

# **More Than Management**

Guidelines for  
State Higher Education System  
Governing Boards  
And Their Chief Executive

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## AN ODD CONSTELLATION

The job of the chief executive officer of a university system is unusual, if not unique. It requires a constellation of skills and personal characteristics that might be described as odd. To be sure, those skills and characteristics can be found among other types of academic leaders (e.g., university presidents), and among political leaders and corporate executives. But the ways in which they manifest themselves in a successful system head do not necessarily mirror those in holders of such other leadership positions. For example, there is a characteristic a colleague once described as a penchant -- or at least a tolerance -- for "vicarious achievement," i.e., the ability to derive personal gratification from the achievements of a community of individuals and institutions that may seldom be credited to the system head.

The oddity of the position is exacerbated by the rarity and diversity of the systems themselves. The National Association of System Heads (NASH) currently counts just over fifty university systems in thirty-seven states and Puerto Rico. That means that the CEOs who constitute the members of the Association also constitute a more exclusive club than that more famous exclusive club, the United States Senate. Moreover, while colleges and universities can be grouped into categories of institutions with similar missions and characteristics, the nation's university systems defy such categorization. A few are similar, but most are one-of-a-kind. Thus, just as systems differ markedly, so do their CEO's. One is reminded of Francis Bacon, who wrote, "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion."

Nevertheless, in university systems, as for most societal institutions, leadership really matters! In the following document, *MORE THAN MANAGEMENT*, E. K. Fretwell describes what it takes to be a successful university system head, based on 112 interviews nationwide with system and campus heads, governing board members, and state officials. Fretwell, who is Chancellor Emeritus of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a one-time system interim president, salts his distillation of his interviews and his own experiences with telling quotations from his interviewees. The result is a veritable Baedeker's Guide to university system leadership that deserves close study by system heads, would-be system heads, members of system governing boards, and anybody else who must deal with system heads and wishes to understand them.

An earlier abbreviated version of Fretwell's report has been published by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) as Occasional Paper No. 45. NASH is pleased to make available here the complete document. Like most thoughtful and provocative publications, this one will probably attract questions, comment, criticism, and perhaps extravagant praise or passionate outrage. These may be directed to me ([dnl@usmd.edu](mailto:dnl@usmd.edu)) or (preferably) to E. K. Fretwell (Office of the Chancellor Emeritus, UNC Charlotte, 9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223; Phone: 704-687-2484; Fax: 704-687-3317; [etdeese@email.uncc.edu](mailto:etdeese@email.uncc.edu)).

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June 10, 2001

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# Chapter I

## THE SYSTEM HEAD IN CHANGING TIMES

As higher education grows increasingly important in our culture and economy, so does the role of the chief executive of higher education systems. State higher education systems now encompass the vast majority of public campuses and enroll massive numbers of students. Their impact on higher education and on public support for higher education is enormous. The literature on leading a single college or university campus is extensive, but far less attention has been given the more complex role of the public system head.

This report will focus on system leadership, and especially the role of the system head, known in different states as chancellor, president, commissioner of higher education or other titles. The executives who oversee higher education systems must be more than superb managers. They must daily demonstrate the ability to read the political winds, create vision, inspire confidence, achieve team leadership, provoke positive dialogue, and match a constellation of other star qualities that will be defined in the succeeding chapters. Hence the concept of *MORE THAN MANAGEMENT*.

Higher education systems vary in size from very small (three or four campuses) to gigantic operations--in one case 26, not counting affiliated community colleges. They also vary in function. In some states they are operating boards that enroll students and confer degrees. In others they are coordinating boards that allocate function, apportion resources, manage growth, and perform long-range planning. In all systems, the performance of the system head is crucial to the success of the enterprise.

Former president of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) D. Bruce Johnstone of the State University of New York (SUNY) has identified nine major decision areas for which higher education systems have responsibility:

1. To determine, reaffirm, and occasionally alter the missions of the system and of its constituent campuses.
2. To appoint, nurture, evaluate, and if necessary remove the chief executive officer of the system and of the constituent campuses or institutions.
3. To advocate to the legislature, governor, and other key opinion leaders and patrons the needs of the system.
4. To advocate to the constituent campuses the needs of the state.
5. To allocate missions and operating and capital resources to the respective constituent institutions.
6. To provide liaison between the executive and legislative officers of state government and the member campuses.
7. To mediate disputes over programs and missions among constituent institutions.
8. To foster cooperation among campuses, which can both cut costs and enlarge options for students.

9. To audit and otherwise assess the stewardship of resources, including the assessment of academic programs.

While these functions have remained basically the same since Johnstone identified them, significant changes afoot in higher education will make the responsibilities of system boards and system heads even more challenging. Some of these changes relate to:

- **The rising importance of higher education.** American higher education, with public systems carrying a large part of the load, is increasingly perceived as absolutely essential to access and advancement in a growing list of professional and employment fields. University research is having a greater impact on the society than ever before, and demands for public service are rising annually.
- **Public moods.** While public higher education is more vital to the welfare of the society than ever before, stakeholders tend to view it in narrower, more personal perspectives, such as: parents seeking undergraduate access for their children, strivers seeking to advance their careers, business leaders requiring better preparation for potential employees, and state officials concerned over costs vs. benefits. As a result, a more traditional undertone is evident in some quarters, lessening commitments to affirmative action, to established academic freedoms, and to participatory campus governance.
- **Changes in board membership.** Terms of board members are often shorter, with the result that new appointees frequently are not fully familiar with established procedures. Some appointees have narrowly focused opinions which they voice, sometimes as if speaking directly for the appointing governor. Board members tend to be impatient with deliberative decision-making procedures. Board members are more likely to be activists, bringing special-interest agendas and individual objectives to board deliberations.
- **Demand for proven outcomes.** In years past much of the public accepted the assurance of higher education leaders that all was well in the academy. Now, state officials and employers want harder evidence of outcomes and better documentation that public funds are being well spent. Clear and understandable definitions of quality and success are not easily identified or agreed upon.
- **Shorter terms.** Legislators in many states are serving shorter terms. Chairs of important finance and budget committees who control appropriations for higher education often have less time (and perhaps less interest) to comprehend systems or appreciate their achievements. "Old friends" of higher education are increasingly rare in state capitals.
- **Competition for funding.** Tax revenues in some states have increased significantly, but so have demands for support by other state agencies, especially K-12 public schools, health and social services, and public safety and corrections, to mention only a few. Some states are facing new budget crises.

- **Changing clientele.** A rising tide of students will include greater numbers of non-traditional students and an increase in those who approach higher education as consumers rather than students. Accompanying the expanded enrollments will be greater demands for "more productive" teaching/learning outcomes as well as greater internal pressures for more faculty, more classrooms and laboratories, and more staff, all of which mean higher appropriations. Greater competition from for-profit institutions will force traditional institutions to reexamine their methods and curricula.
- **Aspects of instruction.** The nature, means, and location of instruction, research, and other institutional services are already changing dynamically. Distance learning—however defined—is a part of this. So are “branches” within business and other employers, coupled sometimes with international locations.
- **Relations with campuses.** System central offices frequently have been viewed by campus heads and faculty as inhibitors rather than helpers. Occasionally campuses--especially so-called flagships--have presented arguments favoring secession from the system in pursuit of more money and less control. Occasionally, campus heads have emerged as "rogue" leaders and engaged in practices embarrassing to boards and system heads. Issues of centralization vs. decentralization continue to need clarification.
- **Job attractiveness.** The pool of outstanding candidates for system heads is said to be diminishing. Potential candidates frequently opt to remain campus heads, which they deem to be a more satisfying job.

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The concept of *MORE THAN MANAGEMENT* can best be demonstrated when a significant portion of system boards and system heads focus their time, energy and intelligence on future-oriented public needs and possibilities rather than on routine management. Greater emphasis should be placed on how system boards, system heads and their constituent campuses respond to such issues as:

- The United States and its changing place in the world order.
- National and regional economics and the need for research and innovation.
- Preparing (and retraining) students of all ages for the Knowledge Society.
- Identifying and practicing better ways of teaching and learning.
- Improving K-12 public education through more effective preparation and continuing development of teachers and administrators.
- Expanding public appreciation of and support for the role of higher education in society, technology and the economy.

As higher education systems, their boards and system heads seek to respond to challenges such as these, they also find themselves confronting paradoxical situations requiring great ingenuity:

- A call for more collaboration but on a faster time schedule.
- Great accountability even when institutional and system goals are being reformulated and redeveloped.
- Courageous action at the same time that more stakeholders seek to exercise a veto.
- More people demand access to institutions while per capita state support declines.
- Greater reliance on private fundraising is expected even as state governments question the autonomy of university foundations.
- Expanded efficiencies through technology are expected at a time when equipment and start-up funds are scarce.

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This report's final chapter (IX) will suggest steps to be taken by state officials, system boards, system heads and national higher education organizations in facing issues confronting state systems. The answers to all of the challenges are not provided, but adherence to the recommendations may lead to some solutions, improved relationships, and better ways of reaching public goals.

The intervening chapters draw on observations by many of the 112 people who were interviewed in the preparation of this report. Procedural details of the study supporting these chapters will be found in Appendix A.

Before going on with the study, there is one more challenge to note. It is that higher education makes a statement about itself in one way or another every day by the examples it provides the public. An overarching need is to carry out the public's business with a renewed spirit of civility and respect. This cannot be done solely with a "business as usual" posture. New initiatives are needed to bring government and higher education together with many other stakeholders. It is imperative that systems, their leaders, and their campuses take the lead in setting positive examples for the rest of society.

## Chapter II

### BOARD LEADERS AND MEMBERS

“The board you have is the board you have. And it may not be the board that appointed you.”

--An experienced system head from a western state

The concept of lay boards overseeing statewide higher education systems is not seriously under question. Increasingly questions are being raised, however, about the length of board members' terms, the perspectives they bring to the board, and the working relationships they establish with other board members and the system head.

Good teamwork among board members and system heads is still a way of life in most state systems. Many boards work well most of the time. Yet in some systems there is rising concern about how effectively the arrangements are working and what improvements might be desirable.

On some boards relationships among board members and system heads are considerably different from those of a few years ago. For example, some board members are serving shorter terms, are arriving on the board with "special interest" viewpoints, and are blurring the line between policy-making and operations.

Here are brief looks at implications of each of those trends.

**Shorter terms.** Increasingly, state legislatures have mandated shorter terms for system board members, such as from four years to two years. Also, some legislatures have limited the number of consecutive terms a board member might serve. Whatever the cause, board chairs and system heads are concerned about rapid turnovers among board members. In theory a frequent change in membership can provide a constant source of energy and new ideas. In reality it often makes orderly procedures difficult to maintain. Effective consideration of complex issues can be impeded by a lack of understanding of background circumstances. Board members who serve only two-year terms renewable only once often wind up arriving at and departing from boards faster than many baccalaureate students arrive at and depart from individual campuses.

“Looking over one's own shoulder” is regarded as a deterrent to effective board service. While all system trustees need to be constantly aware of the needs and desires of the board and the citizens being served, having to pay excessive attention to “what it takes to get reappointed” can compromise the performance of the tasks at hand.

Many new appointees arrive without full knowledge of what board members do. Often they may have some understanding of board roles in overseeing a single campus but little knowledge of systemwide governance.

Many short-term board members come to system governance without a good understanding of the system's history. "History is not an end in itself, but it's useful to know how we solved problems in the past and what we stand for," one experienced system head said.

Another observed that board members who don't understand the role of the system couldn't appreciate what the system head does or evaluate how well he or she is doing the job.

**New working styles.** Some new board members arrive with perspectives and working styles that are significantly different from those of more traditional board members. One veteran system head noted that many board members represent a whole new cast of characters. They do not see themselves as people doing honorary things in their leisure time, as once was the case. Many of today's board members are individuals busy with their professional lives, with no desire to waste time on what they consider trivia.

Many more board members are women "who are assertive and very smart." The old pattern of male system head and male chair is no longer the rule.

An experienced board member remarked on the increasing generational difference:

*Board members are... younger and want to prove themselves. They feel they need to be involved in almost all decision making. As a result, not many things are settled in committee. Discussions have to be repeated. What amounts to their orientation has to be repeated because they just got here.*

Recently appointed members may not have enough time to work with more experienced colleagues in developing trust-based perspectives.

Doing more board business in the open, especially in states with "sunshine laws," presents additional challenges. In the words of one system executive:

*The traditional style, which often worked but did not involve enough participation, was a private get-together to solve problems. Now there is more open debate. Things may not always be orchestrated in advance.*

Boards in some states are becoming more representative of citizens in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds.

**"Special interest" viewpoints.** In concept, lay board oversight is intended to shield the system from excessive partisanship, commitment to specific institutions, or the other needs and interests of the state government. Yet newly elected state governors are an important part of the context. It may be difficult for them to appoint individuals who do not share their views of higher education or to tolerate those who espouse other philosophies of higher education. The results can lead to a divided board, at least until such time as a governor might control the majority.

Decisive action on important matters such as securing sufficient budget support, identifying future program needs, or selecting campus heads may be delayed disastrously if board factions wrangle incessantly over every issue.

Some new board members, however well meaning, sometimes arrive with a fierce loyalty to a particular region of the state or "their" special campus within the system and as a result have difficulty seeing the big picture.

**Blurred lines between policymaking and operation.** While never perfectly resolved in the past, this quandary has become a greater problem. Two factors contribute to it:

- Boards often get too far into academic and other operational matters
- Board members often act as individuals.

Board members sometimes fail to recognize that the system head is the individual through whom policy decisions are carried out. A range of inappropriate actions often results. They include individual board members:

- Telling campuses what general education requirements to impose.
- Seeking on their own to recruit new football or basketball coaches.
- Dealing directly with individual faculty members.

By now system heads generally have become familiar with one or more of those situations.

There are no guaranteed solutions, but system sources across the country offer these seven major approaches:

**Support legislation to lengthen board member terms.** Explain to legislators why longer terms are in the public interest.

**Consistently seek optimum communication between board members, the system head, and especially the board chair.** Always important, such communication takes on special significance when procedures are not be moving smoothly. Such communication will require more time and effort by all concerned but it is definitely worth it. Wise board chairs and board members do not engage in micromanagement, but they keep themselves fully up to date on important matters. All parties should avoid "surprises." In large, well run systems, the chair and the system head are on the phone with each other daily. In smaller, less complex systems, the chair and system head meet regularly, with telephone conversations as needed.

**Take the time to give new board members full and effective orientation.** Beginning at the moment of their appointments, new board members should receive a message of welcome, together with pertinent documents: procedures manual, recent minutes, statement of duties, legal responsibilities, and other explanatory papers. Overkill at this time should be avoided, however.

Early meetings of new appointees with senior members are highly essential, as are informal conversations with new members during their early months or even years on the board. Serious

questions can be frankly and privately discussed. Devoting portions of each board meeting to helping orient new colleagues is a good idea. Incumbent board members also may learn some things. (See the Bibliography for more detail.)

**Assure continuity of leadership in the board chair.** Annual changing of the board chair has been termed “a senseless merry-go-round” by one system head. A two-year minimum term makes much better sense. This may take a legal change, or could conceivably be achieved by board consensus. Early identification of a vice chair who will move up allows the incoming chair to learn much about board leadership. Some chairs profit by meeting with committee chairs before formal board meetings to share information and plan agendas.

**Periodically review (and update) system planning documents (strategic plan, master plan, etc.).** Discussion of program emphases, program additions or subtractions, and roles of individual campuses should be considered not as special cases but as normal procedures within an agreed-upon context.

**Study existing benchmarks (enrollments, expenditures, and progress of individual campuses), and update information.** Board members old and new need keep up to date on potential problems as well as potential successes. Institutional research offices on each campus can transmit such data to the central office. It can then be put in easy-to-read form for board use in planning future action as well as documenting the current state of the system and its parts. Easy access to current data on enrollments, faculty load, budgets and the like can help chairs and system heads provide timely facts to counter false assertions and rumors. Quality indicators, including regular reviews of programs on individual campuses, are essential. Sharing useful and important information can preclude micromanagement tendencies.

**Conduct periodic evaluations of board and executive functions.** Regular reviews of system head and campus heads, with dates, procedures and criteria agreed on in advance, encourage good performance by those officers. Further, they provides board members or designated committees opportunities to issue commendations as well as suggestions for improvement.

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As board attitudes and values shift, as they inevitably will, common sense and open communication should be the characteristic way of doing business by board and system heads. Win/win outcomes may not always be possible but they are worth striving for.

## Chapter III

### STATE GOVERNMENT

“Members of the Legislature seem to change so fast that it’s like giving a lecture to a parade.”

--Current system chief executive

“Higher education is not high in state policy-making circles.”

--Sympathetic recent ex-governor of a large mid-western state

For the good of society higher education may be more important than ever, but the quest to increase public support for it has become a harder sell. That observation is based on a number of trends, four of which are especially evident:

- A tendency toward cautious political attitudes, coupled with public pressures to cut back or at least hold the line on public expenditures.
- Tighter competition for state revenues, especially from K-12 public schools, health and social services, public safety and corrections agencies, transportation departments, and (sometimes) environmental protection programs, including clean air and clean water.
- Term limits in many states producing high turnovers among state legislators, requiring new and more efficient lobbying methods by higher education leaders.
- System and campuses encountering increasing difficulty in “proving” they are doing good jobs and that the public is getting real benefits from the dollars spent.

Some governors and legislators, reacting to what they perceive as a more traditional electorate, have definite views about what needs "fixing" in public universities. As one former system head pointed out, these political leaders “seek to alter the very wide academic standards of American public higher education ...which they see as too soft, too politically correct, and affected by such practices as affirmative-action admissions and excessive remediation.”

Some governors distrust members of higher education faculties as “politically liberal,...self-serving, arrogant, and insufficiently productive,” according to one observer. Coupled with that is a gubernatorial and legislative “impatience with academic governance....[and its] endless discussion and committees.”

Such governors and legislators believe higher education needs fiscal discipline and better management.

In keeping with a perceived swing toward conservative politics, governors in some states have been appointing people of similar persuasion to university systems and coordinating boards.

The urge to cut taxes is strong in many state capitals. Even after making planned cutbacks, one large state university went well into its fiscal year facing a \$110 million hole in its budget, about five percent of its total spending. The university system was left largely to its own devices in trying to fill that gap. Rather than attending directly to the fiscal crisis, the system board took on the role of system head and started trying to define general education requirements for its campuses. Faculty senates, both systemwide and on individual campuses, made common cause with the faculty union and condemned the board's action, but seemingly to little avail.

In another large state where support for the university system had been steady and relatively generous a major bond issue was proposed to meet demands for capital. Pressing needs included new buildings to accommodate rising enrollments, new teaching and research facilities, and renovations to meet serious deferred-maintenance problems. Finding that they lacked the votes to authorize the proposed bond issue, legislative leaders adjourned their session and went home.

In certain other states governors saw to it that system heads with whom they were displeased were fired with virtually no advance notice.

Actions such as these may not be new, but they appear to be occurring more frequently.

On the other hand, many governors take a more balanced view of higher education systems and are business-like in seeking better results. Further, some governors realize that the effectiveness of their university system is a major factor in attracting and retaining important employers, which provide tax revenues and expanding payrolls.

A senior member of a system board in a populous and thriving state pointed out, "The strong public university is still the goose that lays the golden egg." (Examples of university/business cooperation appear in the following chapter.)

"The system is a great asset to the society," noted the governor of a smaller and less advantaged state. He demonstrated his commitment to higher education by using challenging criteria in screening potential appointees to the system board.

A former governor of another state affirmed publicly that it was absolutely essential to his administration and to the future of the state to have a good university system which would fuel its economic success. He advocated an occasional "bull session" (to use his term) of just the governor and the head of the system. "It was not so much a budget session or an asking of financial support as it was a planning arrangement," he pointed out.

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Increased competition from other agencies for state funds, as noted, comes as no surprise and is part of a long-term trend. For a while, a strengthening economy and rising tax revenues may have improved fiscal conditions temporarily in some states, but the stiff competition remains and may become even worse as competing agencies and their leaders escalate demands. Though the size of the fiscal pie occasionally may be larger, all participants are seeking larger

pieces. As the year 2001 opens, however, an increasing number of states are facing real budget crises.

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Legislators who are elected for shorter terms and seek reelection on tighter schedules have little time to develop detailed understanding of university system achievements and needs.

Observers report that these officials are more likely to fund projects that are closely related to their districts and “they can see happen on their watch.” There is a “sense of newness” and in some states a weakening of political alliances that once included support of public higher education.

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In the context of these findings, the following advice is offered to system boards and system heads to help them meet the challenges:

1. **State the case clearly and be prepared to be accountable.** Whether the occasion is a formal budget presentation or an informal call on a key legislator, a common-sense approach is desirable. Indicate what you need, why, and point out whenever possible what signs of success may already be evident. As indicated, many legislators—and state budget office personnel—do not have time to listen, so be brief. Describe ways in which the institutions and the campuses expect to be accountable. (For systems involved in performance-based budgeting, some measurement criteria are readily available.)

Achieving outcomes is important. Straightforward self-examination procedures, including scrutiny by accreditors, can lead to measurable earmarks of success. So can candid playback from employers of graduates.

Some of the criteria used by popular magazines in rating colleges may be deceptive and unhelpful, especially when they put heavy emphasis on what entering freshmen achieved in high school, how they scored on SAT and ACT exams, among other criteria, and their rank in class and grade-point averages. Instead, university system campuses that enroll a wide range of students might be rewarded for the *improvement* they make in students' academic performance. Perceptive state officials are likely to be increasingly impressed by such success.

2. **Get to know officials and keep in touch.** System heads are advised to cultivate a personal style that is respectful without being subservient. Be well informed about every campus in the system, particularly those in or close to a legislator's district, but make it clear that you speak for the whole system.

Be able to talk in an eyeball-to-eyeball manner, never looking down from any ivory tower. Praise elected officials for what they previously have done for the system. When appropriate, attribute other good results to their initiatives. Let them know that you want to do good things for the state as a whole and for which they have responsibility. That is your goal. The state support you seek is a means to that end.

Take influential community leaders and other selected constituents with you on some legislative visits and let them help tell your story. Don't forget to pay attention to legislative staffers and other state career people. They may outlast the elected officials.

Consider what one forward-looking system has done: Get acquainted with people running for state office *before* Election Day and start informing them of the system's needs. All of them may not win, but you will have a head start with those who do.

Successful system heads make it a point to call on legislators (and board members as well) in their home settings. Summer is often a good time. "I make it a point to visit them down on the farm if necessary," one executive said, "and there are a lot of farms in our state. Keep your message short and to the point." Another system head sometimes spends as much as four days a week on the road making such calls, reportedly putting 38,000 miles on his car in a year. (Being away from the office that much requires a good staff, of course.)

3. **Organize system's lobbying carefully.** The above suggestions also are pertinent to lobbying. Smart system heads are at the state capital during legislative sessions, or ready to go on a moment's notice. Well-informed individual lobbyists from the several campuses can form a mutually supportive team, provided they remember that all work for the system head and all support the system's budget. Loyalty to the system's cause is essential. A good example: One system head insists that campus heads and their people should not conduct policy discussions or budget end-runs with public officials without the system head's approval. (See Appendix C. Carrying out single-campus deals not approved by the system head will result in a reduced general allocation by the system office.)
4. **Encourage good board appointments.** As noted in Chapter II, the quality of board performance is directly related to the nature and commitment of individual trustees. While appointing governors often have their own special reasons for selecting particular individuals, it may be useful—if not always successful—for a board chair (sometimes accompanied by the system head) to discuss with a governor the *qualities* needed for good service on the board. If asked to provide names, the chair or system head might do so, preferably in balanced, non-partisan ways. (AGB publications in the bibliography contain useful criteria and procedures concerning board membership.)
5. **Use the campuses.** Work closely with campus heads. Encourage elected officials to make visits to campuses. They'll become better acquainted with the institutions and learn more about their needs and their successes. A number of such visits might even help persuade them that a well-run system is more than the sum of its parts. Sometimes the best salespeople are serious students having a good experience, profiting from it, and being enthusiastic in talking about it.

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A system itself can be perceived as practicing responsible political citizenship. It may subscribe to the theory that if you do *good* work, support will follow. Going the extra mile to serve the public interest is often noticed and sometimes repaid.

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One successful system head sees his role as helping the elected leadership of his state do good things for the state as a whole, not just looking for money for the system in a self-seeking way. In that situation, the concept seems to be working.

## Chapter IV

### CITIZENS AND TAXPAYERS

“Pay more attention to the public. Listen to the profound hopes and fears of the people. Address such issues as kids, jobs, and community.”

--Advice from an active chancellor

“High fees, low faculty workload, too many perks, foolish requirements, and ‘make work’ are turning the public off.”

--Chairman of a state board of higher education

How do recent changes in public attitudes affect university system relationships with citizens and taxpayers?

A persistent undertone suggests that higher education systems and their leaders need to improve their relations with the various publics they seek to serve. Directly or indirectly, these publics determine the nature and extent of public support that systems must have to survive. The basic message that higher education systems send to the public should say: "Use us," "Understand us," and "Support us."

While the use of such terms as "customer," "client," and "market" may not be greeted with warm enthusiasm by everyone in academe, growing competition in the sensitive areas of enrollment and financial support demands increased attention in these times of consumer awareness. Forward-looking system heads, their boards, and their campus leaders are well aware of this and understand the necessity of positive, sensitive, and continuing responses.

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What does the emerging student demand look like? There will be many changes. The potential market may be significantly different--and considerably larger--as a result of rising birth rates, increasing numbers of high school graduates, higher percentages of high school graduates who go on to college, and expanding in-migration. Already the ethnic mix of higher education enrollments is changing dynamically in many states and will change even more.

While the four-year, full-time, baccalaureate student, living on campus is still a major presence -- and indeed the heart of many respected institutions -- the numbers of nontraditional students are rising rapidly. New teaching/learning locations and branch operations have become a way of institutional life. Distance learning, stimulated by advanced technology and increasing customer acceptance, also promises to expand enrollments.

Sample clients: community college and hospital nursing school graduates who seek B.S. degrees; ambitious workers in business who seek the advancement that often accompanies an M.B.A. degree; empty-nesters and ex-military personnel who seek new careers; medical

workers, teachers, and accountants who seek to upgrade their credentials, and many others. Not to be forgotten are “casual students” of various ages who are following intellectual or other personal interests. All of this is in addition to an increased demand, stimulated by a fluctuating job market, for a wide range of graduate and professional programs.

The recruiting of students is usually done at the campus level, but the reputation and backup of a good statewide system can guide students to make good decisions. System publications can be useful by delineating admission requirements, costs, and locations of specialized programs. Cooperative recruitment (if that is not an oxymoron) would be useful in helping students find the institution that best met their needs.

Prospective students could be informed as to urgent personnel needs in some disciplines, such as the demand for teachers in K-12 public schools. In that sense, such cooperation would not only benefit the individual but also could be perceived as a public service.

Perceptive system leaders should be well aware that their campuses seldom have a monopoly on what students want. Conveniently-located, actively-advertised, and market-focused programs at for-profit institutions, as well as expanding programs of established private colleges and universities, are parts of the competitive scene. Community colleges, close to where people live and work, respond promptly to needs and are increasingly nimble in offering new or expanded programs in high-demand fields, especially workforce development.

The message here is clear: in our consumer-oriented society customers look for value-added services that appear to offer quality and convenience. While that observation is not entirely new, the “what can system campuses do for me?” question is being raised increasingly often. System boards and their executive heads should be prepared to respond.

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Business organizations and public agencies are also customers. They look to higher education institutions for a wide variety of services, ranging from specialized instruction for employees to major research partnerships. As the new century leads society even farther into the Knowledge Age, the line between company and campus may become almost invisible. Research institutes, university-related research parks, and incubator centers are major parts of this movement.

“In the past,” one respondent indicated, “there was limited collaboration with business, much of it restricted to fund-raising. System executives now face the challenge of also becoming successful opportunity brokers.” Taxpaying business and industry seek out communities with good public schools and attractive cultural opportunities which often are stimulated by a nearby campus.

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What are other timely messages for leaders of systems?

- Be aware of what is going on in your state. Study data on demographic and economic trends. Learn to spot future trends. Analyze them as they may affect both your support and your ability to serve public needs through your campuses.
- Become well known in the business and civic community as a broker of ideas and opportunities. Tell potential customers how the system and its campuses can meet their changing needs.
- Encourage campuses separately or as teams to recognize and meet customer needs. Share information with them and draw ideas from their experience and ingenuity. As a broker you shouldn't try to do it all centrally.
- Legitimize and stimulate the investment/risk capital approach. Reward successful entrepreneurial activities by campuses. Identify public and private sources and procedures for finding startup funding for promising enterprises. Publicize examples of how modest upfront investments have produced significant returns in terms of profit, new processes or inventions, expanded employment, and even better teaching/learning techniques.

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The practical system head will encourage citizens and taxpayers to understand the expanding values of a well-run system and its campuses. Campus heads can join as major parts of this permanent campaign. At times of decision, such as those preceding any bond referendum, enlightened teamwork is especially vital. The public university system is often at its best as an engine of change. It must be action-oriented, well-run, forward-looking, and sensitive to the needs of individual citizens and public agencies.

In what specific ways have system executives responded, and what have they done?

“Use the bully pulpit,” a board staffer urged. “Descend on a city and plug the local institution as part of the university system. Do it in tandem with campus heads. Stress the importance of the K-12 public schools and partner with them,” she said.

A relatively new system head with 20 years of experience in the system as a dean and as a campus president re-emphasized community relations as one of his top priorities, this time all over the state. “Three-quarters of this job is outside,” he asserts, “talking with citizens, chambers of commerce, and other important community groups.” It is important that taxpayers and citizens become convinced—based on facts—that professors do full-time work and that the public is getting its money's worth.

Many system heads work hard and effectively to keep the media informed of achievements as well as needs. Headlines were made recently when one executive spoke to officers of state-wide daily papers, stressing how much more the state was spending per capita on prisoners than on college students.

Informed and enthusiastic alumni have long touted the strengths of *alma mater* and made financial contributions. They form one of the larger and most useful citizen groups. Fundraising is best left to campuses, but knowledge about the entire system is something helpful alumni can proclaim.

An increasing percentage of system graduates—especially at the baccalaureate level—is coming from comprehensive regional universities. “Since everyone can’t be admitted to flagships,” one campus leader pointed out, “there is expanding power and influence on the part of ‘other’ campuses.” Observant chief executives note that more legislators these days are graduates of regional/comprehensive universities.

In terms of “getting out the word,” system heads are typically hard at work giving speeches, getting involved in community activities, and serving on external boards. Presentations by video, computer, and television are increasingly utilized. While legislators—especially when in session—receive the major attention of chief executives, other relationships with the public also are vitally important. Governing board members themselves are an important part of the linkage to the public, but the load falls most heavily on the chief executive as the official spokesperson.

When campuses within systems have their own individual boards of trustees, their members can help spread the system message. Absent a local board, many perceptive campuses have developed their own advisory councils, often with the active encouragement of the system head. Foundation boards and designated “campus ambassadors,” can be part of this assertive approach. Such action could be of real value in

- Pointing out ways a particular campus serves the community and the region.
- Maintaining friendly relationships with political leaders.
- Carrying out private sector fund-raising activities.
- Helping campus leaders recognize needs for modified or additional programs of study or services.

Procedures that guide volunteer supporters are a good idea. They can encourage supporters to assist campus and system causes while keeping in step with official plans and policies. Their roles should be defined, with the clear understanding that the system and campus heads are the official spokespersons on basic policy and procedures.

Emphasizing accountability for system operation and outcomes is more important than ever. “It’s vital that we convince the public that its money is well used,” stated the recent board chair of one of the largest systems. “We must show that graduates have learned effectively and that they hold jobs.” He proposed a plan to find out, as some other systems have, what types of positions university graduates are filling and how they are meeting the needs of employers, as well as being participating citizens.

Campuses are increasingly under pressure to “prove” that they are doing a good job. That is essentially a fair and legitimate request. Showing that student performances were improved as a result of studying at a system campus is more convincing than pointing to high admissions ratings based on what students learned in high school. Completing a bachelor’s degree in four years is one measure, but this doesn’t always make sense for the growing number of part-time adult, and/or non-traditional students.

There is often a lot of good news to share. It ranges, for example, from exciting research breakthroughs to a non-traditional student's education that changed the lives of an entire family. More examples need to be identified and shared. They can strengthen relationships with citizens and taxpayers.

A continuous challenge for the system head is to find time and energy to get out of the office or the halls of government often enough to meet the rest of the state's citizens and stakeholders.

The system head, as one active incumbent emphasized, "must build a base of support throughout the state, be visible, and be engaged in grass-root activities that relate to the system's agenda."

Many have found that the effort pays off.

## Chapter V

### CAMPUS HEADS

“The job of system executive is to ensure balance. It’s not just all control.”  
--A former campus head who became a system executive

“The campuses should not be merely a collection of parts.”  
--Professor of government and former system vice president

“People who work successfully in large organizations continue to know that local service counts.”  
--Board chair with public administration background

“The system head’s job is to create a climate in which campuses can flourish.”  
--Professor of higher education who once headed a campus and then a system

How do recent changes affect system relationships with campus heads?

As noted earlier, better performance by university systems is increasingly demanded by stakeholders. Tangible results are expected from the system and its component campuses. This puts system heads in the challenging position of “delivering” to external publics while simultaneously encouraging campus initiatives and upholding traditional values of academe, including participatory governance.

Wise system heads will constantly reaffirm their commitment to the campuses. They know that campuses are where the teaching occurs and where significant research takes place. Higher education’s public service functions are directly or indirectly campus-related. Proficient and caring faculty members working in concert with campus executives are the bedrock of effective higher education systems.

Rising external expectations and declining budgets, even in prosperous times, demand good leadership and skilled management. The procedures suggested here are not new. Success is more likely, however, when the six following conditions are evident:

1. **Individual campus roles are clear.** Effective functioning is significantly enhanced when an established master plan for the system is in place and is clearly understood within the system and within state government. When that is not the case, or when existing plans are not updated, the system head should initiate appropriate action. Roles and missions of the several campuses, as well as of the system itself, must be clearly stated. Such statements create guidelines for the allocation of programs and for budget development. They define avenues for the advancement of individual

institutions. They help guard against “mission creep,” recognizing that no one campus can be all things to all people.

2. **Working responsibilities are understood.** Typically job descriptions exist for the system head and campus heads. Beyond those, various understandings are necessary. An openness of style by all parties is desirable in building good working relationships. Surprises and end runs are not acceptable. A balance of powers is necessary and is often spelled out in official procedures for the operation of many systems. It is not the role of a system head to run individual campuses; a delegation of powers—coupled with clear accountability—is desirable. The devil may be in the details, but the basic principles must be clear.

For daily operation a mutually agreed upon statement of principles, expectations, and commitments can be useful. (Appendix C provides a good example.)

3. **Clear communication procedures are followed.** The wise system executive keeps campus heads informed on major issues and proposed changes. While the governing board clearly has the responsibility for establishing policy, the system executive would do well to discuss major plans and possible changes with campus heads. This precludes surprises, allows campus heads an opportunity to offer valuable insights, and can enhance a sense of ownership in the ultimate outcome.

Campus head attendance at regular system board meetings is highly desirable. In different systems the degree of campus head involvement in board meetings ranges from inviting campus heads to sit with board members and have opportunities to speak, to being in the same room but not participating, to not attending at all, but being represented (this in an unusually large system) by a small number of campus heads. Ideally agenda and supporting materials are provided to campus heads in advance of board meetings, and the results of any action are shared immediately (e-mail has been found useful). It is embarrassing for campus heads not to know promptly about board actions or to learn of them through indirect and often unofficial means.

Regular meetings of chief campus officers with the chief system officer are standard practice in most systems. It is up to the system head to see to it that these meetings are productive in getting business done as well as engendering system pride and ownership. Conference calls and televised meetings can save costs and travel time but face-to-face sessions still play a large role. Procedures for these meetings could be discussed occasionally with the campus heads. In many cases members of the system's senior staff are regular participants. There are obvious advantages in this approach. Occasionally, however, the chief executive may wish to meet with only the campus leaders as a reminder that they and their campuses are really the hearts of the system.

If important action of an unusual or unanticipated nature takes place involving the system, campus heads should be advised at once. Again, e-mail and sometimes

conference calls are of great value. Vital “heads up!” information should be provided whenever needed.

In matters approaching emergency significance, a campus head should have timely access to the system head. The system head also should provide reasonable opportunity for campus heads to make one-on-one appointments as needed.

4. **The system office both leads and serves.** The system head and his/her central staff are the principal links to the board and to state government. On official matters the system needs to speak with one voice, based on board policy. Presentation of both operating and capital budgets, formalization of collective bargaining agreements (where pertinent), auditing, gathering and interpreting significant statistics, and other official reporting are among major central functions. Input from campuses is necessary, but central offices should avoid asking campuses to supply data of little practical value.

Authorization to offer degree programs continues to be an important central function. Periodic program reviews with significant campus input are worthwhile, especially when related to changes in disciplinary fields and workforce needs.

Realistically, do system executives have enough time to work intimately and thoroughly with all campus heads, particularly in a large system? Close and continuing professional contact between the levels of leadership is essential. Yet, as noted, the system executive is becoming more and more an “outside person.” One experienced observer expressed the fear that the system head is fast becoming a “President of External Relations” with too much of the important system business and leadership functions delegated to central staff and campuses.

Especially when the system executive is heavily involved in outside responsibilities, the second-level people in the central office take on more work and greater responsibilities. Many handle their roles with great effectiveness. Some campus heads have expressed concern, however, that when the system head brings into the central staff “middle management types” lacking in certain sensitivities or campus experience, “*they*” tell campus heads how to run their institutions. One observer termed this “a demeaning trend which tends to marginalize campus heads.”

The team role of chief campus officers within a system should be emphasized. Occasionally contrary examples have been observed. In one system campus leaders were reportedly “becoming enamored with the possibilities of patronage” and, bypassing the system head, were working out campus-specific advantages directly with legislators and board members. That is like “tossing meat to wild animals,” the observer noted. The annual review of a campus head's performance offers an occasion for improving the behavior of any “rogue” leader.

5. **The system provides campus stimulation and rewards.** As noted above, system leaders expect campuses to achieve agreed-upon results. Performance budgeting, for

example, is a way of life in some systems. In many cases next year's budget is related directly to this year's enrollment—in terms of both numbers and sometimes presumed quality measures, such as test scores.

In the currently changing scene the role of the campus as an entrepreneur is increasingly being encouraged. Specific and tangible cooperation with business, industry, and public agencies is notable in many systems. Results are expected, and in many cases are substantial. Risk capital from campus foundations and sometimes earmarked state funds are useful in setting up cooperative enterprises which often turn out to be good investments. "Seed money" from the central office has stimulated groups of campuses to develop cooperative arrangements with external economic interests.

Of great importance is the receptiveness of the system head and the central staff to new or different ideas related to such endeavors as joint programming, shared use of technology, and emerging fields of study such as bio-sciences, information technology, and other areas.

In the spirit of encouraging initiative and broad ownership of new program ideas by campuses, one system trustee suggested: "Let *them* invent it." That allows a greater chance of continuing campus ownership and commitment.

6. **Good performance is encouraged and evaluated.** Each system head has the right to expect effective performance from campus heads. In turn, campus heads should expect clear agreement as to expected outcomes and, within reality, the resources to do the job.

Of paramount importance is the appointment of the right individual to head a particular campus. As the complexities and demands of that job increase, the really good campus leader grows with the challenges. The system head can help through useful counsel and by providing opportunities for the campus head's continuing professional growth.

As campus heads themselves have pointed out, good performance on their part is further encouraged when the system head:

- Consistently practices clear communication (as above)
- Shows campus heads that he/she can be trusted
- Offers public praise when deserved, but reserves criticism (when necessary) for private meetings
- Concentrates on big issues that make a difference
- Develops reasonable tolerance for different styles of campus leadership
- Delegates enough—but not too much—responsibility, but expects (and gets) results
- Plants ideas, and lets campuses take the credit when they succeed

Evaluations of campus-head performance are constantly being made, at least informally. While procedures differ from one system to another, there is a growing trend toward regular and formal evaluation procedures. (More details will be found in certain bibliography listings; see Appendix D.) In brief, system heads usually develop a sense of “how things are going” on each campus, so that even before any formal evaluation, informal and private conversations may take place.

Should a campus head be having problems, discreet help and counsel, and sometimes executive coaching, may be in order. In cases where termination of a campus head appears necessary, it should be carried out in ways that are humane but do not require excessive delay. One system head has described an “aluminum parachute” which might provide employment elsewhere in the system, or at least some terminal leave with pay.

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From their particular perspectives, how do campus heads feel about system relationships? Some had useful observations. Among them:

- It’s vital that the system head be strong and be perceived as a buffer against political and other external pressures on the campus.
- The system head is entitled to timely answers when he/she seeks information as to how the campuses feel about an issue (preferably *before* a policy change is enacted at the board level), but must realize that it takes time to carry out serious consultation with faculty.
- Good things can happen when the system head works to create a climate in which campuses are more likely to thrive. After all, it is the individual campuses that make the system look good.
- Campuses sometimes would like to get more direction, but would rather have no direction than bad direction. “Just give us the tools and the technology to do the job,” said one campus leader.
- There are times when campuses would like a firm answer from the central office—even if negative—to clarify system policy and settle an issue. “We need to get on with campus business.”
- When a campus head becomes system head, it’s sometimes hard for him or her to relinquish control of internal matters on the previous campus.

A good sense of balance on the part of the system head is vital when it comes to visiting campuses. One professor (a faculty union leader) was annoyed when he believed the visiting head was “getting his nose too far into the campus tent.” Another viewpoint suggested that “faculty wish to hear from the chief executive. We want him to come around and find out what’s going on at our college.”

Almost every campus, at one time or another, feels “sibling rivalry,” fearing that some other campus is getting a better deal. Over a period of time, as one successful system head put it, “everybody needs to win something. Each campus head wants to go home with something for

his/her campus.” This is not always easy. When new educational offerings or degrees are to be allocated, there are often resource limitations and other factors to be considered.

Do campus people want an academic person as system head? The answer is frequently YES, for traditional and other reasons. Some, however, replied NO. “We want our leader to be a superb politician with the top goal to get funding from the legislature.” This view came independently from both a faculty spokesperson and an experienced campus head.

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In summary, few of the campus-relationship issues raised during the many interviews were really new. In some cases, clarification of campus missions was helping. So was definition of “what happens at what level.” Campuses continue to seek more freedom. With this, however, comes the commitment to provide tangible evidence that the system head can use in dealing with state funders. It must be shown that educational progress is really being made.

Understanding procedures and perspectives as suggested here can help build and sustain a spirit of collegiality among the parts of a system. It may not be fashionable to talk about a “family of campuses,” but the concept is worth trying. Mutual respect and decorum are still important, coupled with clear and balanced leadership at all levels. The way in which the system executive and campus head work together can make a lot of difference. And it will be noticed.

## Chapter VI

### QUALITIES AND QUESTIONS: SUBSTANCE AND SEARCH

“Appointing the right chief executive for the system is the governing board’s most important function. “

--Former system head

“A system can rise and fall with the chief executive.”

--Big system regent

“Higher education as an industry is not putting enough emphasis on executive development.”

--Former lieutenant governor who became system head

“The style of the chief executive makes all the difference. It is not the structure.”

--Retired system head

When the time comes to select a new system head, what personal and professional qualities should the system board look for? What distinct qualities mark the leader who can be even more than a good manager?

As a system board performs its paramount function in seeking a chief executive, it would do well to:

- Consider the condition of the system
- Pay attention to basic qualities related to successful system leadership
- Understand the differences between the role of a system head and a campus head
- Discuss in advance the major “compass” questions that will provide direction for the search

Those four recommendations will be discussed in greater detail and in that order in the following pages.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is seldom much leisure at search time to re-examine system goals in any depth, or to what extent they are being achieved. Yet, as a wise observer suggested some years ago, the search for a new leader is really a search for the future of the organization. Those responsible for the search would do well to consider again the nine basic functions of systems as defined by Bruce Johnstone (see Chapter I).

The board also might ask itself: What does our experience with the previous executive tell us we need now? What did we as a board learn? Do we now want more of the same

(realizing that no two chief officers are exactly alike)? Or do we need a new approach to the job and, if so, in what ways?

As to the actual search process, the board is strongly urged to make use of some of the excellent Association of Governing Board procedures listed in the Bibliography (Appendix D) and to consider seriously the use of a search consulting firm (see below).

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Certain basic qualities are identified as being especially important by current and past system heads, board members, campus leaders, and other wise people. A major national figure in the sphere of leadership development presented this perspective:

*It's essential that the board pick somebody whose past experience enables him/her to have a vision of what can be done with the system. Many capabilities can be delegated to management people, but somebody has to have the vision to put arms and legs on it. Unless the leader has this vision and good compass bearings, this person doesn't know how to hire the kind of people who will help achieve the goal.*

A former governor who became a system head cited five major attributes:

- The ability to see the big picture
- The willingness to empower as well as to roll heads (and to know when to do which)
- The habit of listening selectively, coupled with the right amount of disciplined impatience
- The ability to adjust but not buckle under when in the midst of political realities
- The personal style that makes networking possible (and even enjoyable)

Experienced leaders spoke frequently of the importance of understanding the paradox that the public university represents.

The public university is in many ways a creature of state government, although constitutional status (where it exists) and other provisions make it somewhat different from a typical state agency.

On the other hand, it also embodies much of the culture of the academic world with emphasis on scholarship and participatory procedures.

The tempos and outlooks of those two cultures seldom match. The system head has to cope with both.

As the search goes forward constant attention should be paid to 12 basic qualities of the desirable candidate, as recommended by various interviewees:

1. **Integrity.** Demonstrates integrity and intellectual honesty in all situations.

2. **Commitment.** Shows commitment to the cause of public higher education and is an energetic and inspiring advocate. Follows through in priority areas such as soliciting support.
3. **Judgment.** Practices good judgment in all matters. Is able to evaluate the ability of others (colleagues, for example) to use good judgment and thus delegates wisely, insisting on accountability. Has a fine sense of timing.
4. **Values.** Exemplifies—without being preachy—good humane values in decision-making and dealing with all kinds of people. Understands positive values of diversity of individuals and ideas.
5. **Perception.** Possesses an unusual sense of perception in sizing up opportunities to enhance the strengths of the system, and to avoid political and other pitfalls. Understands strategic needs of the state, its leaders and the system. Endeavors to blend them to reach solutions.
6. **Skills.** Builds teams. Draws ideas selectively from others. Can analyze and understand complex situations in depth without being diverted by details. Knows how to use staff without becoming excessively dependent on others.
7. **Initiative.** Is constantly coming up with pertinent new ideas, sharing and modifying them for useful application; understands which ones are likely to work.
8. **Leadership.** Leads by consensus whenever possible; avoids unnecessary confrontation; but is quite firm in moving ahead convincingly and effectively when necessary. Gets others to follow.
9. **Communication.** Thinks, speaks, and writes clearly and cogently. Relates well to a variety of people and audiences. Knows how to listen creatively. Has “media savvy.” Understands how a system can use websites, and other newer approaches.
10. **Self-renewal.** Is wise enough to know that fatigue can be the greatest enemy. Takes proper rest, exercise, and vacation time.
11. **Stamina.** Has moral, intellectual and physical stamina. Can move forward through tough times even though no cheerleaders are screaming: “Go, Big System!”
12. **Humor.** Has a sense of the ironies of life. Demonstrates the ability at times to laugh, to move others, and perhaps even to cry.

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Board members need to remind themselves of the differences in responsibilities of system heads and of campus heads. The system head, for example:

- Reports directly to the board and is responsible for the total enterprise
- Provides the major vision for both the short- and long-term vision of the system in the context of the major planning document
- Focuses on leadership and “the big picture” while making sure that others are managing effectively day-to-day operations through delegation to campuses and central staff—and being accountable
- Sees to it that some reasonable allocation of function exists among the campuses as to academic programs, research, and public service
- Serves as the system’s official voice and chief seeker of resources
- Is the major factor in selection of campus heads and stimulating them to perform effectively

- Recognizes the increasing diversity and cultural changes in the society and encourages/stimulates enlightened responses across the system

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As the board defines its particular criteria, it also may need to consider four procedural or “compass” questions:

- **Should the board use outside search consultants?** Some boards have had success without using consultants, but the trend is toward using them. They frequently know where good prospects are. A scrutiny of a search firm's recent track record should be quietly made before signing any contract. Careful consideration of several successful search organizations is desirable.
- **Should the new system head come from inside or outside?** There are various arguments favoring one or the other. There is no standard answer. Again, what strengths does the board consider most important? An outsider can bring new and different perspectives and experiences, but has to learn the organization. An insider is familiar with many facets of the system but may have fewer fresh viewpoints. For either, a thorough background check and analysis of experience is necessary, even for the insider, many of whose qualities may be somewhat evident.
- **Should the board consider candidates from government, business, and other sources, as well as from the academic world?** Boards should keep an open mind and consider quality candidates from all likely sources, at least in the early stages of the search. Ideally, an academic background is favored by most stakeholders, certainly the campus people. On the other hand, any candidate who clearly appears able to do the best job of gaining resources, providing vision, and demonstrating the type of leadership that transcends even the necessary good management should be very seriously considered.
- **Is the board really ready to commit to a chief officer who has the demonstrated track record and the potential to provide more than management?** If a board is perceived by candidates—and by well-informed people across the country who know where the best leadership can be found—as looking for a truly outstanding executive and supporting that officer in all possible ways, then good things can happen. Should a board not really want a strong leader, that may already be evident and many good prospects will not be interested.

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A final perspective of the realities of job came from a knowledgeable system head who pondered for a few moments and then shared these observations:

There is a diverse cluster of desirable qualities—among them: controlled ego and strength of will to sublimate; a sense of where and when to be visible, when invisible; a tolerance for raging egos of campus heads, with the ability to curb them when necessary; an awareness that politicians and businessmen like the system head to be there (but not too visibly) and often have their allegiances to

particular campuses; an understanding that while campus presidents may have fun with Nobel winners, football victories, and bagels in the cafeteria, the system head deals with abstractions; an ability to carry out effective leadership; possession of a good set of political instincts, effective peripheral vision, negotiation skills, and the ability to know what's on the horizon.

## Chapter VII

### PREPARATION AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING

“The nature of the job ranges from horrendous to very satisfying.”  
--Retired Chancellor

“There’s no one road to the chief executive position, particularly at the system level. It’s a wild card and a big jump.”  
--System vice president and former dean

“You never really know everything you need to know.”  
--System head

How can the preparation of system heads be improved and how can their learning be made continuous?

Performing successfully as a system chief is an art as well as a science. Increasing challenges require system heads to be both good leaders and good managers. No standard preparation for the position exists nor any guaranteed route to the office, complete with triptych or signposts.

Several decades ago when today’s older systems were in the formative stage, the chief executive of the original campus frequently moved up to take the system-wide job. New campuses were developed, and systems became increasingly complex.

As noted earlier, with time and expansion, the job began to require a wider variety of skills, abilities, and perspectives. Developing and sharing a vision for the system, seeking support visible and invisible from many sources, and overseeing effective management at varying levels of the system are all part of the challenge.

Current chief executives say that much of what they have learned came through on-the-job experience, both in current positions and in previous assignments. The No. 2 position in another system with good leadership was mentioned frequently as a useful stepping stone. Indeed, search committees and their consultants often look carefully at promising individuals in such positions.

To date, graduate programs in higher education administration at various universities usually focus on leadership of a single campus. While the demand for chief executives at the system level is not great in terms of numbers, a few enterprising universities might explore the nature of the position and create programs that address it, including internships.

Graduate study in public administration deals with some issues that future system heads face, but such programs usually don't put much emphasis on many of the important aspects of university system administration.

Although search procedures were discussed in the previous chapter, it's important to note an observation by board members who head complex organizations such as banks and insurance companies. They emphasize heavily the value of a candidate having been in charge of a large, complicated, and frequently geographically-dispersed enterprise. Even in leading private corporations, such executives have to deal with public agencies, develop long-range plans, pay attention to human resource and employee issues, and be sure the product suits the various customers.

A key factor identified by one corporate leader:

*The big issue is how the relevance of experience is seen and used. Some persons can—and others can't—transform experience from one place to another.*

Similar advice came from a current chief executive:

*Draw from your experience in managing a complex organization, whether it is academic, business, or elsewhere. Develop positive ways of dealing with people and sharing responsibilities, even while being clearly perceived as the person in charge.*

A wry comment from another system head suggests that “the best experience for the job is having survived under combat.”

In evaluating what helped them most, many system heads spoke of valuable experiences after their appointment. Between the time of appointment and the first day on the job, one individual arranged to visit other system heads who were willing to take him on for several days. He shadowed them as they carried out their regular work.

Multiple advantages: What he observed was real. He could ask questions privately, however “dumb.” Everything was confidential, and later opportunities were provided for asking additional questions by phone.

This is an example of mentoring at its peak. As one beneficiary of such an informal arrangement put it: “Only another system head can tell you what it's really like!”

Many system heads had to start almost at once after their appointment and had insufficient warm-up time. Once on the job they found little time for non-routine activities. What helped them get off to a good start and keep learning?

- Relationships with the board chair that were so good the new executive could be quite frank (in private conversations or phone calls) in seeking counsel (perhaps a better term than “advice,” which is almost always supposed to be followed).

- The ability to pick up the phone and in confidence call a colleague in another system who could share good and pertinent experience, or at least provide a friendly ear.
- An opportunity to talk occasionally with the previous chief executive, assuming that personal relationships were open and friendly.
- The opportunity to attend an institute on system administration after the new executive had been on the job a short time (“Now I know what the real questions are!”)
- Participation in annual—or special—meetings of such organizations as Association of Governing Boards, the National Association of System Heads (NASH), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), which monitor major systems issues, offer fellowship, and sometimes provide conversational therapy.
- Attendance at institutes or seminars on overarching challenges facing the society and the world. (Examples: changing demography, future effects of technology, regional planning, the environment, etc.).

Continuous learning is as essential for system heads as it is for faculty and students. One respondent suggested criteria to judge whether a given program or seminar is worth attending:

- Is there intellectual and practical substance to it?
- Does it encourage the executive to keep learning?
- Does it have some refresher value?

The last question is not puffery. Since the chief executive job provides “limited wiggle room,” as one practitioner put it, there is a need for occasional breathers. Another system leader observed: “If this is rafting, then it’s permanent whitewater.” Still another suggested: “We need an antidote to ‘fast forward....’ We can’t find the pause button.”

Board members might consider these comments from the perspective of their own self interest. A good chief executive is a great institutional investment, one worth taking good care of.

## Chapter VIII

### REWARDS, INCENTIVES, AND PITFALLS

“Being in charge of improvement on a broad scale is exciting to me.”

--Current system head

“There are so many aches and pains in this job that there is no way they can really pay me enough. A thick skin helps.”

--System head

“It’s a privilege to be a part of a great institutions that affects the future and thousands of people.”

--Another current system head

“A system can rise and fall with the chief executive.”

--Regent of one of the biggest systems

“The job is a deadly one for a rookie—and for some others, too.”

--Chief executive who was called back after resigning

What is the job of a system head really like? What are its attractions? What are its limitations? Where are its possible pitfalls?

System heads across the nation believe they are worth every dollar they’re paid. But in many cases they say they’re not working just for the money.

They observe the nature of the enterprises for which they are responsible and frequently note that top officers with comparable budgets and comparable numbers of employees in private industry or non-profit agencies often get more money and better perks. They also may have to put up with fewer hassles.

Functioning within the scope of “business in the sunshine/open-meeting laws” makes the work even more challenging in many states. And at departure time, there are few golden parachutes.

Nevertheless, individuals of considerable talent, extensive experience, and frequently deep devotion to the task fill system head positions as American higher education faces the uncertainties of a new century.

Challenges facing the position are enumerated in other chapters and, as noted, will continue to change, often becoming more rather than less difficult. Meanwhile other challenges have arrived.

Tax revenues may have improved in some states, yet competing demands from other state programs are increasing. At least two state systems faced major work stoppages by faculty. Staff employees and teaching assistants seek more recognition and better remuneration. Hospitals and medical centers may fail to pay their way.

So-called natural calamities such as hurricanes and floods afflict states in different parts of the country, creating unprecedented financial commitments to public works and human assistance. Energy shortages will also present crises.

The need for increased financial commitments to K-12 education (improvement of which can benefit higher education) is a top priority in almost every state.

Meanwhile, even in a time of relative prosperity for some of the country's citizens, the drumbeat of demand for tax cuts is heard almost everywhere.

A recitation of woes does little if any good. It *is*, however, the context within which state higher education systems operate, and which will probably continue to operate in the foreseeable future.

Why do individuals want to become system heads?

Some undoubtedly see the job as an expansion of personal and professional power and achievement. As the usually top-paying position in the state higher education world (with such exceptions as heads of medical centers and occasionally an endowed/outstanding professorship), the post is a natural goal to be sought by the ambitious. But there's much more to it than an ego trip.

"It isn't just the prestige of holding the job," one system head asserted. "It's the satisfaction of being able to do it well."

The incentive that persuaded one state university head to move to another system was the opportunity to "remake that system," which prior to his arrival incurred damaging personnel and organizational problems. (His dream of being able to make major improvements on a truly timely basis was helped considerably by the departing executive who had thoughtfully left a number of key positions vacant so that the incoming head could fill them at once with carefully-selected members of a new team.)

One long-term system board member, a construction contractor, noted that a number of system heads are more attracted by the prospect of building new programs, services, and even campuses, in contrast with the rebuilding job facing some newly-hired system heads. Some new appointees, fortunately, are willing and skilled rebuilders.

One recently-appointed system head who had led a campus for some years was attracted to the system executive position because he felt he could do a better job of working constructively with campus heads than what he had experienced as a campus head.

There are a cluster of other attractions. Retiring after 25 years as head of a distinguished system, one individual, who had also served as a member and sometime chair of many national boards and commissions, recalled the stimulation he had experienced in knowing and learning from outstanding people in other fields of endeavor.

Although the opportunity to work directly for, and report to, the system board is attractive to some, a few current campus heads reportedly have turned down opportunities to become system heads. They see the campus job as more fulfilling and offering fewer frustrations.

In contrast, another observant and experienced higher education leader—once a campus head and then a system head—sees the statewide job as being the more satisfying. He put it this way:

*The system head avoids most of the truly dirty features of the job of the campus head, e.g. getting caught in vicious squabbles between deans, chairs, and faculty; contending with agonizing faculty personnel issues such as tenure denials; contending with the misbehavior and sometimes with the tragedies of students, and dealing with a generally negative press.*

*In many ways [he continues] I found the job of system head, dealing with very big ideas, and trying to find ways of making a large system work, and especially in dealing almost entirely with campus presidents, to be enormously rewarding.*

*My role and my reward are making the campuses thrive by supporting and helping the campus heads.*

Any wise candidate for the system head position would do well to size up a board before becoming a serious contender. While the general spirit and ethos of a board is not always evident from the official records of its meetings, a serious candidate will benefit from reading board minutes prior to final interviews.

Seeking observations from less formal sources as to how a board does its work and how it has related to chief officers in the past can be helpful. Are there many split votes? How serious are members about the real work? Boards, as noted earlier, sometimes can change fairly quickly over time. Sometimes a good executive can help improve board performance.

Good candidates like to serve boards that take their responsibilities seriously, work hard to make a difference, are relatively free from domination by political leaders, and understand and observe the difference between policy development and actual administration. They discuss ideas seriously and, once decisions are reached, support their chief executive as he/she goes about implementing them.

A vital issue concerns the provision for adequate staff and the ability to have the right people serving on a compatible, cooperative central office team. It is unlikely that a chief executive can head a system effectively without top quality senior staff, including an executive deputy. Typically senior staff officers are concerned respectively with academic affairs, business

and financial management, and public affairs/governmental relations, to mention only some of the many functions. Good legal counsel and professional auditing also are essential.

To perform well the chief officer has to have major lieutenants in whom he/she has complete confidence. A new chief executive should have the opportunity to decide what personnel to keep and whom to replace. As noted in Chapter V, really good central staff people understand and practice the concept that the head is the head.

Drawing such officers from among successful campus performers was recommended. Occasional rotation to campus positions also was suggested, especially for those without this experience.

As a new system head is selected (see Chapter VI) there are practical incentives and rewards to be worked out in terms of financial and other matters. Salary and related benefits need to be enough to attract (and retain!) top quality individuals at a time of national competition for superior candidates.

One board leader who recently identified and hired an unusually good new system head after an exhaustive national search considered himself—and his system—to be very lucky. “There wasn’t a lot of outstanding talent out there,” he reported.

As salaries and perks for system head positions have continued to move up, boards need to be aware of trends. Up-to-date market information can be provided from executive search organizations, the College and University Personnel Association, and sometimes from trustees of similar institutions. Necessary expenses—travel, car, housing (with some exceptions), and official entertainment—are part of the picture. These, plus any “exceptional arrangements,” such as deferred compensation, should be clearly disclosed, understood in advance, and be publicly defensible.

A timely and comprehensive Association of Governing Boards publication, *Renewing the Academic Presidency*, suggests providing a safety net for the president. System heads are strongly in accord with the recommendations that boards provide them with (1) transportable retirement benefits, (2) rolling contracts so that they can look ahead to two or more years with contractual protection, and (3) severance arrangements sufficient to provide for the out-going system head’s transition to another position. As noted earlier, administrators in higher education do not expect the golden parachutes of the business world.

A current executive reported that he was glad he had a three-year contract, but stated that if he had a five-year contract he would take on more issues. “If you want independent thinking and action, a longer contract really helps.”

Are safety nets “deserved” by system heads? “After all,” noted one with a wry smile, “football and basketball coaches often receive contracts for as much as five to ten years, with buy-out opportunities, of course.” Clear definitions of severance arrangements may sometimes make the board’s role less difficult.

Fair and effective evaluation procedures provide opportunities for board leaders to apply criteria for periodic salary adjustments and discuss areas for improved performance. The bibliography lists sources that provide more details regarding chief executive evaluation. Most of the literature pertains to campus heads, but a number of the approaches also can apply to system heads.

While there was no consensus on what is the “right age” for a system head, an experienced large-system trustee spoke in favor of having a relatively mature individual fill the job, one who might bring “qualities of positive maturity.” Such an individual might not be diverted, he asserted, by looking for a position elsewhere.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three key factors in keeping chief system officers alive and lively are *time*, *relationships*, and *perspective*. The board that desires its chief executive to get better over time, rather than just increasingly fatigued or stale, should encourage and provide:

- Reasonable annual vacation time (to be used!) as well as planned sabbaticals.
- Funding for attendance at professional conferences, institutes and seminars, as well as paid study leaves.
- Other arrangements that keep him/her in touch with good practices in other systems and up-to-date on issues in the current society.

\* \* \* \* \*

Do chief executives just fade away into retirement? A number do, of course, depending on factors such as age, health, desire for less excitement, and other opportunities. In some recent transitions, retiring system heads resumed professorships. Others have become heads of foundations, presidents of national higher education organizations, consultants, and—occasionally—heads of a single campus.

One example saw a civic-minded ex-system head become mayor of the city in which the principal campus was located and later as leader of the area chamber of commerce. “Trading up” also takes place occasionally, with a chief executive becoming head of a larger and conceivably more prestigious system.

\* \* \* \* \*

Admittedly the job is complicated. It’s hard to be right all the time. Attention to Chancellor Portch’s “Principles, Expectations, and Commitments” (Appendix C) and to “Ten Suggestions” (Appendix E) can be useful for both new and experienced system heads. Advance knowledge of some seemingly common pitfalls or classic mistakes also can be of value. Out of some 29 major mistakes identified by interviewees, the following half dozen appear to have occurred with some frequency:

- Trying to do too many things simultaneously while devoting too little attention to the system's *major* needs
- Delegating too little, or sometimes too much, and not following up to assure compliance
- Failing to cultivate a sense of timing as to when an idea might work and when it might not
- Encouraging or allowing board members to take on inappropriate administrative duties
- Not keeping up with important trends, issues, and tools
- Forgetting to say "thank you"

\* \* \* \* \*

There are attractive features in being a system head. There are a number of incentives and rewards. Wise board members are aware of them. A system is vastly better when trustees recognize those incentives and attractions, reward effective performance, and thus encourage stability of their chief executive.

The wise system head savors the satisfaction and learns from any mistakes.

# Chapter IX

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The establishment and support of state higher education systems represents one of the greatest human and financial investments that any state undertakes. Many people are stakeholders in this investment, including the population of the entire state.

For this partnership to be effective, the state's elected officials, members of the higher education system's governing board, and the system head must work together to carry out their respective roles.

\* \* \* \* \*

This study recommends that **governors**:

1. Understand that support of the system is a taxpayer *investment* in the present and future of the state's economy and quality of life.
2. Delineate clear goals for the state so that higher education officials can create plans that advance these goals.
3. Realize that board success and system head performance are highly dependent on the quality, experience, and dedication of the board members appointed. Seek capable citizens who care about the future of the state and its citizens, and who bring a variety of professional and life experiences to overseeing the university system.
4. Consider using external and objective advice in identifying board candidates through both formal and informal means, explicitly incorporating merit criteria into their selection.
5. Impress upon board members from the time of their appointment that they serve on behalf of all the people of the state. While they should obey their own consciences and exercise their best judgment, they also must work as a board with limited individual prerogatives of their own.
6. Encourage procedures that enhance stable board leadership and terms of service. Provide the chair a minimum term of two years and honor the responsibility of boards to select their own leaders.
7. Respect the integrity and mandated role of the board and its chief executive while working with them to provide quality higher education for the people of the state.

\* \* \* \* \*

B. This study recommends that **legislators**:

1. Understand that support for the system is an investment by citizen taxpayers in the future of the state's economy and quality of life. Protect this precious public resource.
2. Support executive efforts to improve the quality of board appointments and the commitments that board membership requires.

3. Expect regular reports of achievements from the university system and its campuses, as well as evidence that it is serving the needs of individual campuses. Have conversations with heads of the board and the system at times in addition to budget meetings.
4. Challenge boards to focus on “the big picture” and on major issues such as establishing system goals and meeting campus responsibilities.
5. Expect boards and their chief executive to make clear, honest, and convincing budget requests and to demonstrate wise use of public and private resources.
6. Balance statewide needs with those of particular communities.
7. Provide adequate funding to match expectations of the board and system head in carrying out their duties.
8. Insist on creative working relationships between the university system and community colleges, K-12, business and industry, state agencies, and cultural organizations.

\* \* \* \* \*

C. This study recommends that **members of system boards**:

1. Develop and follow thoughtful goals for the system and adopt formal plans for achieving them, taking into account the needs of the state and its citizens, and the respective strengths of the system’s campuses.
2. Recognize that the identification, appointment, and support of a top-quality chief executive (system head) is one of the board's most important responsibilities.
3. Work with the system head in enlightened ways to bring about effective communication. Realize that a good executive can make a good board look even better.
4. Comply with existing open-meeting/government-in-the-sunshine requirements, and find informal and appropriate ways to consider different points of view and ways of doing business that maximize wise decision-making.
5. Willingly provide multi-year executive employment arrangements. Make this challenging job as attractive as possible.
6. Agree in advance to provide the chief executive periodic performance evaluations that are fair and realistic. These should focus on helping improve the performance as needed, as well as providing background for compensation adjustment. Reasonable termination arrangements should be provided.

\* \* \* \* \*

D. This study recommends that **chief executives**:

1. Concentrate on being the kind of leader who provides vision and commitment, as well as good management.
2. Make every effort, public and private, to win and maintain the board's confidence and work effectively with the board.
3. Work with the board in identifying and appointing outstanding campus heads, and then help them succeed in all appropriate ways. Emphasize that the success of the campuses is a major factor in system success.

4. Present carefully defined plans and budget needs to the board and state officials in ways that are factual, clear, and convincing.
5. Advocate the system's mission and goals on a statewide basis throughout the year, not just during legislative sessions. (Get out of your office and into the mainstream of your state!)
6. Recognize that fund-raising from private sources is increasingly vital, and help campuses succeed in that enterprise.
7. Conceive of the system as a broker, through its campuses, to provide service to the private sector and to other agencies.

\* \* \* \* \*

E. This study recommends that **national higher education associations:**

1. Encourage continuous dialogue and better communication among elected state political leaders and higher education and trustee leaders, including the business community, on mutual expectations. Work with national and regional organizations of state governors and legislators to co-sponsor substantive exchanges on issues that threaten to divide the political and education communities.
2. Serve as a third-party broker and facilitator to bring key political, public-private higher education and business leaders together to shape public agendas. Such meetings should be organized in ways that encourage all parties to support initiatives that tie higher education's work more closely to state needs and priorities.
3. Offer to help state governments and their appropriate agencies plan and conduct annual orientation and education programs for all board members and trustees, new appointees as well as veteran members.
4. Co-sponsor with AGB, NASH and SHEEO periodic institutes for new and experienced system heads that include sessions on board development, policy-management, and professional development.
5. Explore ways to enhance informal communication among system executives, with emphasis on mentoring, problem-solving, and peer counseling based on expressed needs.
6. Call attention to the need to reform board member selection by offering ideas, alternatives and consulting advice that will institutionalize changes and attract each state's most capable citizens to board membership. Urge development of concise and appropriate job descriptions for governing boards and qualifications to be sought in candidates for trusteeship.

\* \* \* \* \*

With serious attention to these recommendations prospects for success of higher education systems in serving the people of their states can be greatly enhanced.

## Appendix A

### Rationale and Methodology

Over the years a major aim of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) has been to help enhance relationships between executive heads of systems and the system boards which they serve. In the challenging years opening the 21<sup>st</sup> century the importance of effective leadership for their systems is more important than ever before.

Over recent years the literature on this topic has continued to expand (see selected works listed in Appendix D). Publications on the role of the campus head were fairly extensive. Yet much less attention appears to have been focussed on the role of the system chief executive, whether called president, chancellor, commissioner of higher education, or other title.

It seemed fitting, therefore, for a new study concentrating on such basic questions as:

- How is the work of a system head different from that of a campus head?
- How is the job of the system head changing?
- How can system boards and their chief executives work most effectively in changing times?

What are some criteria for effective structures for state systems? This intriguing topic, it was decided, would best be left to other research studies.

Along the way the author talked with leaders of NASH, as well as the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). An earlier and shorter version of this report was issued in August 2000 by AGB as Occasional Paper No. 45 addressed to system heads, boards, and state officials.

Following meetings and conversations with representatives of the organizations listed above, the author developed nine questions to serve as the outline of this report:

- I. In what ways has the nature of the work of the system head changed during the past few years?
- II. How have these changes affected working relationships with governing board leadership and members?
- III. Do changes call for different relationships with leaders of state government?
- IV. Do changes call for different relationships with citizens and taxpayers?
- V. Do changes call for different relationships between the system head and the heads of system campuses?
- VI. What should boards look for in seeking, using, and retaining system heads?
- VII. How can system heads best be prepared for the job, and continue to grow professionally on the job?
- VIII. What incentives help attract and retain good system heads?

IX. What can be done—by the various constituencies—to make the services of system heads more effective in the future?

The final chapter provides observations and recommendations.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following steps were then taken:

1. While still in draft form the questions were tried out and modified as suggested by various practitioners and by representatives of the organizations listed above. The author also profited by participating in various discussions at annual meetings of NASH and AGB.
2. Interviews were conducted in person whenever possible, but in some instances telephone conversations were used, ranging in length from ten minutes to one and a half hours. Some conversations took place in system offices, others in state office buildings, on campuses, and at national meetings.
3. Opinions and observations were received from interviews with a total of 112 individuals. They included 57 current and former system chief executives, 26 governing board members, 9 system staff officers, 9 campus heads, 7 former governors and lieutenant governors, and 4 association executives. While no claim is made that the population interviewed is representative in a statistical sense, a successful effort was made to include the observations of people associated with a wide variety of systems in terms of number and size of campuses, structure of systems, and other factors. Individuals with service in 31 separate states were interviewed.
4. A draft of the report was prepared drawing on, but not limited to, those interviews. Observations/ conclusions were shared in draft form with members of the 22-person advisory panel, as well as with selected leaders of national higher education associations. Many resulting suggestions were incorporated into the revised draft.
5. While most of observations in the draft were commonly agreed upon, on certain issues divergent viewpoints arose. For example, some respondents strongly believe that a system head must have previously served as a campus head. Others do not. Regarding satisfaction on the job, some interviewees felt that serving as a campus head was preferable to heading a system, yet there was a small but strong view to the contrary.
6. Almost without exception persons interviewed seemed genuinely interested that serious attention was being devoted to the importance of system leadership and management. Most interviews were conducted in an atmosphere of friendly candor, stimulated by the confidentiality promised. Interviewees were advised that their names and specific institutional titles would not be divulged.

## **Appendix B**

### **Acknowledgments**

Thanks are expressed to the John S. Knight Foundation for an initial grant arranged by Rolfe Neill, then publisher of *The Charlotte Observer*, and to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, whose then-president David Pierpont Gardner not only facilitated a grant but also provided an especially perceptive interview. Without such generous support for travel and related expenses, extensive fieldwork for this study would not have been possible.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte through Vice Chancellor Olen B. Smith, Jr., added funding, administered the grants and provided office space and communications facilities. Elaine Deese, administrative assistant in the Office of the Chancellors Emeriti, arranged interviews, kept records, transcribed notes, and typed the final draft. My wife Dorrie S. Fretwell provided timely editorial assistance and put up with my various absences related to travel. Former newspaperman Jack Claiborne, director of public relations at UNC Charlotte who is knowledgeable in campus and system matters, provided perceptive editorial help. My thanks to everyone!

To all of the persons interviewed and to colleagues who made valuable suggestions, I extend special appreciation.

Two persons were especially helpful from the very beginning of this study. In their long and remarkable careers they have demonstrated magnificent leadership in the vision and development of two of the nation's greatest university systems: Clark Kerr of the University of California and William Friday of the University of North Carolina. It has been my rare privilege to have served under each of them. It is an honor to have been mentored by giants.

During the course of the study a distinguished panel representing wisdom and experience agreed to serve. From the outset it was understood there would be no meetings of the panel but that individual members would be available for discussion and to respond to questions. I take this opportunity to thank them. Thanks also to NASH leaders including but not limited to Bruce Johnstone, Tom Layzell, and Don Langenberg who invited me to their meetings and provided other useful suggestions.

While the observations and suggestions of many participants in the complex world of higher education systems went into the development of this report, the opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any of the individuals interviewed, or their institutions or organizations.

E. K. Fretwell Jr.  
March 2001

## **National Advisory Panel**

Listed here are 22 experienced leaders in higher education with titles as of 1999 who agreed to serve as an informal advisory panel to the author. They are included among the 112 individuals who were interviewed. Their help is very much appreciated, but they are in no way responsible for the observations in this text.

Ms. Juanita Baranco, Regent and former Chair  
Georgia Higher Education System

Joseph W. Cox, Chancellor  
Oregon University System

Gordon K. Davies, President  
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

William C. Friday, President Emeritus  
The University of North Carolina System

Elaine Hairston, Chancellor Emerita  
Ohio Board of Regents

Adam W. Herbert, Chancellor  
State University System of Florida

Larry Isaak, Chancellor  
North Dakota Board of Higher Education

D. Bruce Johnstone, Professor of Higher Education  
State University of New York at Buffalo, and former Chancellor, SUNY

Clark Kerr, President Emeritus  
University of California

Donald N. Langenberg, Chancellor  
University System of Maryland

Thomas D. Layzell, Commissioner  
Mississippi Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning

Arthur Levine, President  
Teachers College, Columbia University

Terrence J. MacTaggart, Chancellor  
University of Maine System

James H. McCormick, Chancellor  
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education

James R. Mingle, Executive Director  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

John Morning, Trustee  
The City University of New York and Wilberforce University  
Chairman, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

Aims McGuinness, Board member and former Chair  
The State Colleges in Colorado

Richard Novak, Director of Public Sector Programs  
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

Allan W. Ostar  
President Emeritus, American Association of State Colleges and Universities  
Senior Associate, Academic Search Services

Charles B. Reed, Chancellor  
The California State University System

The Honorable Robert W. Scott  
Former Governor, State of North Carolina  
Former President, North Carolina Community College System

Kala M. Stroup, Commissioner  
Missouri Department of Higher Education

## About the Author

E. K. Fretwell Jr. has worked in system leadership positions for over 40 years. Currently Chancellor Emeritus of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, which he headed for ten years, he was previously president of State University of New York College at Buffalo. He was interim president of the University of Massachusetts five-campus system, and interim president of the University of North Florida. Earlier he served in central administration roles as Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education in New York State and as Dean for Academic Development in the Chancellor's Office at the City University of New York. He taught at Teachers College, Columbia University and at the University of California at Berkeley. His recent writing includes *The Interim Presidency* (Association of Governing Boards, 1995), and *Wise Moves in Hard Times: Creating and Managing Resilient Colleges and Universities* (David Leslie, senior author) (Jossey-Bass, 1996).

**Appendix C**  
**Chancellor/President**  
**Principles, Expectations and Commitments**  
**(from Chancellor Stephen R. Portch, Head of the University System of Georgia)\***

1. **The President should not surprise the Chancellor.**  
The Chancellor shall not surprise the President.
2. **The President should inform the Chancellor of substantive written (cc: all correspondence) or oral contacts with Regents and Legislators.**  
The Chancellor shall inform the Presidents of all substantive contacts with Regents and legislators concerning their institutions.
3. **The President should not conduct policy or budget end-runs without the Chancellor's approval; to do so with budget items will result in a reduced general allocation.**  
The Chancellor shall be open, fair, and reasonable in supporting budget initiatives.
4. **The President shall see all budget allocations, policy initiatives, and items concerning your institution in draft form prior to submission to the Board of Regents.**  
The Chancellor shall entertain the occasional request for changes to these draft documents.
5. **The President shall have increased autonomy, responsibility, and flexibility.**  
The Chancellor shall hold you accountable.
6. **The President should provide the Chancellor an annual accomplishments and goals statement.**  
The Chancellor shall use this document as the basis for annual evaluations.
7. **The President shall be responsible for sound personnel practices, affirmative action accomplishments, good fiscal management, and nurturing a positive educational environment.**  
The Chancellor shall provide access to any expertise needed in these areas.
8. **The President shall be the institutional voice on all items.**  
The Chancellor shall not intrude in campus matters without the involvement of the President.
9. **The President should continue professional growth.**  
The Chancellor shall insure such opportunities exist.
10. **The President should take vacations.**  
The Chancellor shall not intrude on your vacations.

\*Chancellor Portch has generously granted permission for this inclusion.

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## Appendix E

### Ten Suggestions for Higher Education System Heads

1. Choose carefully the system in which you would like to work. Size up in advance the nature of the working relationships you might have with the current board leadership. Contemplate how the board might change and how you could be of maximum value in stimulating excellent board performance. Is there a real chance to reaffirm and/or sharpen the system's mission statement? Ask important questions before you sign up, but know that the board that hires you will be a different board within a few years.
2. Arrange for a warm-up period before you start work as system head. Don't start tired. Get in touch with and visit established heads of other systems that are somewhat like yours and who are willing to make candid, off-the-record suggestions. "Shadow" one or more, if at all possible. Build these experiences into a network with which you can get in touch instantly and privately. Find and use one or more mentors.
3. Never surprise the board, the governor, or the legislature. Keep board members posted but don't plague them with dinky details. Encourage them to back you up on sticky issues.
4. Get to know the legislative culture. Talk eye-to-eye with public officials. Remember that they were elected. Never talk down to them or even seem to do so. Respect their knowledge and their responsibilities. Seek mutual interests to improve the state's economic vitality and quality of life. Strive for consensus where possible, but never compromise your integrity. Stay constantly vigilant.
5. Realize that the job is preponderantly outside work. Appropriate delegation of some duties is essential. Be ready and able to sell the system's achievements to your various publics. Tell them what the system and its campuses are doing for them. Simultaneously practice the habit of skilled listening. Provide for constant input of ideas. Use your best judgment in determining how to use those ideas.
6. Identify and prioritize major goals. Get the right results whenever possible by persuasion. Develop and use enough but not too many policies and centrally-mandated procedures. Try to put campuses in a win-win situation.
7. Develop and nurture excellent campus heads. Expect action, ingenuity, accountability, and loyalty. Shape a central office staff that is relatively lean but still has reasonable depth. Delegate authority but do it carefully. Anticipate making central staff changes if needed. Take good care of all your people.
8. Know your campuses---their actualities and their potentialities. Visit them and consider the unique possibilities of each. Always recognize the significant role of each campus head. Lead and suggest, but don't meddle.

9. Look for outcomes. Be able to show specific signs of performance and achievement by the system and by all campuses. At least once a year reread your inaugural address, not only to check fidelity, but also to look ahead. Consider doing an annual or biennial “report card” for widespread distribution. Do this in such a way that the total system becomes more than the sum of its parts. But remember always that the system is not an end in itself.
  
10. Take care of yourself as a person, in terms of mind, body, and spirit. Don’t take yourself too seriously. Develop a disciplined sense of humor and use it. Remember it can be a lonesome job that has no cohesive and consistent constituency. Make in-service education for yourself a high priority. Keep up to date on issues, trends, and tools. Never complain publicly, but learn how to unburden yourself in quiet ways. Grow on the job. Take sufficient time off for personal renewal, and let off-job experiences enhance your strengths.