michigan, was inaugurated in 1960 as the University's fifteenth president. In his inaugural address, Lederle made a bold statement in favor of expansion and ambition for the new University, in line with his own experiences at one of the country's great public research universities.

> As a university we have not only a responsibility to transmit knowledge, but a responsibility to advance the frontiers of knowledge. . . . I have come to feel that what we have here is potentially a giant. I do not mean merely a bricks and mortar giant, but a great public center for excellence in higher education in this region.[11]

Indeed, during the 1960s, the University of Massachusetts grew by leaps and bounds. From 1960 to 1970, student access improved as enrollment at UMass more than tripled from 6,030 to 20,835.[12] With student enrollment and economic prosperity came political support. In the "Freedom Act" of 1962, the state gave UMass broad powers of fiscal self-management, including control over hiring and purchasing.[13] This move gave UMass a degree of management autonomy that was comparable to its public university counterparts. State appropriations, which had increased a substantial 8.5 percent per year during President Mather's tenure, grew an average of 12.8 percent per year from 1960 to 1965, rising to a whopping 23.8 percent per year from 1965 to 1970.[14] Appropriations for capital building projects averaged $3.6 million per year from 1953 to 1960, $8.2 million from 1961 to 1965, and an incredible $50.6 million from 1965 to 1970. Campuses were added in Boston and Worcester.

Despite its massive growth, the historical artifacts of the University's agricultural beginnings remained. In the early 1960s, the school of agriculture still had a disproportionate share of the campus budget, and its best-known programs were in food technology, zoology, and science education. The University had a fledgling medical school, no law school, and no business program "suitable for training top-level corporation executives."[15] UMass was still seen by Harvard's Christopher Jencks and David Riesman as vocational education for the masses.

> The upper-middle class student in California, if hostile to the presumptive conventionality of Stanford undergraduates, can choose Berkeley with confidence in its academic resources. A comparable student in Massachusetts can see no real alternative to the private colleges like Harvard even if he objects

> to their arrogance or complacency. Public education seems to him merely technical training rather than a real initiation.[16]

Thus, even by the mid 1960s, institutional ambition and expansion were leavened by the state's intellectual and political culture. Intellectually, the university was still merely a niche among the state's research institutions, providing technical education to the lower-middle-class student. This would be a boon to the University during this period. The legislature came to be dominated by Boston's Irish Catholic politicians, many of whom were educated in the public system, had an antipathy toward Harvard's exclusionary admissions policies, or saw young people being priced out of Catholic universities, Boston College in particular. Thus, as legitimacy and funding grew during the 1960s, UMass saw its ambitions rising to those of the great public universities.

Lederle's presidency would prove to be a "golden age" for the University of Massachusetts. The state codified a new governance structure for public higher education under the Willis-Harrington Act of 1965, simultaneously reducing public-private conflict and producing endemic conflict with state government.[17] Exacerbating tensions, student demonstrations, the Vietnam War, and a declining national economy dampened the public's enthusiasm for higher education. By the early 1970s, it was also obvious that the state's projections for future student enrollment had been highly optimistic.[18]

During each of the following three decades, the system would face fiscal crises that restrained campus prosperity and state university ambition. The system would also face political crises, including presidential misappropriation of funds and sexual misconduct. Intense competition for resources in the 1970s and 1980s would lead to dramatic conflicts between campus presidents and state government. Managing these conflicts dominated public higher education in Massachusetts during this period, undermining state support for increasing the stature of its public university.

Competition between the public and private sectors ameliorated, but hardly disappeared. As late as 1974, private college presidents suggested a moratorium on capital expenditures, and wanted public tuition prices to be set at levels comparable with the state's private universities.[19] Expanding the public sector may be necessary, renowned higher education scholar Howard Bowen argued, "but to do so in ways that would drive out substantial parts of the private sector would be grossly wasteful."[20] These conflicts persisted well into the 1970s, but gradually declined as the major private universities no longer saw the university as a credible threat. Once the state committed itself to scholarship aid for Massachusetts residents to attend private colleges, their policy concerns gravitated toward the federal government. The attention of UMass turned sharply toward the governor's office.

The first major conflict of this new era came between Governor Michael Dukakis and Robert C. Wood, the ambitious UMass president who succeeded John Lederle. Wood, a well-known scholar of city and urban planning, was a veteran of Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" programs, serving as Secretary and Undersecretary of Housing and Urban Development from 1966 to 1969. A nationally respected scholar and politician, Wood seemed ideally suited to take UMass to the next level. Wood opened a presidential office in downtown Boston and expanded his staff. The faculty at Amherst, who had been completely shut out of the process of Wood's appointment, were particularly unhappy with the new arrangement. Even as state appropriations declined, Wood created a new level of administration in Boston previously unseen at the university.

Compounding the problem, Wood never enjoyed the political and financial support of his predecessor. Politicians and the public were angered by the student demonstrations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, believing they demonstrated a lack of willpower on the part of campus administrators to control student behavior.[21] There was also a widespread belief that UMass expansion had come at the expense of the state and community colleges, which had not benefited as greatly from the state's largesse during the 1960s. The state's private colleges, concerned by the stagnating economy, continued to vocally oppose any further expansion of the public system. The Massachusetts Public-Private Forum, designed to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation, dissolved in March 1976 after Boston University president John Silber delivered a caustic speech attacking the wastefulness and redundancy of the public sector.[22]

Most disastrously, Wood engaged in open conflict with the new governor. Both men were graduates of elite private colleges, Wood at Princeton and Harvard, Dukakis at Swarthmore and Harvard Law. Both came from lower-middle-class backgrounds, Wood the son of a shoe salesman and Dukakis the son of Greek immigrants. But unlike Wood, Dukakis never supported public higher education's ambitions. Despite being widely regarded as a liberal, Dukakis announced in November 1974 that he supported a 30 percent cut in the public higher education budget.

His policy actions seemed designed to agitate Wood. Dukakis refused to allow the medical campus to occupy its new facilities in Worcester, impounded construction funds for UMass Boston, and refused to allow the UMass president's office to fill any vacant positions in the system.[23] To Wood, these budget battles were not only a financial attack on the university, but a direct attempt to bring the University of Massachusetts under the control of the executive branch.[24] Wood responded in kind, going to court to assert the University's right to fiscal autonomy. Simultaneously, he worked with friendly legislators to restore many of the Dukakis budget cuts, and to

win support for the Medical School in Worcester, which finally established its campus and graduated its first class of 16 MDs in 1974.[25]

The conflict between Wood and Dukakis became deeply personal. Wood, an outgoing and extroverted personality, enjoyed the perquisites of university leadership and statesmanship.[26] The president's office rented office space in Boston's pricey financial district, further antagonizing the parsimonious Dukakis. But ultimately it was the governor who had the upper hand. A no-confidence vote by the Amherst faculty, driven by Wood's tendency to micromanage affairs on the campus, hurt his standing in the state. Dukakis began replacing members of the UMass Board of Trustees with his own supporters, and Wood's position with his own board became tenuous. After briefly trying out a campaign for governor against Dukakis, Wood reluctantly resigned in 1977.

Financially, the system was in bad shape. In the early 1970s, both state appropriations for operating expenses and capital operations were stagnant.[27] Despite strong appropriation increases in the 1960s, the state still ranked forty-ninth in per capita spending. Eventually, the stagflation economy of the 1970s took its toll even on existing levels of support. In 1976, Governor Dukakis cut state support for higher education, and faculty would not receive salary raises for three years. Economic conditions improved in the late 1970s, but Dukakis was not inclined to place the state's surplus funds in public higher education. The proportion of the state budget allocated to higher education steadily declined, from 7.5 percent in fiscal year 1973 to 5.65 percent in fiscal year 1980.

Dissatisfaction among policymakers with the existing governance structure flared during the 1970s.[28] No less than seventeen different proposals for reorganization were made during the decade, but there was little consensus on its proper direction. The executive branch was concerned over the lack of efficiency and fiscal controls resulting from the coordinating board's lack of budget authority. The legislative branch sought protection from the barrage of campus demands, with each making their case for increased funding through local legislators. But powerful politicians, particularly Amherst's James Collins, the House education committee chairman, were opposed to any change that could possibly damage the hard-won autonomy of the university system.[29] With Collins in opposition, it seemed impossible for any form of reorganization to pass the legislature.

Supporters found a way around Collins through a last-minute amendment to the state budget. The substance of the reorganization shocked the higher education community, who were completely unprepared for the swiftness of the proceedings. The legislature created the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR), a governing board with powers unmatched in any other state. The Regents had governing level authority over every campus, including day-to-day management authority. Annual budgets were to be

submitted to the Regents for approval, but funds would be appropriated for the entire system in a single line item to the BOR.[30] The Regents had the power to approve and discontinue academic programs, and even to merge or discontinue existing campuses. Thus, the legislature granted the BOR a significant amount of its own power to distribute funds to their districts, in the hope that the Regents would improve the efficiency of the system, engage in strategic planning, and protect them from the campuses' endless requests for money.[31]

Among those interested in state policy for higher education, the Board of Regents was a fascinating experiment in governance reform, according to American University president Stephen Trachtenberg.

> Pulled together in an abbreviated way, the mandate of the Board of Regents has a sweep and power that, against the background of previous decades in higher education, can only be described as awesome. The only appropriate historical parallel may be the moment when the fiefdoms of the Middle Ages definitively faded away and the centralized monarchy of a Louis XIV, complemented by an efficient nationwide bureaucracy, put in its magnificent appearance. . . . The genial and expensive chaos that has long characterized higher education in Massachusetts, as in other states, is to come to an end, and is to be replaced by a system which, though it makes no utopian claims, does aspire to an almost mathematical ideal of accountability.[32]

In response, John B. Duff, the first chancellor of the Board of Regents, joked that if "*L'état c'est moi*," the most appropriate retort would be, "*Après moi le deluge*."[33] Duff's joke turned out to be remarkably prophetic. In December 1985, Duff resigned when it was discovered that he had solicited donations from Regents for the House speaker's reelection campaign. Paul Ylvisaker, one of Dukakis's former professors at Swarthmore, chaired a search committee to find his replacement. Representative Collins of Amherst, still licking his wounds from the reorganization controversy, made a determined play for the chancellor's office. Regents who had been appointed by former Governor Ed King quickly supported the appointment of Collins, who was well liked and Irish Catholic to boot. Ironically, Collins was now in a position to become chancellor of the board that he had opposed so vigorously.

The anti-Collins forces were equally powerful, and most importantly, were supported by Governor Dukakis. Ylvisaker was determined to bring the search process to an appropriate conclusion, and he favored contenders with academic backgrounds.[34] Collins made it to the search committee's short list, along with a number of academic contenders. By this point, the search had become public and highly politicized. Collins opponents publicly derided him as a "hack politician" without appropriate academic qualifications, having earned a law degree but no doctorate. In a particularly petty move, an aide to Governor Dukakis leaked Collins's unimpressive law

school transcript to *The Boston Globe*. These attacks antagonized state legislators, who were beginning to see them as an insult to their own honor. In May 1986, House speaker George Keverian declared that he would hold up an important chancellor's pay raise bill unless Collins was made a finalist. The pay raise was a key issue: Many of the search committee's top choices were not interested in the position if it came with its legislatively mandated salary of $65,000, but Collins was.

This did not impress the search committee, which eliminated Collins in the final round. Subsequently, according to one observer, "the sense of urgency in the Collins camp bordered on frenzy."[35] The terms of three Collins supporters on the Board of Regents were about to expire. During the July board meeting, the Collins supporters refused to vote for any of the finalists, thus seemingly ending the search in a stalemate. Instead, a Collins supporter moved to rescind the search committee and to accept nominations from the floor. Collins was nominated and appointed with eight votes, taking Governor Dukakis completely by surprise. His education adviser and liaison to the Regents, Gerard Indelicato, had convinced the Regents of the governor's support and subsequently failed to inform Dukakis of the status of the search. In doing so, Indelicato was trying to ensure the appointment of Collins and, through the support of the Collins faction, ensure his own appointment to the presidency of Bridgewater State College.

Dukakis moved quickly. To him, Collins was simply unqualified for the post, and politically he could not allow himself to be outplayed so publicly.[36] Dukakis replaced the Regents chairman immediately with supporter Edward Lashman, who was instructed to begin proceedings to remove Collins. Lashman offered Collins a contract of only ninety days, which Collins refused. Lashman then went on an extended vacation, giving Dukakis the time he needed to appoint three new Regents. Collins was quickly ousted and Franklyn Jenifer, the head of academic affairs for the New Jersey system, was selected as the new chancellor. The debacle was over, but strained relationships with the legislature and the governor's office would persist for the rest of the Dukakis administration.

The Collins fiasco was not the only serious political problem facing the public higher education system during the mid 1980s. Numerous scandals involving campus presidents infuriated state legislators and the public. Gerard Indelicato, who had played such an infamous role in the Collins/Dukakis conflict, was forced to resign from the presidency of Bridgewater State College and imprisoned for two and one-half years after being found guilty of defrauding the state of adult education funds. Francis Pilecki, the president of Westfield State College, resigned in 1986 after it was disclosed that he made a $10,000 payment to a male student he allegedly seduced. The succeeding president, Irving Buchen, resigned in July 1988 after billing

college trust funds for personal expenses. UMass Boston chancellor Robert Corrigan resigned for similar reasons. The same year, Salem State College president James Amsler resigned after using $65,000 from trust funds for a self-promoting brochure.

Despite the Collins appointment and other scandals, the state's public colleges, and UMass in particular, enjoyed somewhat of a resurgence after years of spartan Dukakis budgets. Boston politicians in the legislature continued to support the public higher education system despite Dukakis's indifference. Surging revenues in state coffers provided years of surplus funds that greatly improved the financial situation of higher education, and student enrollment rebounded after the demographic slump of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Outside observers began to take notice of the transformation. In 1986, UMass Boston was named one of the country's nine "hot colleges" in *Time* magazine. Perhaps even more impressively, the Amherst campus was raised to a four-star rating in the *Fiske Guide to Colleges*. By 1988, the state's per capita spending on public higher education had risen to $188, making it forty-first out of the fifty states.[37] In per student funding, the state now ranked a respectable twelfth.[38] There was genuine optimism about the future of the University on the national scene.

Sadly, this era did not last long. The "economic bubble" fueled by dramatically increasing corporate profits and Reagan-era tax cuts had burst by late 1988. Massachusetts particularly benefited due to its concentration of defense contractors and high-technology firms near Route 128. Governor Dukakis was quick to take credit, and parlayed his role in the "Massachusetts Miracle" into the Democratic presidential nomination in 1988. It was not until 1989, after his presidential ambitions had been dashed, that Dukakis was willing to make the necessary cuts to state appropriations. By this time the state's economic condition was bleak. In fiscal year 1990, the state had a budget deficit of $1.1 billion.[39] The state did not have a "rainy day" fund to cover declining revenues. Due to its policy of heavy borrowing, the state's bond rating was the lowest of any state, raising the interest rates that the state had to pay on future debt. Dukakis, as he had done at the start of his first term in 1976, chose to have higher education endure a disproportionate burden of cuts.

The legislature's support proved weak in the face of a fiscal crisis and in the wake of the staggering series of political scandals tied to the system. Because the BOR was tied so closely in the post-Collins years to the Dukakis administration, it was not in the position to make the case for reduced cuts. Between 1988 and 1991, when adjusted for inflation, state appropriations for public higher education fell by an incredible 33 percent.[40] In real dollars, state funds declined from $757 million in fiscal year 1988 to $588 million in fiscal year 1991. In spring semester 1989, more than 1400

students who had been admitted to a state college received letters telling them not to enroll. In the fall semester, 9000 admissible students were rejected and 1100 course sections were cancelled.

UMass president David Knapp, understanding that the university needed far more political and financial support if it aspires to national stature, urged his trustees to appoint a blue-ribbon commission on the future of the university in 1989. University of California president emeritus David Saxon was recruited to lead the panel. The Commission's report was unequivocal: the existing public universities needed to be brought into the University of Massachusetts, and the UMass Board of Trustees needed to be vested with all governance authority over its campuses.[41] Further, they argued, the university should make its annual budget request directly to the legislature as a single lump sum, which would provide a measure of fiscal autonomy.

The Saxon report proved to be the first volley in a campaign to unseat the Board of Regents. The appointment of Franklyn Jenifer had inaugurated a more activist and intrusive administration at the Board of Regents, antagonizing public college leaders.[42] The state and community colleges complained bitterly that the Regents were not advocating for their needs. All of the campuses resented so much state oversight over prerogatives that in other states were vested in the campuses. The Regents were ultimately brought down, however, because they simply failed to exercise their governance rights. In spite of its broad statutory authority, the BOR had delegated many of its governance powers to campus boards of trustees. Thus the BOR managed to combine the downside of both state bureaucracies and local control, by failing to protect the legislature from campus leaders and conflict resolution.

Changes in leadership helped to accelerate the fall of the Regents.[43] In December 1989, deeply hurt by calls in the House of Representatives to abolish the Regents, Chancellor Jenifer accepted the presidency of his alma mater, Howard University. Dukakis handed over the governorship to William F. Weld, a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law, in 1991. Finally, in June of that year, Regents chairman Paul Tsongas left the board to seek the presidency of the United States. There was a consensus among lawmakers that the time was ripe for change, and that political machinations like those associated with the Reorganization Act would be unnecessary. The new governance structure decentralized authority to the University of Massachusetts and created a new coordinating agency, the Higher Education Coordinating Council, with greatly reduced staff and statutory authority. As recommended by the Saxon commission, the five universities of the state were now under the authority of the UMass president's office in Boston.

The council's political support from the Weld administration was no better than it had been under Dukakis. Weld, like Dukakis, made it clear

that he believed public higher education to be a pale shadow of the state's private institutions. During his first term, Weld advocated closing or merging four or five state colleges to save money. Even before his inauguration as governor, Weld solicited a confidential report from Northeastern law professor Deborah Ramirez to make a case for the idea. Later, in February 1991, Weld aide Stephen Tocco made the governor's position clear. "We aren't considering the [higher] education system we have out there as wonderful," Tocco said. "We're not buying into the idea that it's so great it shouldn't be touched . . . we think there's a lot of duplication and inefficiency."[44]

Advocacy from the public system was weak at best; the only major player during the fiscal crisis was the University of Massachusetts. UMass president Joseph Duffey made it clear to the Weld administration that the university would accept budget cuts in exchange for independence from the Board of Regents, according to former Administration and Finance secretary Peter Nessen.

> Going to those pockets [in public higher education] was not a matter of great principle but rather based on the fact that the advocacy was weak or was diffused whereas, in other areas, there was stronger advocacy. We had to be able to do things quickly without being held up and those discretionary areas allowed us to do that. The only strong advocacy was from the university system and they used the opportunity to spin off as independent. And we did not really care about that as long as they didn't care about the cut, so it was really the trade off that we made in order to get the dollars that we needed.[45]

The new coordinating agency was seemingly incapable of making the case for reducing the cuts. The resignation of Franklyn Jennifer and Paul Tsongas left a vacuum in state leadership. "We didn't hear from them. We only heard from the university," Nessen said. "That was the only force and it was compounded because Governor Weld was close to the [UMass] board and listened to their case, and was less troubled with this request for splitting out and going independent."[46]

Public support for the state's higher education system was equally weak. In January 1991 an unsigned editorial in the *Boston Herald* crystallized this sentiment.

> Fat, lumbering, expensive to feed, one of the most sacred cows in Massachusetts is the state-subsidized network of colleges and universities… If Governor Weld is in earnest about reducing government spending, let him take a pair of pruning shears to the overgrown ivy choking the state's budget. In the land-grant states of the Midwest and West, it may have required taxpayer dollars to promote excellence in higher education. That was never the case in Massachusetts. . . . Where is the need for Framingham State College or the University of Lowell or Middlesex

> Community College? Do Massachusetts taxpayers really need to maintain the costly glut of state-supported schools?[47]

During the last three years of the Dukakis administration, state appropriations for public higher education had fallen by 33 percent when adjusted for inflation.[48] As a proportion of the state budget, higher education fell from 6.5 percent of the budget in FY1988 to 4.4 percent in FY1994, a drop of nearly one-third in six years. In competition with other elements of the discretionary budget, higher education was faring very poorly. Taken as a whole, the six-year period between 1988 and 1994 represented the largest disinvestment in the history of U.S. public higher education.

In response, the system cut 1711 full-time equivalent positions from the state payroll.[49] Spending on academic instruction was cut by five percent. Most disturbing, however, was the impact of state budget cuts on students. In just two years, from FY1990 to FY1992, state scholarship aid was cut by more than half, from $77.6 million to $35.0 million. The maximum award for the neediest students was also cut in half, from $3800 to $1900.[50] State scholarship aid fell so low that the state was forced to return $2 million in financial aid to the U.S. Department of Education for failing to meet federal requirements for minimum support.

At the same time, the burden of state appropriation cuts was placed almost entirely on students through increases in tuition and fees. UMass president Joseph Duffey believed that if UMass were priced equivalently with the University of Michigan, the public would believe it was equally good. It was a tragic error in judgment. Between FY1988 and FY1994, tuition rose an average of 48 percent, and fees, which constituted more than half of student costs, rose 240 percent. The overall cost to students more than doubled over the period, increasing 113 percent. Student response was equally dramatic. Applications for freshman admission declined precipitously, from 24,000 in 1988 to just 14,000 in 1991, raising the admissions rate from 50 percent to 83 percent in just three years.[51]

The state's handling of the fiscal crisis created a sense of panic and instability on the public campuses.[52] Each year the fiscal crisis worsened, entailing further and further cuts. In addition, each year there was at least one "reversion," a budget cut that was made mid-year to balance the state budget. From FY1988 to FY1991, there were ten reversions that cumulatively averaged 4 percent per year, making it very difficult for campuses to plan their annual budgets in a rational manner. Benefits such as worker's compensation and unemployment insurance, once paid through the central state account, now had to be paid out of campus funds, creating a hidden de facto cut in appropriations. As a result, faculty and staff morale plummeted. The state's four-year colleges eliminated 48 academic programs, often very quickly and with little discussion or consideration, leaving faculty feeling scared and victimized.[53]

The state colleges spent the last years of the Weld administration recovering from the fiscal crises of the previous six years. State financial support during these years was not spectacular, mainly due to Governor Weld's ambivalence about public higher education. In the early days of Weld's administration, he was clearly antagonistic toward public higher education, and was largely responsible for the disproportionate impact of state budget cuts on the higher education system. Over time, however, Weld's position changed, and at one point he supported a plan to make UMass "as good as the University of Michigan by 1998."[54] Yet as late as 1995, Weld's budget called for a $25 million cut in state appropriations, to be replaced by a $12.5 million fund that would match private donations dollar for dollar. At best, the system would emerge with level funding; at worst, it would sustain a 4 percent cut. He also vetoed the faculty's collective bargaining contract, further damaging campus morale. To many campus leaders, Weld's position on public higher education seemed to change from day to day.

The state's media, particularly the *Boston Globe* and *Boston Herald*, continued to highlight weaknesses in the public system. Alice Dembner of the *Globe* led a series of reports in 1995 investigating the impact of the fiscal crisis on the University's struggle for national recognition.[55] The series portrayed UMass as a conflicted institution trying to manage competing goals. Raising academic standards while improving the profile of the campus's sports teams, trying to improve teaching while simultaneously gaining recognition for its research, and trying to become more selective while still maintaining access. These conflicts were played out in an environment where the legislature and the public viewed the campus as inferior.

> Three decades ago, President John Lederle envisioned the University of Massachusetts as a "potential giant," comparable to the state universities of Michigan and California. Today, many are worried that its potential will never be realized. More than four years after the state molded a new UMass out of five disparate campuses, and more than two years into Michael Hooker's presidency, the university remains hobbled by campus parochialism and lukewarm support from politicians and the public.[56]

The *Globe* series noted a number of problems faced by the campus, and focused particularly on declining admissions standards. In fall 1994, UMass Amherst admitted 85 percent of its applicants, only 12 percent of whom had graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school class. During the 1960s and 1970s, due to its policy of limited enrollment, UMass Amherst had some of the highest average SAT scores in the nation. By 1994, the average SAT score had fallen to 994, when it had been 1050 just five years earlier.

These revelations did substantial damage to the perception of academic quality at UMass among legislators, the state board, and the public. The conservative columnist for the *Boston Globe* used the SAT data to inveigh against the existence of public higher education in Massachusetts.

> What a sorry farce the state university and colleges of Massachusetts have become. What a mockery of excellence in education. Anywhere else they would be an embarrassment. In Massachusetts, which for 350 years has been the heart of American higher learning, they are a humiliation . . . Sentimental attachments aside, shouldn't the government of Massachusetts be getting out of the business of operating four-year colleges and universities?[57]

Governor Weld, understanding that public higher education needed serious leadership and attention, appointed James F. Carlin, a former cabinet officer and UMass trustee, as chairman of the newly designated Board of Higher Education. Carlin repeated many of the same attacks against the university — that it lacked admissions standards, was rife with remedial students, and offered duplicative academic programs. Carlin was especially angered by the sharp increases in tuition and fees and cuts in financial aid during the Dukakis and Weld administrations, which he had approved as a UMass trustee.[58] The weakness of UMass in 1995 would lead to an activist governing board in Massachusetts that would make national headlines.[59]

Conclusion

The story of Massachusetts public higher education is consumed by questions of institutional mission and system development. In the early nineteenth century, the normal schools considered their appropriate role — indeed, the appropriate role for higher education for the lower and middle classes — in Massachusetts society. Together, the normal schools and the Massachusetts Agricultural College fought for legitimacy and recognition from a state that was indifferent and even antagonistic to their development. In the twentieth century, as the need for a system of public higher education became more widely accepted by the public, the ambitions of the university system rose, but political support rarely followed. The result was a "boom or bust" policy from the state that provided surplus funds when revenues were high and staggering decreases when revenues were low.

Unlike most states, questions of system development in Massachusetts have been deeply influenced by the demands of the private sector. Commissions developed to study the future role of public higher education were often exclusively composed of the presidents of private institutions. Private campus presidents consistently opposed any increase in the number of public campuses or the range of academic programs offered. It was only when enrollment and funding were plentiful — during the immediate post-war period and the mid 1960s — that the private universities allowed the state to expand the system. As late as 1995, conservative commentators and private university presidents questioned whether the public higher education system should exist at all[60] or should expand and grow into new areas.[61]

Public higher education in Massachusetts has never been taken for granted, leaving the system threatened and vulnerable.

The prestige of the large public university systems in California, Michigan, and North Carolina served to provide the seeds of ambition. The prestige of public universities has largely depended upon expansion of the research function, but this role was never enthusiastically supported in the Massachusetts legislature. Some believe that the state's late start in the research university business has ensured a persistent lack of support for its ambitions.

> Lederle aspired to make Amherst another Berkeley or Ann Arbor. His model, in other words, was the great public university of the day, with an eminent, research-oriented faculty and strong and influential graduate programs. But as Lederle well knew, legislators, and by extension the public, give money chiefly for undergraduate education. Berkeley and Ann Arbor were able to become premier research and graduate centers in part because they had already provided a century of large-scale, high-quality undergraduate education, from which tens of thousands of California and Michigan opinion-makers had benefited. They had, that is, already formed a mass political base that ensured sympathetic hearings in the Michigan and California legislatures and continued high-level funding. . . . Lederle tried to short-circuit this process by moving directly to greatness in research and graduate work. From a legislative standpoint this is a foundation of sand, unable to sustain a strong institution through difficult times.[62]

This lack of political support has been endemic in Massachusetts. Notably, the period of greatest legislative support for expansion, from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, was when UMass graduates dominated both the House and Senate. Irish Catholic legislators, often serving a constituency of the lower and middle classes, clearly saw a need for a public higher education system that could provide a low cost, high quality education for social mobility.

Lack of political support inevitably leads to lack of financial support when times are tight. This was particularly the case during the fiscal crises of the Dukakis and Weld administrations, when the combination of illegitimacy, fiscal stress, and decreasing autonomy proved to be volatile. The state was more than willing to draw funds from the public higher education system when other needs were pressing — rarely out of malice, but merely political expediency. These same factors made the state's governing board virtually incapable of the rational planning and strategic decision making necessary to manage a growing crisis. They also led the University to make decisions to dramatically increase student tuition and fees that resonate to this day. While the system often suffered from a lack of leadership, its

leaders were placed in a politicized environment that was virtually unmanageable.

In recent years, the role of private universities in state systems of higher education has emerged as an important public policy issue. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPHE) began issuing a report card in 2001 of state performance for higher education called *Measuring Up.*[63] In a controversial decision, NCPPHE decided to include private universities in the report, specifically impacting their analysis of student access to higher education. As a result, states that provide financial aid to students attending private universities will rate higher than states that focus all of their resources on public higher education. Indeed, Massachusetts faired poorly in its rating for student access for precisely this reason, despite large increases in financial aid to lower-income students in the late 1990s.

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