Michael N. Bastedo is an assistant professor in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan. He was a policy analyst with the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education from 1996-98. Thanks to those who commented on earlier drafts of this work, especially Ann Austin, Patricia J. Gumport, Marvin Peterson, William G. Tierney, Steve Weiland, and the participants at the CHEPA Research Forum on Institutional Governance in Santa Fe. Funding for this research was provided by the Spencer Foundation, whose support is gratefully appreciated. Comments welcome. Address: 610 E. University, 2108C SEB, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109; phone: 734.272.7619; fax: 734.764.2510; email: bastedo@umich.edu.


**Metapolicy: Institutional Change and the Rationalization of Public Higher Education**

**ABSTRACT**

This article develops the concept of metapolicy, or the predominant theory of action that aligns policy development in a given domain, to understand policymaking for public higher education. A metapolicy approach stands in stark contrast to traditional methods of policy analysis, in that it addresses cases where policy directions are taken for granted by policymakers and traditional interest groups lack influence or power. Through the use of case study analysis, metapolicy is used to understand the increasing rationalization of state education policy and its consequences for institutions and state governance. The study concludes that metapolicy is a useful conceptual construct for understanding policymaking in systems where there is widespread, bipartisan agreement on appropriate directions for policy. Possibilities for using the metapolicy concept to study educational policy and other forms of organizational change are offered.
"Paradoxically, the single most serious problem facing the understanding of higher education – and hence public attitudes and public policies – may well be common sense. Very persuasive and appealing common sense."

--Gordon C. Winston, Williams College, 1997

National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education

The scholarship of higher education governance has largely attended to the structure of state governing boards, which have undergone pendulum swings from increasing centralization to increasing decentralization (Berdahl, 1971; Marcus, 1997; McLendon, 2003a; 2003b). Empirical research has thus tried to understand the relationship between state governance structures and policy development (Richardson, et al., 1999; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Martinez, 2002). Another line of research, one that has been all too rarely undertaken, has examined the perspectives of policymakers, legislators, and governors regarding higher education policy (Eulau & Quinley, 1970; Richardson, et al, 1999; Martinez, 1999; Ruppert, 1996; 2001). As yet, however, these studies have not yet revealed a consistent understanding of the underlying theories of action driving state policymaking for public higher education, or
Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs and values of policymakers and associated changes in policy and governance suggests an in-depth case study approach (Chrispeels, 1997; Clark, 2001; Young, 1999). In 1995, Massachusetts appointed a new chairman to its Board of Higher Education that was determined to overhaul a system that was widely believed to be illegitimate and adrift. Rapid adjustments were made in both policy and board organization, resulting in a bewildering set of changes at multiple levels. Many characterized these changes as a new trend in activist governance in public higher education, but few could make sense of the broad array of changes that were occurring over a short period of time. Key questions emerged: How should we understand this overwhelming, discontinuous change in policymaking? What were the key assumptions underlying these policies and how did the organizational structure change to support it?

To analyze the underlying assumptions and organizational structure that emerge in education reform, a new conceptual anchor called *metapolicy* is developed as an analytical framework. Interviews with a broad array of actors in Massachusetts, including board members, board staff, campus presidents, and unionized faculty revealed a consistent set
of organizational logics that describe the changes derived from activist policymaking. It is revealed that radical organizational change has led to an important set of institutional changes, particularly geared toward the rationalization of higher education policy, that have broad implications for state policymaking. After discussion of this new framework and the findings that emerged, I will probe the usefulness of this conceptual framework for studying other problems in state policymaking from both macro and micro perspectives.

A metapolicy approach to understanding educational policy stands in stark contrast to traditional, political science models of state policymaking, which emphasize policy process models, social conflict, incrementalism, and interest articulation (e.g., Baldridge, 1971; see also McLendon, 2003a). While emerging models in this tradition provide new theoretical and conceptual approaches, such as punctuated equilibrium, garbage can, and state power frameworks, all emphasize endemic conflict in political systems (McLendon, 2003a; Pusser & Ordorika, 2002; Slaughter, 1990). Indeed, interest group conflict is so well established in these models as to approach disciplinary dominance (DiMaggio, 1988). These models lose their explanatory usefulness, however, in cases where there are widespread and even taken-for-granted assumptions about the appropriate direction for policy across a wide range of influential and
powerful actors in the policymaking environment. In these cases, interest groups that oppose these policy directions may exist, but they lack influence due to a lack of access to power and/or internal conflict over priorities and goals. To understand cases where a single logic for policymaking predominates, a metapolicy approach is more effective.

**Metapolicy: Toward a New Conception of State Policymaking**

Although the concept of metapolicy has yet to be fully articulated, it is rooted in earlier work in public policy and institutional theory. In policy analysis, metapolicy has been understood as simply policymaking, or “policy on how to make policy” (Dror, 1971, p. 74). A more sophisticated definition is provided by Giandomenico Majone, who uses the term “metapolicy” to refer to “the ideas, conceptualizations, and proposals advanced by policy actors, analysts, academics, and bureaucratic experts who share an active interest in that policy” (Majone, 1989, p. 147).

While Majone’s conception is useful to understand the environment for policy analysis, it describes a market of ideas in which all ideas are equally valid and powerful. In contrast, this paper examines the existence of a single metapolicy that may be inductively derived from the policies that were developed in a particular case, and that may be revealed and
articulated by questioning the policymakers and staff who reproduced them in policy after policy. Thus, for this study metapolicy is defined as the predominant theory of action that serves as a common thread aligning policy development in a given domain. This provides a greater role for leadership, power, and strategic action, and describes the particular agents who create policy with consequences for the higher education system.

The concept of a metapolicy is consistent with the institutional tradition, which emphasizes the powerful and adaptive role of norms, values, and beliefs in the process of institutionalization (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Recently, the concept of institutional logics has become a popular means for scholars to articulate the dominant theories of action underlying institutional processes. Institutional logics are the “belief systems and associated practices that predominate in an organizational field” (Scott, et al., 2000, p. 170). These are the “organizing principles” that organizations use when making decisions within a specified arena (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248). Analysis of institutional logics is increasingly common in the organizational literature. Scholars have recently examined the role of institutional logics in changing conceptions of the higher education publishing industry (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), on performance assessment in Canadian
Institutional logics convey the idea that there is a single dominant idea or approach to a policy system, which is an accurate description of a metapolicy. But metapolicies are also a template for action, a set of characteristics that identify the theory of action to be used in policy development. In this way, the work of Greenwood and Hinings (1993) is very helpful. They develop the concept of an archetype, “a set of structures and systems that consistently embodies a single interpretive scheme” (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1053). An archetype is an array of multiple, interrelated features that need to cohere in order to provide direction for strategic action by the organization. The development of an archetype is the result of intraorganizational processes, as advantaged groups or individuals consolidate their political position and gain control over organizational resources. Metapolicies can thus be analyzed in a dual manner. At once they are a logic that is compelling to policy actors in the organization, and a set of organizational characteristics that have adapted to support the emerging logic.
In the construction of public systems of higher education, the predominant metapolicy has been to differentiate the functions of the layers of public campuses to increase system efficiency and improve the fit between students and the college they attend (Clark, 1983; Kerr, 1963). In the functionalist conception, an efficient university system will place the best students in research universities, honors programs, and elite liberal arts colleges. Lower performing students will be admitted to community colleges, where they can prove their worth and receive instruction that is consistent with their academic preparation. Those who do prove their worth are then encouraged to move on to the baccalaureate degree through efficient transfer and articulation agreements with four-year colleges. This concentration of talent is believed to increase productivity, as the best and brightest benefit by working together to increase learning and research output (Clark, 1995; Trow 1984).

From a theoretical perspective, this functionalist approach can be understood as a rationalization process that seeks to closely tie the actions of higher education with its stated objectives and goals. Rationalization is often seen as the centerpiece of decision making by societies in the modern era from both historical and sociological perspectives (Meyer, 1983; 1994; Toulmin, 1990). Substantively, rationalization seeks to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and
standardization in policymaking and organizational structures. Because rationalization is such a highly regarded goal of policymaking, however, it serves the dual role of conferring legitimacy upon the policymaking enterprise and those who promote it. As a result, rationalization can become an end in and of itself, independent of stated goals, needs, and consequences.

Study Methodology

To investigate the role of metapolicy in the rationalization of higher education policy, I have identified a strategic site, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, from 1995 to 1999. A strategic site was selected because of the emergent nature of the phenomena to be studied and the complex and interrelated nature of the research question (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education constitutes an “extreme case” of theoretical interest, due to the board’s radical shift from a regulatory to an activist metapolicy in December 1995. It is also a clear case where systemic reform was attempted in higher education, as demonstrated through the wide array of policies to increase admissions standards, reduce remedial education, cut
tuition and fees, eliminate academic programs, and other policies
developed and implemented during the 1995-1999 period.

Interviews were conducted by the author with a wide range of
participants, both within the Board of Higher Education and with elite
actors in the system: legislators, legislative staff, executive office staff,
system officers, lobbyists, college presidents, and senior administrative
staff members. Interviews were conducted in the participant’s offices in
Boston and at campuses throughout the state. Ultimately, 21 interviews
were completed, taped, and transcribed verbatim. A rich array of archival
documents, internal memoranda, letters, policy revisions, system reports,
and budget data were made available to me. I also utilize secondary
literature, media reports, and independent analyses to further develop the
cases. The unit of analysis is the system board, but particular attention is
paid to the board’s relationships both with campus actors and powerful
actors in the external environment, particularly those connected with the
legislature and governor’s office.

The interview protocol was developed to operationalize concepts
driven from the conceptual framework. It was important to understand
how a metapolicy may be operating within the case without leading
informants to that conclusion or cherry-picking data to support it. It was
also salient to have standards that distinguished situations in which
metapolicy was not in evidence from those in which a metapolicy was clearly operating. This was done by focusing informants’ attention on specific policies that were formulated during the case, and then asking broad questions about the integration of policies and probing the extent to which there was broad consensus among powerful actors in the environment. The coding scheme consisted of both concepts driven from the conceptual framework of the study and new codes generated through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus the study utilized both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis.

The interview data were triangulated with documents, memos, media articles, and editorials to judge the extent to which these were confirmed by the interview data (Mathison, 1988). This was followed by an intensive search for disconfirming evidence that would mitigate against the emerging propositions developed from the axial and selective coding process (Strauss, 1987). Although the author’s conclusions are clearly identified, any disconfirming evidence is included throughout the paper to allow the reader to draw her own conclusions.
Organizational Characteristics

Massachusetts is a state with a long history of turmoil in governance and state policymaking for public higher education (Crosson, 1996). Governance structures were radically overhauled in 1965, 1980, and 1991, with no appreciable improvement in the confidence of legislators or governors. Numerous scandals, declining enrollment and academic standards, and major budgetary problems marred the reputation of the system. In 1991, the Higher Education Coordinating Council was created, to be renamed the Board of Higher Education (BHE). This board has governing level authority over the state’s nine comprehensive colleges (called state colleges) and its 15 community colleges. The BHE has only coordinating level authority over the University of Massachusetts (UMass) and its five campuses. The 11 voting members of the BHE, all appointed by the governor, are responsible for the hiring of a chancellor who serves as CEO of the system. Stanley Z. Koplik served as chancellor until he died unexpectedly in 1999; he was succeeded by his deputy, Judith I. Gill.

In 1995, James F. Carlin was asked to chair the board by Governor William Weld, a liberal Republican. Carlin had a long history in Massachusetts politics, serving as transportation secretary and the head of a number of state agencies for several Democratic governors. Carlin
also served as a trustee of the University of Massachusetts and chaired its finance board during the late 1980s and early 1990s. After a long period of supporting rapid increases in tuition and fees after the collapse of Governor Dukakis’s “Massachusetts Miracle,” Carlin came to believe that public higher education needed drastic reform. After his successful work heading the “Democrats for Weld” during the governor’s reelection campaign, Carlin had an opportunity to make his ideas a reality.

Carlin would lead the BHE in the development and implementation of a new metapolicy for Massachusetts public higher education. While prior boards were primarily bureaucratic, with their logics and authority coming from statutes and regulations, the BHE relied upon charismatic leadership and widespread public support to move the system in the desired direction (Table 1). Thus the BHE was transformed into a political organization, with a small, flexible, loyal staff that could quickly meet the needs of an active board. The executive office of the governor, which had been a persistent critic of the state board, was transformed into the board’s biggest political supporter, and relationships with the legislature became a high priority. The news media was a key source of support for
the board, and the board chairman and other board members were routinely available for interviews with journalists and editorial boards. In combination with policies that many in the state thought were long overdue, the result was a long series of positive stories covering BHE policy and laudatory editorials of the new direction for the board.

The board’s relationship with campuses changed dramatically after 1995. Where once presidents sought to manage the board’s heavy regulatory demands, subsequently the presidents needed to meet the accountability demands of an activist BHE. The board increasingly utilized a “carrot and stick” approach to policymaking that provided incentives, including millions of dollars in grant money, to campuses that collaborated to meet board goals and comply with board policies. Campuses that failed to cooperate got the stick, up to and including visit from the state auditor and angry phone calls from the chairman. Thus, while the campuses had somewhat greater autonomy, standards were raised to ensure their compliance with board policy. Progress in meeting these standards would then be published in biennial performance measurement reports to the legislature.

—Insert Table 2 about here—
These new organizational processes were put in place to support rapid developments in BHE policy (Table 2). Admissions standards, which had been set by campuses de facto prior to 1996, were now set by the BHE and monitored strictly for implementation. High school GPA requirements were raised and exceptions to the policy were progressively reduced. Remedial education, which was largely ignored under the Board of Regents, was limited to 5% of the incoming class at four-year colleges. Student tuition and fees were lowered for six consecutive years, for an overall cut of nearly a third. Academic programs were forced to undergo program productivity reviews, leading to the termination of 52 programs in 1996. These policies are reviewed in Table 2 and discussed in further detail below.

Institutional Logics

Four core elements of the metapolicy for higher education in Massachusetts can be identified: mission differentiation, student opportunity, system development, and managerialism. While these elements are treated as distinct for purposes of analysis, in reality these elements are highly interrelated. It is notable that most key policies cut
across two or more of the main elements. Indeed, the degree to which a policy cuts across multiple areas may help to determine its success or failure. The interdependence of these elements creates a situation where the whole is more than the sum of its parts, because as a whole they represent a coherent vision and direction for higher education that aligns closely with the values of those in power.

These four elements are discussed as the highly legitimate logics that influence the governance of public higher education systems. In the field of higher education policy, these elements have become increasingly institutionalized over time, to the point where they have become taken for granted among policymakers. Although these elements are treated largely as institutionalized logics for this analysis, they can also be seen as instruments that direct organizational action. For example, while system development is a value, it is also a means by which policies are implemented and communicated. Similarly, as we saw in the previous section, while managerialism serves as a strongly held value for Carlin and board members, it also provided a structure for policy implementation. Thus while the elements have organizational characteristics that were discussed in the previous sections (the “carrot and stick” approach, for example), this dualistic role is separated for the purposes of analysis.
Mission Differentiation

Differentiation is a fundamental design issue for all public systems of higher education (Clark, 1983). Over time, the various functions that a modern higher education system must serve need to be allocated to various institutions in a way that is perceived to be efficient and effective. Although each system of higher education is unique in some respect, every system has three layers of higher education organized into segments: a university system that offers all degrees and focuses on research; a comprehensive system that offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees and focuses on teaching; and a community college system that offers associate’s degrees and training certificate, and focuses on vocational education and baccalaureate transfer.

It is widely accepted among those in higher education that this is the most efficient way for a state to allocate functions among multiple campuses (Clark, 1983; Trow, 1984). It is also conventional wisdom that there is a certain degree of unnecessary duplication of functions that results in inefficiency and excessive costs. Thus, it is a logical extension that further mission differentiation will lead to greater efficiency by increasing the fit between students and the campuses that serve them. There is a strong belief that although “all campuses cannot be all things to
all people,” the state can serve all needs if the campuses work together as an efficient system (Koplik, 1994).

The policies enacted during the Carlin administration engaged in three forms of differentiation: vertical, horizontal, and internal. *Vertical differentiation* enhances distinctions between the three segments of public higher education. Standards policies like admissions standards and remedial education serve this role, by providing a gatekeeping function within the system that ensures that only students with a particular kind of academic preparation are permitted to enter the elite levels of the system. These policies sort and allocate students among the various campuses independent of student aspirations and ambitions, which would lead to a greater diversity of preparation in the student body and dilute the perception of excellence.

Policies that addressed mission, and mission creep in particular, also created vertical differentiation. “Mission creep” is a term used among higher education policymakers to denote campuses that reach beyond their stated mission into those of the segment above them. Generally, this means comprehensive universities that want to offer doctoral degrees and engage in more research, and community colleges that want to offer baccalaureate degrees, usually in areas of advanced vocational and technical training that tend to be ignored by more “academic” four-year
colleges. The BHE moved swiftly to keep campus ambitions in check, by reaffirming the superior position of the University of Massachusetts regarding doctoral education and by forcing one comprehensive state college to remove university ambitions from its mission statement. It was believed that mission creep would create further duplication of functions resulting in greater costs and inefficiencies.

Vertical differentiation was reinforced and enhanced by access policies that encouraged students to enter the system through the community college segment. Policies like Joint Admissions, Tuition Advantage, and the Community College Access Grants (Table 2) all created financial incentives for students – particularly low-income students – to earn associate’s degrees and then transfer to four-year colleges for advanced degrees. This reinforces the community college mission as open-access institutions that provide educational and developmental opportunities for immigrants and the poor at an affordable cost.

Part and parcel of vertical differentiation is the promotion of a flagship university campus that would have the highest status and resources of any campus in the system. The performance of the flagship campus is believed to provide a “halo effect” for the whole system, with all of the campuses reflecting in the glory of the flagship. The other segments would be more focused on what they are supposed to do best:
teaching. A key to Carlin’s vision for the system was raising the stature of its flagship, UMass Amherst.

[UMass Amherst] would be an outstanding flagship university, truly outstanding: tough to get into, rigorous academically, and hopefully, over a period of time, more attractive... The state colleges would be more intensive in their teaching, they would be more demanding academically, they would be slightly more career-oriented... The community colleges are the point of entry and I’d have the community colleges sort of doing what they’re doing right now but a lot more of it. This is where people who are really poor, single parents, immigrants, get their first shot at higher ed. and I think there ought to be a lot more emphasis on the community colleges.

Thus, vertical differentiation is not a stand-alone tactic or strategy; it is part of a coherent vision for reforming higher education. In Massachusetts, there was always a particularly strong contrast between its world-class private higher education system – with over 50 private colleges in Boston alone – and its public higher education system, which was consistently poorly funded and castigated by the state’s political leadership. In a private college environment like Massachusetts, it was key to establish
elite functions to legitimize the public higher education system and thus to build its stature and attract resources. Concentration of talent is thus one of main justifications for vertical differentiation. Attracting and retaining the best students and faculty at the upper level of the system requires institutions that are designed to meet their needs.

Policies that forced campuses to focus their priorities and resources facilitated horizontal differentiation. These types of policies diversify the campuses contained within a particular segment, and particularly impacted the comprehensive state colleges. The mission review process asked campuses to establish a set of institutional priorities that were substantially different from the priorities of its sister institutions and that reflected the needs of its local community. Campuses were also required to identify specific academic programs of strength that would be a priority for campus resources and attention. These “programs of excellence” would make each campus unique, and would be designed to attract students from throughout the state, thereby effectively meeting state and public needs.

Academic program termination policies also facilitated horizontal differentiation. Eliminating programs with a low number of majors was an attempt to force campuses to focus resources on programs that had strong enrollment and resources. Increasing the focus and priorities of
each campus helped to diversify them from each other, emphasizing their role as a unit in the system rather than as an independent entity driven by internal ambitions or conceptions. Similarly, the attempt at creating a “charter college” or “Vanguard College” was designed to encourage radical change on a campus by freeing its management from the constraints imposed by state regulations and collective bargaining contracts. Faculty would lose the protections of unionization, but would gain the opportunity to earn more income based on performance.

Finally, there were policies that encouraged *internal differentiation*. Unlike vertical and horizontal differentiation, which are system level elements, internal differentiation creates substantive distinctions among students, faculty, and academic programs within a particular campus. Although it is well known that there is an informal structure that gives more power and resources to certain groups within the university (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974), it is gradually becoming official policy to treat certain groups differently based on their preparation or productivity. These policies thus facilitate a formal hierarchy of students, faculty, and academic programs within the university.

The obvious example of internal differentiation was the development of a “Commonwealth College” at UMass Amherst and a network of associated honors programs placed on campuses in all three
segments. An honors program had existed at UMass Amherst for many years, but the development of Commonwealth College provided stature and resources to the program. Full scholarships for high school valedictorians and salutatorians helped to attract students that normally would have attended private colleges. Similar scholarships for the top graduates of the state’s community colleges were designed to have the same effect. These students hold a privileged position on the campus, having academic and financial opportunities not available to other students. This was rarely recognized as a problem by board members. “What’s wrong,” said one board member, “with a basketball team that’s predominantly black and an honors college that’s predominantly white?” (Kirp, 2003, p. 25).

Internal differentiation also occurs through the identification of flagship academic programs. Although it rarely occurred in practice, the intent of the board was to reallocate resources and attention to particular academic programs on each campus, so that those students would attract students from around the state who wanted to attend the “best” academic program in the state. State employers, for their part, would know where to turn to hire the “best” graduates in a particular field. Inevitably, these students and faculty will hold a privileged position on campus, with more
power, position, and status than their colleagues. With this would come greater expectations for productivity and a greater focus on research.

**Student Opportunity**

The second element of the metapolicy – and the element that both board members and board staff believed was most important – was student opportunity. This primarily addresses the innovative financial aid and transfer programs developed by the BHE. This includes the board aggressively reducing tuition charges at all levels of the system for six consecutive years and urging campuses to reduce fees. To encourage student transfer, the board promoted the Joint Admissions program, which allowed community college students to be simultaneously admitted the four-year state college of their choice, thus circumventing the regular transfer admissions process if they earned a community college GPA of 2.5. This was combined with the Tuition Advantage Program, which provided a one-third tuition waiver at the four-year college for Joint Admissions students who earned a 3.0 GPA. Finally, the board implemented a program that creatively combined state and federal financial aid sources in a way that ensured that community college students from low-income families could attend at virtually no cost.
For the board office, the Joint Admissions program is win-win. Students who enroll at community college can pass through the first two years of undergraduate education at a lower cost to themselves and to the state. Students with remedial needs can take those courses repeatedly at a lower cost as well, without impacting the admissions standards of the four-year colleges. Irrespective of their preparation, students will be given every opportunity to earn an associate’s degree and to transfer to the baccalaureate. Because more students can be accommodated in the community college system, it is believed that ultimately more students will attain the bachelor’s degree, including minority students. The board’s position was supported in a 1996 editorial in the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*.

The arrangement allows the state colleges to demand respectable standards and pursue academic rigor without permanently barring the door to applicants who, for whatever reason, have holes in their educational background... The state Board of Higher Education has concluded, properly, that the large number of incoming state college and university students who needed catch-up work were an unacceptable drag on the institutions' resources and academic aspirations.
This element of the metapolicy expands beyond financial aid and transfer, however. Through nearly every policy passed during the Carlin administration, there was a deep concern for students, and positive student impact was often used to justify new initiatives. Commonwealth College, for example, was used as a means to produce a “halo effect” for the system, but it was also seen as way to provide a public option for the state’s highest performing students. If a student entered Commonwealth College instead of a private school, she was far more likely to remain in the state and participate in the state’s economy and knowledge base. Charter colleges too were seen as a way to emancipate the productivity of faculty and administrators in order to serve students more effectively.

Programs to enhance student access and opportunity were often leavened with standards. Enhanced access was built into part of the system – e.g., the community colleges – but increasingly restricted at the upper levels of the system. In addition, the access policies themselves were often combined with standards. The Joint Admissions and Tuition Advantage programs required a 2.5 and 3.0 GPA, respectively. Full scholarship programs were created for high school valedictorians and salutatorians to attend the state colleges and UMass, and a similar program was implemented for the top community college students. The
Stanley Z. Koplik Certificate of Mastery, named in honor of Chancellor Koplik after his death, provided tuition waivers to students with high scores on the state's new high-stakes graduation exam. These policies combined to create a burgeoning merit-aid program in the state, mirroring similar changes elsewhere.

Nonetheless, cash grants for students nearly quadrupled during the Carlin administration, greatly increasing access for the state’s low-income and minority students. Carlin’s concern for access was stated repeatedly during his term in office; he saw access to education as the solution to a number of social and economic ills, including the country’s racial divide (Carlin, 1997a). Yet Carlin was routinely called an enemy of students who was the agent of the Weld government’s antipathy toward public education. “I’m convinced that the ultimate goal during that time was to do as much damage to the state college system in Massachusetts as was possible,” one faculty union leader said. “That’s what drove the academic policies, that’s what drove the fiscal policies.” In reality, Carlin was to the left of the public on the issue of access, facing down complaints from the state’s papers that he was being too profligate with taxpayers’ dollars, and that his policies would undermine student motivation to succeed. Carlin never accepted this, arguing that public colleges were the only place where students born in poverty could raise themselves to a better life.
Politically, a truly conservative or Republican approach to higher education would never have sold in Massachusetts, a state dominated by the Democratic party. In addition, the legitimacy of Carlin’s policies depended upon them being accepted by a broad spectrum of policy actors, from the state’s Republican governors to the Legislature’s Democratic leadership. The board itself contained a number of Democratic members, not the least of whom was Carlin himself. Carlin’s success was dependent on strong, bipartisan support. Also widely ignored by faculty was Carlin’s role in delivering large increases in state appropriations during his chairmanship. State appropriations increased 48.5% during the five-year period from FY1996 to FY2001 (Palmer & Gillilan, 2001). Over that period, Massachusetts ranked fourth in higher education appropriations increases among the fifty states.

System Coordination

If access was the predominant theme of Carlin’s conception for higher education reform, system development was the predominant theme for the BHE Chancellor, Stanley Z. Koplik. From his appointment in 1993, Koplik hammered the system concept for each policy that he helped to develop. Koplik laid out his agenda for the system in a 1994 plan entitled,
“Using Coordination and Collaboration to Address Change” (Koplik, 1994). This plan foreshadowed the features of what would be identified as the Carlin agenda, including financial aid, admissions standards, academic programs, and performance measures. To be sure, Carlin took many of these ideas two steps further – review of academic programs became academic program termination; examination of financial aid programs became free community college education for low-income students – but nonetheless, Koplik had an agenda of his own that strongly influenced Carlin and his agenda. Their essential agreement on substantive issues allowed them to work together, despite sharply divergent personalities.

Koplik’s justifications for board policies nearly always centered on the concept of system, particularly when he talked with the media. A lack of policy on admissions standards and remedial education, for example, simply made for an inefficient system. “To take ill-prepared students directly from high school into the state colleges or university is not to run an efficient system,” he said in 1993. Koplik stated his goals even more starkly in 1996, when discussing the board’s new policy on remedial education. “Students needing extensive remediation will be encouraged to apply to community colleges,” he said. “And in the end, you may not reduce remediation, but you will improve the strength of the system” [emphasis added]. Thus, increasing the vertical differentiation of the
system, while not demonstrably providing educational improvements, instead is designed to project an image of efficiency and effectiveness to resource providers. Koplik received credit for pushing the concept of system in Massachusetts from many, including one UMass administrator. “I think he saw a system much more effectively than anyone’s been able to see a system: the idea of twenty-nine campuses at different levels all working together and in support of one another to move as many students toward a higher education degree as possible, in the most effective way and using resources effectively, and elevating the image of higher ed.”

Access policies promoted the system concept. Financial aid funds were disproportionately directed to the community colleges, where the majority of low-income, minority, and immigrant students were enrolled. The Joint Admissions and Tuition Advantage programs were developed and promoted to move those students up and through the system once those students received their degrees. In many ways, student transfer from the 2-year to the 4-year system demonstrates that the interconnected parts are working together to produce more than they could alone. The baccalaureate transfer rate is thus a key indicator of the degree of system development in a state. It is also a demonstration that equal opportunity is being provided to all students in the system, even if at first they are barred from attending its flagship campuses.
Academic policies also played a salient role in developing the Massachusetts system. Distributing academic programs efficiently among existing campuses demonstrates that while each campus cannot be “all things to all people,” the system can serve all of the state’s needs if the campuses work in concert. The same is true for policies that restricted doctoral education to UMass and kept baccalaureate education out of the community colleges. Developing Commonwealth College and its coordinated network of honors program in turn demonstrated that there was a place for the state’s highest-achieving students in the public system. Almost relentlessly, board policies communicated the ideas of system, coordination, and efficiency.

Managerialism

Finally, Carlin in particular saw the locus of reform lying in developing a managerial philosophy for system governance that would give presidents the power and discretion to make necessary changes. To Carlin, there was a clear cause-and-effect chain from presidential impotence to rising costs in general and student charges in particular. A lack of leadership from the top leads to “layer after layer of personnel” at the top levels of the campus and faculty dominion of academic decisions
that place huge demands on the budget. This leads to endless
competition for resources, as presidents spend half of their time
fundraising and inevitably raise tuition and fees at rates far above inflation
(Carlin, 1999).

In an infamous speech to the Boston Chamber of Commerce in
1997, Carlin stated this philosophy succinctly. “It is the job of the
president to manage all aspects of a college or university and be
accountable for and responsible for measurable results” (Carlin, 1997b).
The key to giving presidents the power and discretion they needed was to
eliminate faculty tenure, which Carlin believed gave professors too much
power over administrators and made it impossible for them to make
changes to the academic structure of the university. Once presidents had
power, trustees could hold them accountable for campus performance
using measurable performance indicators, which would lead to
demonstrable improvement. Measurability was absolutely key. “He had
wisdom in terms of choosing real hard targets that you could quantify and
point to as having achieved: numbers in admission to show academic
quality, numbers in terms of affordability,” one BHE staffer said. “So I
think you’ve got the numbers to show that [the policies] are working.”

Although this managerial philosophy was found throughout Carlin’s
rhetoric – it was usually the second thing mentioned after student tuition
and fees – only a few policies substantively reflected this mindset. Early in Carlin’s tenure, campus boards of trustees were given the power to set presidential salaries, due to his belief that president’s needed to be paid a market wage in order to attract the best talent. Performance measurement through the *Condition of Higher Education* report was a way in which measurable indicators were used to assess campus performance, but ultimately little was connected to these measures. Most prominent was Carlin’s attempt to eliminate tenure through collective bargaining negotiations with the state college faculty. After three years of negotiations, the board – after Carlin’s departure – compromised on a system of post-tenure review.

Based on Carlin’s rhetoric and bombastic style, he was often accused of trying “to run higher education like a business.” This is mostly inaccurate. Certainly Carlin ran his board like he would run a corporate board, assuming that he was in charge of both meetings and their agenda. He also believed that business practices, such as insisting on measurable outcomes and focusing on customers (students), would be useful to apply in the higher education context. “In business, you don’t confuse effort with results,” he said in 1999, after he decided to retire. “If you’re not realistic in business, you go broke. You have to see things how they are, not how you wish they were” (McGrory, 1999, p. B1).
Yet if one examines the substance of the policies developed during this period, they were far more often representative of traditional policymaking for a higher education system: access, excellence, and mission. Carlin himself is adamant that he never wanted to turn higher education into a business.

I never talked about running it like a business. A lot of business guys doing what I've been doing would say, “We're going to run this thing like a business.” You don't run government like a business. They're two different animals. You don't have the discipline of the marketplace, you don't have a situation where competitors are producing better products at lower prices. I really believe that taxpayer-supported institutions ought to try to be as effective and efficient as they can. They ought to try. I'm not saying they should be more effective; they should try to be more effective.

The activist board agenda was to take existing conception of higher education policymaking further than they had ever been taken before. These policies were thus a logical extension of existing conceptions of system design rather than imposing a new logic to policy development. It is notable that during this period, there was not a single attempt by Carlin
or the board to address issues of workforce development in the state, or to privatize any services, administrative or otherwise. This surprised board member Peter Nessen.

I think Carlin did certain things reluctantly that in business he would have done without a moment’s concern... For example, with privatization, you could have seen the Maritime Academy spin out in some fashion or the Mass. College of Art because they really don’t fit the mold. And, as a matter of fact, there was some energy internally, by them, to do so and he never wanted to play with that much.

Indeed, under a new board chairman and governor, the Massachusetts College of Art was made a “charter college” that has been relieved from state regulations in return for decreased state support over the long term.

Discussion

The single case study, even one as in-depth as this one, often has limited applicability to other cases. For a case study to be useful, it must provide analytical leverage to understand cases that are similarly situated,
without making the common mistake of generalizing directly to other cases. Analysis of emerging developments in public policy reveals that aspects of the metapolicy identified here, with its mix of mission differentiation, system development, student opportunity, and managerialism, has begun to extend throughout the country. SUNY, for example, approved a plan in June 2004 to test undergraduates at all of its 64 campuses in writing, critical thinking, and mathematics skills, with testing scheduled to begin in fall 2006. Virginia’s major universities are extending the charter college concept by asking the legislature to release them from regulation and designate them as “state-assisted charter universities” with increasing exemption from state rules in exchange for measurable performance and accountability standards. And Tennessee, in the face of massive budget deficits, has sharply increased admissions standards and reduced remedial education to both increase academic standards and reduce costs.

In Massachusetts, it is clear that decreasing campus autonomy and increasing access and standards have increasingly rationalized the formal structure of higher education in the state. Access and standards reinforce the legitimate process by which students are efficiently sorted among the segments of higher education while opportunities to enter the system are maintained for all. Politically, each campus is brought under the enhanced
control of state government, which helps to ensure accountability and that efforts are made to maximize the public interest.

Increasing the rationalization of the system has led to increasing legitimacy for the campuses and state policymaking for public higher education. The perception of legislators, the media, and the public is that higher education is working more efficiently and effectively at all levels. This is not a small accomplishment in a state where public higher education has always been the poor stepchild of the private sector, and where there is a long history of indifference and even outright hostility by state government.

Evidence of this accomplishment has emerged in recent years as the state faces substantial revenue shortfalls. When once higher education endured a vastly disproportionate burden of state budget cuts, good faith among legislators and executive office staff has helped to protect state appropriations to higher education. In 1996, the *Boston Globe* ran a multi-part series attacking the remedial education offered at state colleges; after the board’s subsequent policy, not a single article has appeared in state papers attacking remedial education. If this increased legitimacy can be sustained among policymakers over the long term, this will be the most compelling legacy of the BHE.
If there is any lesson to take from this study, it is that we must be vigilant about the consequences of our own “common sense.” The BHE was almost universally accused of trying to impose a business logic on the higher education system (e.g., Giroux, 2002). It is far more accurate to say that they took our existing design principles of higher education systems to their logical conclusion. The intuitive common sense of these policies – in the extent to which they promoted a “master plan” for Massachusetts public higher education – helped build the faith of policymakers in the system and its leadership. But it also helped to obscure the costs of the BHE agenda, and to make it difficult for those problems to be addressed in the future.

Finding structural solutions to the legitimacy problems of Massachusetts public higher education was a laudable and absolutely necessary goal, but it also foreclosed other values that are important to academic communities. Each choice made by the BHE exacted a price that was rarely examined or addressed. Increasing excellence exacted a price in access to the upper levels of the system; increasing access to community colleges deemphasized low-income students in the universities; and increasing mission differentiation took a toll on campus autonomy and the comprehensiveness of state colleges. Each of these decisions was compelling to a broad spectrum of actors, from board
members to legislators and op-ed columnists. Effective systems of public higher education, however, find ways to balance and enhance shared values.

Metapolicy as a Conceptual Construct

The concept of metapolicy proved to be a highly useful for understanding state policymaking in this context. Policies that seemed unrelated at first, and even contradictory, made sense once seen within the metapolicy framework. For example, observers were often puzzled that a single board could pursue both radical changes in admissions standards and remedial education policy, while simultaneously providing massive increases in financial aid that allowed poor students to attend community colleges at no cost. A metapolicy analysis provides a consistent and integrated framework to understand these apparent contradictions.

A metapolicy approach to studying educational policy provides a useful conceptual contrast to the predominant theories in political science that assume endemic group conflict and focus on interest articulation processes. Although the focus of these conceptualizations is conflict, the model is essentially idealistic in that it portrays a highly democratic
process in which key actors, while not equally powerful by any means, have some influence on the policymaking process. This is not an accurate description of cases in which those with the most power in the system, including policymakers, the news media, and the public at large, hold highly similar, taken-for-granted assumptions about appropriate policy directions.

Indeed, a metapolicy approach takes us away from a common but often misguided focus on partisan conflict over educational policy. Issues in education are often untied to raging social and economic conflicts that are high priorities for political parties. In those cases, interests are well-articulated and debated among policymakers and pundits. Subjects like higher education governance, however, are not likely to be a high priority for legislators and governors, and they do not usually generate a great deal of public interest or attention. As a result, political parties often do not have established or considered positions on these issues, and rely upon their basic assumptions and approaches to policymaking to address these issues. Cases such as these can lead to widespread, bipartisan agreement among policymakers about policy directions that make partisan approaches to political analysis far less effective.

Metapolicy is also useful in that it focuses attention on the underlying assumptions of policymaking, which are often unstated or
misunderstood. Probing these assumptions provides an opportunity to analyze the fundamental values and beliefs of those who have power in the policy system. Exposing these assumptions to public scrutiny provides opportunities for honest and informed debate about important decisions being made about the future of education in our society. An additional benefit of the metapolicy framework is that it works at both the macro and micro levels of analysis. Because metapolicy is a template, it exists at both the levels of ideas and values and at the level of organizational structure and processes. Adaptations in organizational structure that support concurrent changes in policy logics are thus an important part of the analysis. Making these connections between the macro and the micro is a vital component of modern policy analysis (Majone, 1989; McLaughlin, 1990).

Metapolicy also examines institutional changes in higher education policymaking. In this case, examining each of the factors behind institutional change leads to the conclusion that higher education policymaking in this state has become dominated by an ideology of rationalization, which has been previously discussed by scholars as the major project of modernity (Meyer, 1983; 1994; Toulmin, 1990). Rationalization serves as both a process by which objectives are more tightly linked to outcomes, and as an ideology that promotes the value of
rationalization for solving social, political, and economic problems. The institutional changes in this case, driven by a rationalized ideology that has a long history in society and in higher education itself, are thus not an entirely new or comprehensively original approach to understanding how higher education policy should be developed and implemented. We should rather think of these institutional changes as a bricolage of old and new, where parts of the old institution are reconstituted and combined with new ideas, brought together and moved forward to an extent previously unseen in the field.

The metapolicy concept has extensive applications in the study of education and social institutions more broadly. In policy, there are other metapolicies in the field that are inconsistent with the metapolicy derived here, primarily those that are market-driven. A metapolicy analysis of market-driven policy formation could provide important information about the underlying assumptions that have driven this form of policymaking and the possible implications for society. Metapolicy can also serve as a means for understanding institutional policies that are driven from a common framework, and for comprehending seemingly incongruent sets of policies or programs derived from such a metapolicy. Finally, historical analyses of metapolicies that have existed in the field of higher education could be conducted to help us understand the sources of the values
expressed in the contemporary era. All of these approaches should focus on the role of policymakers and lawmakers in the formation of policy, and on understanding their important and often competing perspectives. For those who are concerned about the declining equity of higher education, or the reduced legitimacy and respect for public colleges, a full examination of policymakers’ conceptions of the role and mission of higher education is needed.
References

[author cites omitted]


Carlin, J.F. (1997b, November 4). 'I know my campus is broken, but if I try to fix it I'll lose my job.' Invited address to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, Boston, Mass.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Board</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main political support</td>
<td>Executive branch</td>
<td>Legislative branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of board conflict</td>
<td>Legislature and Governor</td>
<td>Campus Presidents and Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of authority</td>
<td>Legal statutes</td>
<td>Public support, charismatic leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policymaking</td>
<td>By regulation</td>
<td>By standards and incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the news media</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Large staff, low pay</td>
<td>Small staff, higher pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campuses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidents</td>
<td>Low autonomy, low standards</td>
<td>High autonomy, high standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance assessment</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives for change</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 2. Selected BHE Policies, 1995-2000</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Standards</td>
<td>Minimum high school GPA for incoming students at four-year colleges raised to 3.0. Percentage of students exempted from the admissions standards cut to 10%. Data monitoring to ensure compliance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Education</td>
<td>Remedial education limited to 5% of the incoming freshman class at all four-year colleges.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Reductions</td>
<td>Tuition reduced six consecutive years from 1995-2001, for a total reduction of 32%. Fees increased, but overall reduction in student costs of 9.5% systemwide.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Admissions</td>
<td>Program that allows students to be jointly admitted to the community college and four-year campus of their choice simultaneously, providing for “seamless transfer” if they attain a 2.5 GPA at the community college.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Advantage</td>
<td>Provides a 1/3 tuition discount in the junior and senior years to students who transfer from a community college and earn a 3.0 GPA.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Colleges</td>
<td>“Free” community college tuition and fees for low-income students with family incomes below $36,000.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Review</td>
<td>Review of each institutional mission statement to align with state interests. Development of measurable campus priority statements. Use of incentive funds to push campuses to comply with board policies and priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Programs</td>
<td>Statewide review of academic programs with low enrollments, leading to the termination of 52 programs by the BHE. Statewide reviews of program in various key areas, such as computer science.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Colleges</td>
<td>Development of Commonwealth College, an honors college at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, to attract the state's highest achieving students. Promotion of the idea of “charter colleges” that are released from state regulations but are more closely monitored for performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>