ADAPTATION, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE:
HOW THREE PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES ARE RESPONDING TO THE
CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A DISSERTATION
in
Higher Education Management

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education
2016

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OLUFUNKE ABIMBOLA FONTENOT
DEDICATION

To my mother, Victoria Adunola Aliu, and my dad, Samuel Abiodun Fagbohun. I know you are cheering me from heaven. You believed in me and supported my dreams. To my mother, you are my true North, and Dad, you are my moral compass. To my son, Olaseni, and my daughter, Omotara, you inspire me to live an exemplary life; you are my greatest achievements yet. To my brother, Dr. Olufunsho Charles Fagbohun, your constant and unrelenting support for my children and me has been one of my life’s greatest gifts.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The past two years have been a journey of discovery and learning—a confirmation that our successes are never ours alone. Instead, they are enabled by the support of a community of learners; of fellow travelers along this journey; of professors and mentors who share their knowledge, expertise, and wise counsel with us; and of families who provide moral and material support. I am grateful to my chair, Dr. Mary Linda Armacost, for her guidance, patience, and quiet force of character and integrity; to Dr. Peter Garland, my second reader; and to my third reader, President Elsa Núñez, of Eastern Connecticut State University.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Bill Spellman, director of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, and to Claire Bailey, program associate, for helping facilitate my visit to one of the sites. I also extend my gratitude to the presidents/chancellors of the three colleges in my study for opening the doors of their institutions to me.

Special thanks go to Ken Procter, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgia College & State University. Dean Procter supported me every single step of this journey, starting when I first indicated my interest in the doctoral program. He read drafts of my application and my dissertation research proposal and supported my request for a research leave of absence. He took on additional responsibilities while I was away rather than lighten his load by hiring an interim associate dean. Dean Procter is one of the finest colleagues and supervisors. I am grateful for his support in the nine years we have worked together.
My gratitude also goes to Jihye Lee, director of research at Lingo Ventures, for helping convert my tables into readable charts; and to my good friend and cohort mate, Lisette Nieves, for linking me up with Jihye.

Last, but not the least, my sincere thanks to my son Olaseni Akintola-Bello and his wife, Jacqueline—they were two of my greatest cheerleaders. They inquired about my progress, called constantly to check how things were going, wanted to know if I was getting enough rest in between the busy juggling of work and study. Olaseni, thank you for the pride you take in my work and accomplishments and for being ever so ready to blow my trumpet even as I seek to remain under the radar. I am as proud of you as you are of me.
ABSTRACT

ADAPTATION, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE: HOW THREE PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES ARE RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Olufunke Abimbola Fontenot
Mary-Linda Armacost

The value proposition of the public liberal arts colleges is that they provide the quality of education typically associated with esteemed private liberal arts colleges at a comparably lower cost. These institutions emphasize access and affordability, and a rich and rigorous undergraduate education in "small" residential settings, making this type of education available to students who otherwise could not afford it. Given the decline nationally in state funding of public higher education, demographic shifts affecting who goes to college and how, the “disruption” of technology, and the public questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree, this dissertation looks at how three public liberal arts colleges are responding to these changes and how both the changes and institutional responses to them are shaping or reshaping their mission.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The rapidly changing environment of American higher education has significantly altered traditional higher education norms. Declining state funding for public higher education, new technologies, shifting demographics, and emphasis on workforce training are some of the factors that are forcing higher education institutions to reexamine their business models and driving the market competition for resources and students. They constitute significant pressure points for post-secondary education institutions and are pushing the public and private not-for-profit institutions to adopt market-driven measures that may alter their mission.

Breneman (1994) suggests that all higher education sectors have been forced to adapt entrepreneurial responses—in both style and substance—to the pressures of the marketplace. He argues that while the nature of the response may vary among institutional types, they exhibit more similarities than differences. Breneman concludes that “each sector in its own way is subject to external forces that influence behavior and reduce [the] autonomy of action” (p. 4).

For public institutions, the increasing reliance on tuition and fees to make up for the shortfall in state funding poses additional challenges to their historic commitments to access and affordable education. In essence, it puts their public purpose and compact with their respective states at risk (Ehrenberg 2006; Fethke & Policano, 2012; Lambert, 2014; Morphew & Eckel, 2009). Another aspect of the tuition dependency is the strategy of increasing enrollment of nonresident students who, by that fact alone, pay higher tuition than state residents. The privatization literature suggests a correlation between the decline in state funding and an increase in nonresident students (Hoover & Keller, 2011; Jaquette
Jaquette et al. (2015), in their study of public research universities, found that increase in nonresident student enrollment tends to be at the expense of low-income and under-represented minority residents.

The marketization trend also has a bearing on the institutional diversity in American higher education. The diversity of American higher education is one of its greatest strengths—small, private, stand-alone, four-year liberal arts colleges; the private and public research universities; community colleges; comprehensive master’s; minority-serving institutions; public liberal arts colleges; stand-alone professional schools; and the recent wave of private, for-profit institutions. The more than 4,000 public and private not-for-profit institutions and the relatively recent entry of for-profit, post-secondary institutions provide a broad range of options for potential college students. These institutions are distinguished by their mission. The Carnegie Classification of post-secondary education institutions throughout its history has identified higher education institutions according to their mission and type of institutional control—public versus private (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). This mission differentiation was critical to institutional diversity. However, as institutions compete for students in response to the changing environment of higher education, there has been a tendency toward mission creep, with institutions becoming all things to all comers (Breneman, 1994; Deluchi, 1997; Hartley & Morphew, 2006).

Public liberal arts colleges are relatively recent additions to the system of higher education in America. This group of institutions has a consortium, the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), which became a formal organization in 1992. Currently, COPLAC has 29 members, 28 in the United States (representing 27 states),
and one member from Canada (University of Alberta, Augustina Campus). COPLAC colleges reflect a rich diversity and include colleges that started as private liberal arts but made the shift to become public (New College, Florida and Henderson College, Arkansas fall into this category); colleges that initially started out as boarding schools for Native Americans and maintain that commitment as part of their mission, including legislative authorization of free tuition to Native American students (Fort Lewis, Durango, Colorado, and the University of Minnesota–Morris). Most are classified as public master's in the Carnegie classification scheme, with a few as bachelor’s (New College, Florida; University of North Carolina, Asheville, North Carolina); undergraduate enrollment ranges from 800 to 8,000 (Schuman, 1987–2014).

A common bond among these institutions is their commitment to providing quality education commensurate to that provided by "esteemed private liberal colleges" but at a comparably lower cost. COPLAC institutions emphasize access, diversity, and a rigorous undergraduate education in "small” residential settings. They promise small class sizes and experiential learning experiences to complement classroom experiences. Most emphasize undergraduate student research and study abroad. According to COPLAC, what sets public liberal arts institutions apart from the private liberal arts is access and affordability:

COPLAC institutions combine an egalitarian concern for access with academic rigor. The mission of COPLAC is not just to provide higher education for students who otherwise could not afford it, but a transformative liberal education commensurate with that offered by North America’s finest colleges. (http://www.coplac.org)
This study will investigate the implications of decline in state funding of public higher education, shifting demographics, challenges of new technology, and the public questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree for the mission of public liberal arts institutions. The focus is on how three public liberal arts institutions are responding to these changes and how both the changes and institutional responses to them are shaping or reshaping the mission of these institutions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Contemporary research on the changing landscape of American higher education has focused attention on the increasingly competitive environment shaping the system of American higher education. The drivers of change include declining state funding of public higher education, shifting student demographics, technology and online education, and the entry of for-profit colleges and universities into the arena (Breneman, Callan, Finney, & Zumeta, 2012; Fethke & Policano, 2012; Lambert, 2014; Pusser & Doane, 2001).

Research on private liberal arts colleges illustrates how one institutional sector has responded to changes in the higher education landscape. Private liberal arts colleges—“the four-year free-standing residential college with the liberal arts curriculum and baccalaureate degree” (Pfnister, 1984)—occupy an iconic position in the history of American higher education; they were the preeminent institutions in the American system of higher education for more than 200 years (Pfnister, 1984). Small, private liberal arts colleges dominated the higher education landscape until the advent of public land-grant institutions beginning in the middle of the 19th century. Many of these institutions provided educational access for women and minorities at a time when opportunities were denied to this group in public secondary and post-secondary institutions (Stankiewicz, 1982; Thelin, 2004, 2011).

For more than 50 years, the literature on private liberal arts colleges have raised the alarm bell that the “stand alone private liberal arts colleges” are being threatened by a confluence of factors that challenge their sustainability (Breneman, 1994; Ferrall, 2011; Jonsen, 1984; Pfnister, 1984). Jonsen (1984), in his study of private liberal arts colleges,
identified six critical factors he referred to as “rapidly and powerfully changing environments”: demographic, economic, political, social, technological, and organizational (pp. 172–73). Jonsen (1984) argues that the threat and potential impact can be felt more acutely by private liberal arts colleges that are less affluent and may not have the political clout of larger, wealthier institutions (p. 173). Similar concerns led Commager (1977) to ask whether “small private liberal arts colleges can survive?” He concluded at the time that these institutions are “in trouble and were having both an identity and financial crisis” (p. 224). Breneman reached much the same conclusion in his 1994 seminal study, Liberal Arts Colleges: Thriving, Surviving or Endangered?
Breneman concluded that many private liberal arts institutions are so in name only. This 1994 study confirmed the observations of earlier studies. Pfister and Finkelstein (1984) noted that in responding to external challenges, many private liberal arts colleges have veered far from their core mission. Finkelstein and Pfister argue that the trend toward increasing “comprehensiveness and professional and vocational programs” has led to “a loss of a sense of their historic mission in the process of knee-jerk accommodation to the apparent requirements of the moment” (p. 117). These studies concluded that the dangers posed to the private liberal arts institutions are more about how they are responding to the environmental changes in higher education than the initial threats themselves.

Public liberal arts colleges face many of the same threats the private liberal arts institutions are experiencing, but there is little in the literature on these institutions. Breneman (1994) dismissed these types of institutions in a footnote with the statement, “The institutional type, public liberal arts colleges, has not thrived or found a niche in U.S. higher education; pressures on public colleges seem to force them to be
“multipurpose institutions” (Breneman, 1994, p. 11, n. 28). A more recent study (Baker, Baldwin, & Makker, 2012) revisited Breneman’s question about the fate of liberal arts colleges and also focused exclusively on private liberal arts colleges. Similarly, a review of the literature shows that while the stresses public higher education institutions are experiencing from cuts in state funding of public higher education is well documented—as are stories of how institutions, in general, are responding to the cuts (Breneman, Callan, Finney, & Zumeta, 2012; Fethke & Policano, 2012; Lambert, 2014)—what is much less discussed is how different public higher education institutions with different missions are responding and how their responses impact their missions.

Finkelstein and Pfnister (1984) point to the importance of institutional contexts in determining how institutions respond to changes. These include “the array of environmental and internal attributes that characterize a particular institution—its location, the nature of the community in which it was founded, the clientele, basic resources, and administrative, student, and faculty characteristics” (p. 307). State context is another important factor—the economy of a state and its politics can result in policies and funding decisions that could fundamentally affect the sustainability and viability of public institutions (Lambert, 2014; Perna & Finney, 2014).

Given the hybrid nature of the public liberal arts colleges, the review of literature from both the private liberal arts sector and public higher education institutions, in general, can provide some insights into understanding how this sector is responding to the challenges facing American higher education. The discussions below address the following questions: What are public liberal arts institutions? Why do they matter? How are they similar to, or different from, private liberal arts colleges? What does the “liberal
“arts” mission mean and why does the particular liberal arts mission matter? What challenges are these institutions facing? How are they responding to the changing environment? What is the significance of organizational culture and context for institutional responses, and what are the implications for the mission of public liberal arts colleges?

The Liberal Arts Colleges: What Are They and Why Do They Matter?

Liberal education is often associated with studies in the liberal arts, and the archetypical liberal arts colleges have as their core mission education in the liberal arts. The classical liberal arts consist of two broad categories, the trivium (logic, grammar, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy). These were regarded as the seven pillars of wisdom (Ferrell, 2011).

The claim to distinction by liberal arts colleges is their focus on high-quality undergraduate education in a setting that emphasizes and rewards good teaching. Students in these institutions are exposed to education that fosters critical thinking and community, typically in the small-class environment. They tend to be limited-enrollment institutions; they emphasize liberal education over professional training; they are residential, enroll full-time students, and maintain a low faculty-student ratio (Breneman, 1994; Ferrell, 2011). Private liberal arts colleges are typically small, located in rural communities, and offer courses in purely liberal arts. A mark of the traditional model of private liberal arts was they did not have professional schools. Indeed, several recent studies of private liberal arts institutions evaluate their fidelity to the mission by whether they have professional schools and the proportion of the degrees awarded that were professional degrees rather than pure liberal arts (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997).
What qualifies a college as a liberal arts college? The definitions of liberal arts institutions vary widely, from definitions based on the relative proportion of degrees awarded in the liberal arts compared to professional degrees (Carnegie Foundation’s 2010 classification, an earlier iteration of which was adopted in several other works—e.g., Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997; Hartley & Morphew, 2006); to one based on institutional size and approach to teaching (COPLAC); to sets of outcomes (AAC&U). The classic definition of liberal arts colleges is higher education institutions that adopt as their distinctive mission a focus on the liberal arts (the seven classical categories—logic, grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, geometry, music, and astronomy). A special issue of the Journal of Higher Education on the small, private liberal arts college uses the following definition: “A liberal arts institution is one that irrespective of control, awards a high proportion of its degrees, at whatever level, in the traditional arts and sciences” (Finkelstein & Pfister, 1984). Acknowledging the limitation of a definition that focuses on types and proportion of degrees, Breneman stated: “My definition, which stresses content over process, subject matter over teaching methods, is controversial and by no means accepted by all educators” (1994, p. 11, n. 39). Restrictive definitions like Breneman’s exclude virtually all public liberal arts institutions from the purview of liberal arts colleges. Unlike private liberal arts colleges, several public liberal arts colleges started out as comprehensive institutions that made a decision to become liberal arts colleges. They had and continued to have professional schools, and a few had master’s programs, and many are classified under the Carnegie Classification (2010) as Master’s Colleges and Universities. (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php, retrieved, March 6, 2016)
There is need for a paradigm shift in the conception of what qualifies a college as a liberal arts college—a change from a focus on form to a focus on substance. A broader definition of liberal arts colleges would include colleges that focus on “liberal education,” which incorporates but is not limited to the notion of “liberal arts.” In other words, it would entail moving from a perspective of liberal arts as a notion of academic disciplines to liberal arts as a way of learning and knowing, and liberal arts as a set of outcomes.

This is the approach of the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U):

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and services to our communities.—Adopted by the Board of Directors of the AAC&U (October 1998). Statement on Liberal Learning. (Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/about/statements/liberal-learning)

The AAC&U was originally founded in 1915 as the Association of American Colleges (AAC) to promote the cause of the “stand-alone small liberal arts colleges.” It has since expanded its membership to include institutions that promote liberal education. Traditionally, liberal education has been perceived as the “non-vocational” or “less marketable” part of the curriculum and confined, for the most part, to general education courses taken in the first two years of college and through studies in the arts and sciences discipline. The AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) Report, College Learning for the New Global Century (2007), challenges this orthodoxy. The LEAP initiative recommends a view of liberal education that transcends these traditional
limitations. It calls for a renewed vision for liberal education that, among other things, fosters and develops key learning outcomes and competencies “across the entire educational experience and in the context of students’ major fields” (2007, p. 2). In explaining the imperative for this initiative, the AAC&U states:

The Academy stands at a crossroads. Millions of students today seek a college education, and record numbers are actually enrolling. Without a serious national effort to recalibrate college learning to the needs of the new global century however, too few of these students will reap the full benefits of college. (2007, p. vii)

The LEAP initiative advocates that, irrespective of a chosen major field of study, all students must achieve a set of learning outcomes grounded through a liberal education—one that is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the 21st-century, interdependent world; equips students to be successful in a rapidly changing technological age and enables them to function effectively across cultures; and one that intellectually prepares students to respond to the economic and workforce needs of the society.

Carol Schneider, president of the AAC&U, observed that the purpose of a liberal education “is broad knowledge that enables you to navigate the world you inherit, to develop powers of the mind, to make reasoned judgments and cultivate a sense of ethical responsibility, and to connect those goals to the world” (Chronicle of Higher Education, January 2015, p. A21). Schneider further reiterated that the AAC&U’s argument at its founding in 1925 remains pertinent today—“we need good citizens. . . . Moreover, those objectives should not be restricted to liberal arts majors” (Chronicle of Higher Education, January 2015, p. A21).

Unlike private liberal arts colleges, public liberal arts colleges have an opposite trajectory. Several of these colleges started out as comprehensive institutions that made a
decision to become liberal arts colleges. They had professional schools, and a few had master’s programs. Their "liberal artness" is a philosophy and an approach to learning and knowing, and this applies to the professional degrees as well. The description offered by Finkelstein and Pfister (1984) in their discussion of the stand-alone private liberal arts colleges is a helpful working definition that is inclusive enough to embrace the public liberal arts institutions. In arguing for an expanded construction of what constitutes a liberal arts college beyond “the focus on values in a residential setting,” they suggest that “a liberal arts college is a community that experientially cultivates values—experiences and values that remain long after the student has left the campus”; an education that sensitizes students, “whatever their age, to humane learning, issues of values and meaning” (pp. 311–12). Two recent publications, Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters (2014), by Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan University, and In Defense of Liberal Education (2015), by the journalist and public intellectual Fareed Zakaria, have been articulate additions to defending liberal education.

The essential distinction between private and public liberal arts colleges and universities used to be their funding sources and control. Whereas public institutions relied on state appropriations and tuition, private colleges and universities depended on endowment and tuition. The state subsidies allowed public colleges and universities to charge lesser tuition compared to their private counterparts. However, this tuition advantage of public colleges and universities is offset by the ability of private institutions (especially those with large endowments) to give discounted tuition to students at a rate far less than the sticker price. Consequently, the real cost to the student who attends a private college may be far less than that of attending a public institution. Furthermore, for
several years now, state support/funding for public education has been in decline. Like their private counterparts, public colleges and universities are relying increasingly on tuition but without the added advantage of a robust endowment to provide funds for discounted tuition (Breneman, Callan, Finney, & Zumeta, 2012; Fethke & Policano, 2012; Lambert, 2014).

Lambert (2014) comments on this blurring of differences between private colleges and universities and the public:

Public universities’ (particularly land-grant colleges’) focus on their states has historically differentiated them from private universities. However, the differences are shrinking between the premier public and private universities today. Both private and public universities receive support from the state and federal governments, and tuition, philanthropy, and research funding makes up a significant portion of the operating budgets at both. (p. 227)

In present circumstances, the funding distinction between private liberal arts and public liberal arts colleges and universities may no longer hold. For public institutions, state control remains without the prior level of support. The state still dictates the tune, though it no longer pays the piper its due.

On the other hand, state support made public institutions more affordable to students who sought the liberal arts experience. Although it is possible for students to attend a private institution for less cost with an adequate amount of scholarship funds, the capacity for private institutions to accommodate or afford grant scholarships to all such students is limited. Many private liberal arts colleges are being challenged to continue with their high tuition-discount rates, without which they may be unable to attract the high caliber of students who make up their selective pool. Additionally, the cost of attending a public liberal arts college for in-state residents is about half of that of a
private liberal arts college. This price differential is consistent with the cost difference between public colleges and universities and private nonprofits. According to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), for the 2012–2013 academic year, tuition, room, and board for undergraduate students at public institutions was an estimated $15,022, compared to $39,173 at private, nonprofit colleges and universities (NCES, 2013).

Enrollment at public colleges and universities is overwhelmingly in-state (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_213.asp, 2004) and this applies to public liberal arts colleges as well. Except for a fully subsidized rate at a private institution, there may be no cost advantage to attending a private college (U.S. News & World Report, "An Affordable Option," 1996). Consequently, students who seek a liberal arts experience may be better off attending a public liberal arts college as in-state students.

The Importance of Mission

Institutional mission is an articulation of an organization’s values and purpose. Ideally, mission speaks to an organization’s uniqueness, and it is the driving force for its actions. Hartley and Morphew (2006) describe mission as a value proposition that stakeholders can understand and the benchmark against which an institution is judged. Hartley describes missions as “the “internal compass” that empowers institutions “to retain their bearing and not lose their way” (2002, p. 4). These ideal expressions of what mission is may, however, have little bearing on the realities of an institution. As Delucchi (1997) cynically remarked, missions may be no more than “window dressings.”
The curriculum is central to the mission of an institution, and changes in the curriculum should be mission-driven. A mission-centered response to external challenges will make programmatic decisions based on the value they add to the mission. Studies have shown that institutions tend to resolve tensions between their mission and the pull of the market by privileging the latter. In such instances, there is a dissonance between the proclaimed mission and the reality of the institution. This has been found to be the case for private liberal arts colleges dealing with low enrollment, small endowment, and increasing competition for students (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997). Other studies also have shown a trend in mission drift among baccalaureate colleges that become universities as a way to improve their competitive advantage for recruiting and enrolling students (Jaquette, 2013). This tendency by institutions to be all things to all persons can be counterproductive. The absence of a niche can threaten rather than enhance the chances of survival of an institution. Without focus, institutions can be pulled in different directions; the mission provides a strategic guidepost against veering too far from its core purpose in how it responds to funding and other external pressures.

Studies of private liberal arts colleges have found that despite the claim to a liberal arts mission, many institutions are not faithful to their mission. Hartley and Morphew (2006) concluded that institutional control (public vs. private) is more important in predicting mission statement elements than Carnegie Classifications types. In addition, Breneman (1994) and Delucchi (1997) found the academic claims incorporated into the college’s mission statement do not necessarily reveal the actual programs and services provided by the institution. In responding to changes in the higher education terrain (economic
pressures, the challenge of changing student demographics, the number of students enrolling in college, and the growing interest in professional degrees), many private liberal arts colleges have moved toward more professional majors. As a result, for many private liberal arts colleges, “there is a disconnect between the rhetoric of claim and the reality of the curriculum” (Delucchi, 1997, p. 416). In essence, the mission statement did not usually reveal a distinct purpose or institutional identity. These criticisms are valid insofar as the definitions of liberal arts adopted in these studies are the restrictive definitions of the Carnegie Classifications types. A more expansive definition that focuses on substance rather than form, as proposed earlier in this discussion, might have yielded a different assessment.

External Challenges

Declines in Funding

The first Land-Grant Acts (1862) signaled the recognition by government of the role of universities in national development and a willingness on the part of the public to underwrite public higher education. For more than 150 years, state investment in higher education supported low-cost access to higher education for many who otherwise might not have afforded it (Bok, 2013; Thelin, 2004/2011). The benefit of education is extended beyond the individual; it was considered a public good that benefited society as a whole (Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovky, 2006; Ehrenberg, 2006; Lambert, 2014).

In recent years, however, with competition for limited state resources (e.g., healthcare, K–12 education), the state subsidy for public higher education has continued to decline (Fethke & Policano, 2012; Finney, 2014). This has resulted in what many term the “disinvestment” in higher education (Pell Institute Report, 2014) and a trend toward
high tuition and decreased access. Tuition dollars made up roughly 47% of revenues for
public higher education institutions for three straight years in 2014 (Woodhouse, 2015).
Students and families are paying more as funds from state appropriations have declined.
Some have framed the question as follows: “Who pays for, who should pay for, what is
the value of, and who benefits from higher education?” (Carnegie Commission, 1973).
The current reality of low subsidy, high tuition has led critics to conclude that education
is beginning to be seen more like a private rather than a public good. The privatization
literature contends that public institutions are responding to the decline in state
appropriation by behaving more like private universities, especially with their reliance on
increasing tuition revenues and intentionally recruiting students who can pay (Ehrenberg,
2006; Lambert, 2014; Morphew & Eckel, 2009). As Lambert (2014) pointedly observed:

Historically, higher education was viewed as a public good that benefited all in
society, not just the enrolled student, and so taxpayers were willing to fund a
system of public higher education generously. Today, however, there is a
fundamental rethinking of whether higher education is and should be a public
good or merely a private benefit to the individual. (p. 3)

Lambert (2014) examines the effect of the privatization trend in higher education.
He described privatization as “increasing institutional autonomy, higher tuition,
diminishing appropriations, alternative revenue sources (such as philosophy and new
business ventures), and modified governance relationships” (p. 10)—on the mission of
access and affordability to quality higher education. The book examines this question by
looking at public flagship research institutions in three states—California, Virginia, and
North Carolina.
Lambert observed that public higher education is increasingly not viewed as a public good. He argues that this fact is reflected not only in the declining state funding of higher education but an absence of articulated policy directions: “Beyond a broad discussion of concepts such as access, affordability and economic development in state capitols, there is rarely any thoughtful dialogue about the goals that states have in higher education” (p. 2). Lambert further notes, “To say that public colleges and universities are squeezed would be to understate the current situation” (p. 10). He calls for a reexamination of the commitment to public higher education that are driven primarily by two principles—public purpose and institutional mission. He notes that while finance and autonomy are driving the privatization trend, institutional and state context—especially “the mission, history, and culture of an institution and its state” (p. 21)—are equally critical. Lambert’s “foundation of privatization framework” situates institutions within a private/public continuum (markers of “whom or what the institution serves”) (p. 21). He notes that institutions are no longer either public or private but rather exist “on a continuum between public and private institutions” (p. 222). He examines six characteristics, reflecting the “layered nature of privatization” (p. 23): state context: mission, history, and culture; autonomy; finance; enrollment and access; and leadership (pp. 21–26, 222–62).

In *Public No More*, Fethke and Policano (2012) discuss the struggles public colleges and universities are facing from what they see as a permanent decline in state funding. They note that public colleges and universities have responded to the budget shortfall by increasing tuition. Unlike many critics of tuition increase, however, they see it as one legitimate option but note that institutions cannot survive through that strategy
alone. They argue that institutions must find savings by operating more efficiently and finding alternative revenue streams. Furthermore, if these institutions are to survive and be sustainable, they cannot just carry out changes at the margins; they require transformational changes. Such changes include cutting low-revenue programs; low demand in highly subsidized academic programs “that lack both student and societal demand, are expensive to offer, and have no source of revenue once public support declines” (p. 215). They argue against the business-as-usual response to “across-the-board cuts,” noting that “the subsidized academic core . . . will have to adjust to the new reality of ‘public no more’” (p. 215). The authors use the models of business schools that traditionally have depended on high tuition (because the market could tolerate it—response to demand) and generous alumni support, with very little reliance on subsidy from the state. They also found examples of financially viable programs in self-sustaining enterprises in research universities (p. 8). These then become the model of what Fethke and Policano call “public no more”:

The new normal in public-no-more higher education will involve lower levels of government support, greater attention to competitive tuitions, purposefully determined quality, and willingness to succeed (or fail) in a broader range of entrepreneurial activities. Public-no-more universities can simultaneously invest in and cut academic programs. They can invest in identified areas of strength and communicate those investments, and they can cut and downsize areas that are neither critical to their strategic vision nor able to generate self-sustaining resources. (pp. 217–18)

They suggest that universities develop alternate entrepreneurial activities, independent from their traditional operation, with the potential to generate revenue that can help support their traditional core activities (p. 221).
Even as they acknowledge the culture of resistance to change that is endemic in the governance structures of higher education institutions (pp. 171–93), Fethke and Policano emphasize that change is necessary if these institutions are to survive: “The question is not whether public universities will adjust to reflect this new reality—because they must; rather, it is whether they can react quickly, successfully, and sensibly enough to sustain their competitive position as premier providers of instruction and research” (p. 4). Whether or not institutions survive this change depends on the ultimate question: “Can strategy trump culture?” (p. 221).

They are explicit in their view of higher education as a private good—hence, the shifting of the cost to those who “receive the primary education benefit” (p. 214). This view is in stark contrast to Lambert’s position.

Additional pressure for funding results from federal and state governments’ emphases on workforce development and obtaining a “practical degree”—a factor that impacts enrollment and, ultimately, revenue. The logic of Lambert’s (2014) public-versus-private-good and other similar arguments is challenged by state and federal policies promoting a college degree for workforce development with projections on how many, and what type of degrees, would be required to meet future workforce needs (Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012, pp. 193–99). This in itself presumes that higher education is a public good that benefits more than the individual. The shift would appear to be in who pays for the “public good”? Whereas past policies assume that the public pays for public good, the new policies veer in the opposite direction—individuals must help pay for the public good.
The economy is central to the challenges higher education institutions are facing and will continue to face. As Breneman (1994) observed, financial circumstances of institutions are sensitive to changes in the growth and distribution of family incomes and to the job security that families feel; to trends in stock market and other asset values; to changing labor demands for graduates and the skills rewarded; to the cost and availability of student loans; and to state and federal policies governing grant support for students (p. 118).

Although declining state funding poses a challenge to all public colleges and universities, the scope and nature of the problem depend on and reflects state and institutional context (Lambert, 2014; Perna & Finney, 2014). Lambert notes that while finance and autonomy are driving the privatization trend, institutional and state context, especially “the mission, history, and culture of an institution and its state” (p. 21), are equally critical.

**Demographic Shifts: Access and Diversity**

The census projections show that the United States population will be older and more racially diverse by 2060. ([http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html)). The population 65 and older is expected to double in the period covered by the projection (2012–2060), representing one in five by 2060 ([http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html)). The Hispanic population is also projected to see exponential growth, from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060, with the effect that 1 in 3 U.S. residents would be Hispanic—an increase from the current 1 in 6.
The population of African Americans is projected to increase slightly from 13.1% to 14.7% by 2060. Overall, the percentage of the U.S. population that are minorities will rise from the current 37% to 57% by 2060. Shifts are also noticeable in the number of high school students going to college. Nationally, the number of high school graduates was projected to decline by 4% in 2013 from the peak of 3.34 million in 2008. The number is expected to rise to 3.36 million in 2021 (Breneman et al., 2012, p. 103). These population shifts are, however, not uniform across the 50 states. According to a study by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2008), some states are experiencing an increase in high school graduates and hence in potential demand for college education. The increase is fueled mainly by “growth in nonwhite ethnic groups and in population with low or moderate incomes” (Breneman et al., 2012, p. 103). These changes have implications for demand for college education and the capacity of the states to meet the demand. On the other hand, some states are experiencing a decline in the 18–24-year-old population as well as in the number of high school graduates (Breneman et al., 2012) suggest that these states would need to expand access beyond their traditional cohort to include the adult-working-age group.

Hossler and Kalsbeek (2013) note that demographic changes constitute “powerful drivers of demand and enrollment potential” (p. 11). For the most part, the national demographic shifts play out differently in different regions:
It is the significant gain in the proportion of college-age population that is from non-college educated families and lower-income and particularly Hispanic/Latino background that now fundamentally affects the enrollment strategies at nearly all colleges and universities, though the particularized consequences vary considerably by region. (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013, p. 11)

These demographic trends have access and affordability implications for first-generation college students and students from lower socio-economic classes. Older students are another group that has experienced a rapid increase in enrollment (Soares, 2009). The easy portability of credits adds another wrinkle to shifting demographic trends. Sixty percent of students graduating from postsecondary institutions in the U.S. get their degrees from institutions other than the one in which they started (Adelman, 2007). This pattern, described by Borden (2004) as “student swirl,” underscores the pattern of college attendance and points to the increasing importance of transfers in college enrollment.

The Education Advisory Board (2013) reports on the historical dependence on enrollment and increases in tuition in the past 15 years, fueled by “demographic growth and rising college access” (p. 6). The report noted, “The years of steady tuition revenue have now come to an end.” It predicts, “Over the next decade demographic, financial, political, and competitive pressures will make it harder to maintain historic growth rates” (p. 6).

Technology

Technology is both an opportunity and a challenge. It shapes how we define teaching and learning and challenges the traditional face-to-face paradigm and the conventional sense of what it means to go to college. Christensen and Horn (2011) discuss the growth and competition of for-profit institutions, noting their growth is
largely driven by online learning. They refer to them as “thriving disruptive innovation” (p. 41). Their financial health is strong, and enrollment is booming, though they suffer from weak brands. They ask the question, “How can this upstart group be so successful while the rest of higher education is treading water at best?” (p. 41).

Christensen and Horn compared the success of the online competitors with the crisis many traditional higher education institutions are facing. Disruptive innovation is the term they use, described as:

The process by which products and services that were once so expensive, complicated, inaccessible, and inconvenient that only a small fraction of people could access them are transformed into simpler, more accessible and convenient forms that are ultimately lower in cost. (p. 41)

Online classes allow for flexibility, with learners able to take classes more conveniently “in a variety of contexts, locations, and times” (p. 41). Christensen and Horn note the potential of these new models to help address the cost and quality challenges facing American higher education (p. 40).

Christensen and Horn observe that traditional institutions, rather than see the possibilities that technology offer, tend to “regard them as mere sideshows to their core operations” and have done little to adapt and reinvent themselves and use technology as sustaining innovation (p. 42). They commented on the model of traditional universities, what they refer to as a “broken business model” that relies on “ever-rising tuition, more endowment income or government support, and research funding” (p. 42). According to the authors,

Our studies reveal that incumbents sometimes survive and thrive amid disruption—in every case because they are able to create independent divisions, unfettered by their existing operations, which can use the disruption inside a new business model that reinvents what they do. (p. 43)
These observations suggest some paths for these institutions looking to remain sustainable while holding true to their mission—to embrace technology for the improvement of student outcomes and to gain greater efficiencies. Christensen and Horn assert that “it is not easy to effect such internal change, but creating the space and autonomy for these models to thrive and grow outside the interests of the traditional groups is the ultimate test and key challenge for leaders in all sectors” (p. 430).

**Questioning the Value of a Liberal Arts Education**

For a variety of reasons, liberal arts institutions have come under attack in recent years by people who have questioned the economic value of a liberal arts education. Governor Scott of Florida and Governor McCrory of North Carolina are examples of state officials who have called into question the value of a liberal arts degree. Shortly after taking office in 2013, Governor McCrory was reported to have stated that students taking courses such as gender studies should “go to a private school and take it, but I don’t want to subsidize that if it’s not going to get someone a job” ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/02/07/n-c-governor-attacks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/02/07/n-c-governor-attacks)). The President of the North Carolina system at the time, Tom Ross, responded to this comment in part by saying:

> We understand that state resources are limited and agree that there must be many pathways to jobs in the modern economy. The University’s value to North Carolina should not be measured by jobs filled alone. Our three-part mission of teaching, research, and public service requires that we prepare students with the talent and abilities to succeed in the workforce, because talent will be the key to economic growth. We must also continue to serve the state through our agricultural and industrial extension programs, our Small Business and Technology Development Centers, and through the many other ways, our faculty and students are engaged in our communities. Higher Education plays a role in ensuring a higher quality of life for all North Carolinians.
Governor Rick Scott similarly stated:

We don’t need a lot more anthropologists in the state. It’s a great degree if people want to get it, but we don’t need them here. I want to spend our dollars giving people science, technology, engineering, math degrees. That’s what our kids need to focus all their time and attention on . . . those type of degrees, so when they get out of school they can get a job.

The governor did not think that it is “a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists” (www.motherjones.com). The two courses/programs referenced in the comments serve as proxies for the anti–liberal arts sentiments.

The push for a “practical degree” is meant as a counterpoint to the notion that liberal arts education promotes contemplation and a life of the mind. Critics argue that is a luxury few can afford. The false dichotomy between the “liberal arts” and “professional degrees” is a myth that has gained currency in public debates about the value of higher education. The view that liberal arts is esoteric and aimed at imparting knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities, while professional degrees are practical and prepare students for the workforce, has created a “bimodal culture” that does a great disservice to higher education. Both can complement each other. As one scholar argued, professional training is not complete if it does not prepare its graduates to live a satisfying life with purpose and integrity; and a liberal arts education is incomplete if it does not prepare the student to thrive in the professional world (Lewis & Liegler, 1998; Roth, 2014). “Something would be wrong . . . with a society in which a lawyer or a
merchant could be a successful businessman only by ceasing to be a successful human being” (Lewis & Liegler, 1998, pp. 7–8).

Furthermore, research does not support the linking of majors to jobs and the assumption that graduates with degrees in the humanities and social sciences (liberal arts degrees) are not employable. The AAC&U, the nation’s leading advocate of liberal education, has commissioned five studies of U.S. companies and business organizations since 2005 to determine what skills they need in employees and their perceptions of the competencies being taught on college campuses. These surveys of employers and civic leaders have confirmed the value of a liberal education while also helping college and university faculty and administrations to improve curricula and educational practices so that today’s students are prepared for success as workers and citizens in the 21st century (AAC&U, 2011).

The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) 2013 survey (http://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013SurveySummary) (Retrieved, March 25, 2016), and the latest AAC&U study, How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014) reaffirmed the findings of AAC&U’s earlier studies during the past decade. Simply stated, the vast majority of American employers value the broad intellectual skills that are taught through a liberal arts education. The clear message from employers has been, “Let us teach them job-specific skills; you teach them how to think” (AAC&U, 2011). Details of that AAC&U study reveal the following about “Cross-Cutting Capacities vs. Choice of Undergraduate Major”:

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• Ninety-three percent of those surveyed say that “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate major.”

• More than nine in 10 employers surveyed say it is important that the employees they hire demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity; intercultural skills; and the capacity for continued new learning.

• More than 75% of employers say they want more emphasis on critical thinking, complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings.

• Employers endorse several educational practices as potentially helpful in preparing college students for workplace success. These include practices that require students to a) conduct research and use evidence-based analysis; b) gain in-depth knowledge in the major and analytic, problem solving, and communication skills; and c) apply their learning in real-world settings.

The study reaffirmed the continued importance of liberal education and the liberal arts:

• The majority of employers agree that having both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of skills and knowledge is most important for recent college graduates to achieve long-term career success. Few think that having field-specific knowledge and skills alone is what is most needed for individuals’ career success.
Eighty percent of employers agree that, regardless of their major, every college student should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

When read a description of a 21st-century liberal education, a majority of employers recognize its importance; 74% would recommend this kind of education to a young person they know as the best way to prepare for success in today’s global economy.

**Framework for Analysis of Institutional Response**

How do higher education institutions respond to external threats? Does the marketplace drive the educational agenda or is institutional response tempered by the institutional context and a need for a mission-centered response? I draw on the theory of institutional change for my analytical framework. The literature on institutional change attempts to distinguish between “change” and “adaptation” as forms of response, but the distinction easily can become blurred. To “adapt” is to make adjustment or modification in response to new conditions while retaining the core character of the organization. On the other hand, “change” involves fundamentally altering the key nature of an organization in significant ways (Finkelstein & Pfister, 1984, p. 302). The question remains, what alteration is fundamental enough to qualify as a change? Moreover, how controlled should an “adjustment” or “modification” be to avoid moving from the threshold of “adaptation” into one of “change”? Should these distinctions matter? “Change” and adaptation can help ensure continuity or sustainability. Continuity also could mean proceeding with business as usual, neither adapting or changing in response to external pressures. The latter is likely to lead to atrophy and serve as the death knell to
an institution. For the purpose of this study, continuity refers to adaption and changes
made by an institution to ensure its sustainability.

Kim Cameron’s (1984) definition and strategies of adaptation provide a helpful
framework for analysis. Cameron defines organizational adaptation as “modifications and
alteration in the organization and its components in order to adjust to changes in the
external environment. . . Adaptation refers to a process, not an event, whereby changes
are instituted in organizations” (p. 123). Cameron identifies four conceptual approaches
for understanding adaptation to change by educational institutions: The “population
ecology,” “life cycles,” “strategic action,” and “symbolic action” approaches.

The population ecology approach assumes a prominent role for the environment
and virtually no role for management action; the life cycles approach assumes a
prominent role for environmental and evolutionary forces, with some discretion
considered by management to manipulate intervening outside forces; the strategic
action approach assumes a role for both environment and management, with the
balance shifted toward management; the symbolic action approach assumes a
prominent role for management, through the ability to manipulate symbols and
social definitions, and a less significant role for external environment. (p. 132)

Cameron explains how outcomes may depend on the degree of control and
influence managers and administrators have or perceive they have over the external
event. In this sense, Cameron emphasizes the importance of leadership. Cameron’s
symbolic-action approach parallels what Ellen Earle Chaffee (1984) refers to as the
“interpretive approach” to change. Chaffee’s study on how colleges in financial crisis
responded to change points to the importance of a mission-sensitive response. She
examines two sets of institutions that are in trouble; half turned themselves around and
the other half did not. What made the difference, she argued, was clarity of mission—
engaging in “interpretive” rather than “adaptive work”—merely trying to respond to the environment in a reactive way (Chaffee, 1984).

In addition, the capacity to adapt varies according to institutional types—the mission, history, organizational culture, and context help define how colleges and universities adapt (Birnbaum, 1988, 2001, 2004; Eckel & Kezar, 2006; Lueddeke, 1999). What is the state context under which universities operate? Eckel asks a similar question in terms of how the market-driven response to declining state funding of public institutions affects the decision-making process: “Are market-oriented changes strengthening non-profit colleges and universities and making them more effective in meeting society’s needs, or are they weakening them, diverting their efforts, leading to counterproductive behavior?” (Eckel & Kezer, 2006, p. 5).

In changing times, institutions must embark on adaptive strategies to remain relevant and sustainable (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). For example, exclusively female colleges faced challenges to their mission—to serve women who had no access to higher education. Once previously all-male institutions opened their doors to women, the appeal of these institutions waned among women. The subsequent enrollment decline challenged the viability and continuing relevance of these institutions. Those that continued to operate have had to modify their mission and business models to survive. The same is true of small private liberal arts institutions. The emphasis on workforce and the practical degree has become a threat, and those that survived have had to adapt by offering practical degrees (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997). Breneman and Delucchi, in their separate studies, argue that while these institutions maintain their claim to the liberal arts mission, it is more in name only (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997). Breneman (1994)
observed that less than 40% of institutions that claim the liberal arts mission are in fact so. What, if anything, can public liberal arts colleges learn from these examples?

Institutions respond to changes in the education marketplace in various ways, which may include significant mission shift. Typically, responses are increases in tuition (coupled with increased discounting by private colleges), aggressive marketing in competition for students, shifts in curricula toward professional programs (Breneman, 1994), and online and off-site programs to accommodate the needs of older students. Organizational culture (Kezar & Eckel, 2002), institutional, and state contexts (Lambert, 2014; Perna & Finney, 2014) bear on the type and scope of an institution’s response to change.

This points to the need for public liberal arts institutions that have a distinctive and significant mission and are part of the diversity of American higher education to be mindful of their mission as they respond to changes in the external environment. Rather than react opportunistically, they must engage in an interpretive response. The public liberal arts institution must be mindful of the “access and affordability” aspect of their mission. Pricing tuition and fees beyond the means of their students undermines this aspect of their mission and is fundamentally at odds with their public charge. Public liberal arts colleges do not have the flexibility of private liberal arts institutions or the range of options. Diversity is integral to access, and not just representational diversity but one that fosters “inclusive excellence” (Witham, Malcolm-Piqueux, Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Breneman (1994) makes this observations about private liberal arts colleges: “While there may seem to be obvious connections between international education and
multiculturalism, in practice the two topics have led in different curricular directions. In my visits, virtually no one brought up ethnic and gender studies for discussion (p.107). Referencing “The Quiet Revolution,” which appeared in a special issue of Change, Breneman speculates as to why multicultural concerns are less in evidence on liberal arts campuses than in larger institutions (p. 107). He notes that besides the intrinsic intellectual value of such studies, including them in the curriculum serves as a recognition “of those who have been relegated historically and economically to the margins of our society” (p. 107, quoting Amy Gutmann).

**Summary**

The challenges of declining funding, shifting demographics, uses of technology, and the public questioning of the value of liberal arts constitute a potent mix that could threaten the survival of public liberal arts institutions. The larger issues raised are about public purpose, and revenue considerations should not be the sole driver of how an institution implements its mission. The mission must drive how institutions respond to external threats; the mission should help set the parameters on strategic priorities and for making critical decisions about types of programs, scope, and quality consistent with its mission. Market-driven responses to the funding debacle that weaken and divert institutions from their missions and public purpose make the system of higher education poorer in the end.

A compelling case for the survival of public liberal arts colleges is not just an emotional attachment to history; public liberal arts institutions are critical to maintaining the broad diversity in types of institutions in the American higher education system. Equally important is their role in advancing access, diversity, and affordable college
education that prepares students for more than their first jobs. Public liberal arts colleges must avoid the deceptively easy response of tuition and fee increases. This will not be a tenable solution in the long run, as public pressure mounts against the rising cost of higher education. In addition, the blame game that ensues between university administrators and state government in response to public outcry against the rising cost of higher education is counterproductive—the latter attributing the problem to wasteful spending and lack of cost containment by colleges and universities, and the former arguing that a return to the high-subsidy–low-tuition model will help put tuition increase in check (David & Evans, 2011).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Liberal arts colleges are facing external pressures that threaten their mission and their place in the higher education marketplace (Breneman, 1994; Delucchi, 1997). Among these are demographic shifts in the college-going population; the blurring of mission among institutional types, which is reflected in the fluidity and portability of college credits (Adelman, 2006, 2007; Borden, 2004); the threats and opportunities offered by technology and online education (Christensen & Eyring, 2011); and, in the case of public liberal arts colleges, the decline in state funding of higher education (Fethke & Policano, 2012). This confluence of factors has heightened the intense competition for students and tuition dollars (Education Advisory Board, 2013; Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). This research examines the pressures and tensions that are shaping the experiences of public liberal arts colleges in their responses to these challenges. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges does the changing higher education environment—in particular, declines in state funding, demographics, technology, and the “public” questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree—pose to the mission of public liberal arts colleges?

2. How are the institutions responding to these challenges and how do their responses impact their mission?

My thesis statement is that state and institutional context (including size) are important factors shaping the scope of the challenges and how institutions respond.
The Research Design and Rationale

This study uses a qualitative case study methodology. The phenomenon that the research investigates is how public liberal arts colleges are responding to changes in the landscape of American public higher education. The study explores this question through an in-depth study (Creswell, 2012) of three institutions. The case study method allows for a study of these colleges in their natural settings and facilitates understanding how the people at these institutions make sense of their world. The case study is appropriate because it allows for a look at the context (Yin, 2009), strategies, and outcomes. Context is critical to how institutions perceive, interpret, and respond to the external challenges; a case study method enhances the focus on context and a bounded system (Creswell, 2012). Yin (2009) suggests three ideal conditions for the use of the case study method: (a) the research questions addressed are “how” or “why” questions; (b) there is little control over the events; and (c) the focus of the research is a contemporary real-life phenomenon where context is crucial. This study fully meets all three criteria. The appropriateness of the case study methods is further justified based on the criteria suggested by Patton (1990):

Case studies become particularly useful when one needs to understand some special people, particular problem or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information—rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question. (p. 54)

Site Selection

The unit of analysis for my study is the academic institution, with a focus on change and outcome rather than process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I studied three public liberal arts colleges to understand the challenges as they see them and to document
the ways in which they are responding to those challenges. The study of multiple sites allowed for comparison across cases and facilitates drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) while being mindful of the particular case context. Similar data collection and analysis procedures were applied in all three settings; the study identified common themes and differences among the cases and drew conclusions from the findings.

My site selection was “purposeful.” I started with a review of member institutions of COPLAC. There are currently 29 members, 28 in the U.S. representing 27 states, and one in a Canadian province. I applied the following primary criteria in my site selection:

1. Founding member institution of COPLAC
2. Regional spread
3. Unique characteristics that show the range of difference among these institutions (including enrollment size and types and mix of programmatic offerings)

The rationale for the primary selection criterion of “founding members” is that these are institutions that believed in the mission and vision of public liberal arts education, invested time and money, and, for the most part, got a commitment from their state legislatures to provide funding support for the proposed new model. They have been there from the beginning and are most likely to provide a compelling case illustrating the adaptation triggered by the changing environment of American higher education—in particular, the decline in state funding.
There were ten founding-member institutions at the formal launching of the organization in 1992. One of the ten founding-member colleges withdrew from membership and reverted to an independent status in 2008. Though all or some in this group may fare better than the newer, less established public liberal arts colleges, preliminary research shows the continuing original nine members of the group demonstrate varying successes in managing change. The three institutions included in this study reflect a range of enrollment sizes—approximately 2,000 to 6,000, and offer similarities and contrasts that helped enrich the study. All three have requested and have been granted anonymity; hence, they are identified in this study as S1, S2, and S3.

**Site 1: A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences**

S1 started out as a junior college in 1927; it underwent various changes in name and mission before becoming the liberal arts college for the state in 1987. The Carnegie Classification classifies S1 as a Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences ([http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu)). This category includes “institutions where baccalaureate degrees represent at least 50 percent of all undergraduate degrees and where fewer than 50 master’s degrees or 20 doctoral degrees were awarded during the update year” ([http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php)). Its enrollment profile is “very high undergraduate,” and its undergraduate profile is “four-year, full-time, more selective, higher-transfer-in” ([http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu)). S1 is part of the 17-campus public university system of its state; it is located in an urban area.

**Site 2: A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields**

S2 is part of its state’s seven-member university system; the system is currently going through major organizational restructuring. It is located in a rural setting. S2 is
classified in the Carnegie Classification in the category of “Baccalaureate Colleges—
Diverse Fields (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). This category applies to
baccalaureate institutions in which less than half of the bachelor’s degrees awarded were
the arts and sciences field (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php).
Its enrollment profile is “very high undergraduate” (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu),
and its undergraduate profile is “four-year, full-time, selective, lower transfer-in”
(http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). Size and setting are “small, highly residential”
(http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). Washington Monthly magazine recognized S2 as a
2014 “Best Bang for the Buck” College (ranked number 64 among baccalaureate
institutions in the United States). The magazine recognizes colleges and universities that
“help non-wealthy students attain marketable degrees at affordable prices”
(washingtonmonthly.com).

Site 3: A Master’s College and University: Medium Program

S3 is classified in the Carnergie Classification in the Master’s Colleges and
Universities: Medium Programs category (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). This
category includes “institutions that awarded at least 50 master’s degrees and fewer than
20 doctoral degrees during the updated year”
(http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/methodology/basic.php). Its enrollment profile is
“very high undergraduate” (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu); its undergraduate
profile is “four-year, full-time, more selective, lower-transfer-in; and the size and setting
are “medium, primarily residential (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu). S3’s location is
rural. It was originally founded as teachers’ training colleges; it became a part of the 13-
member institution that makes up the state’s higher education system in 1970. It adopted
its public liberal arts mission in 1985 when the then–state governor signed the law designating the university as the state’s only statewide public liberal arts and sciences university and expanded its mission from a regional to a statewide institution. S3 is in a state with a decentralized higher education system and has its separate board of governors. The university is classified as a “highly selective” institution.

**Data Collection**

I visited the three colleges for at least a week each between August and October 2015. The interviews helped provide insights into how members perceived the challenges and opportunities facing their college; their understanding of the liberal arts mission; the changes they have observed over time relating to curriculum, students, and programs; and how they perceive the impact of those changes on the implementation of the mission of the college.

I conducted individual interviews with key administrators on all three campuses as well as with the heads of the state systems of higher education for S1 and S2 and two board members of S3. (See Appendix A for a list of interviewees by position titles.) I also interviewed five faculty members on each campus (see Appendix B) and conducted focus group sessions with students. The plan was to have three focus groups on each campus, but I could only get two groups at S1. Consequently, I conducted a total of eight focus group sessions (see Appendix C for focus group protocols).

Given that two of the institutions are part of their respective state systems of higher education, I interviewed the president/chancellor of the state’s university systems. The goal was to get a system’s perspective on my research question and to get a sense for whether and how they support the mission of these institutions. Although S3 has its own
independent local board, it reports to the state’s Department of Higher Education. My efforts to secure an interview with a high-level official of the department was unsuccessful. However, I interviewed two members of S3’s board on the basis of a recommendation by the president/chancellor. I asked all four open-ended questions focusing on how they see the role of public liberal arts colleges within their state systems of higher education and what plans (if any) were in place for their sustainability.

My data collection focused on sources and documents that indicated how shifting demographics, declining state funding, uses of technology, and the “public” questioning of a liberal arts degree have informed changes in admission standards and practices, tuition, student profiles, curriculum, and programs from fall 2004 to fall 2014. This time frame covers the most tumultuous period of change in higher education recently and provides enough time to observe institutional responses to those changes. I used self-designed, open-ended questions for on-site interviews of members. Throughout my site visits, I kept scrupulous field notes to record my impressions and feelings after a set number of interviews and referenced these notes when reviewing and analyzing my data.

I employed a variety of methods for collecting data so as to prevent “evidentiary inadequacy” (Erickson, 1986); consistent with case study design, sources of data include documents, interviews, and focus groups (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2009). I used multiple measures, as well triangulation across these various sources, to reduce errors in my data as well as minimize the potential for bias (Creswell, 2012).

Prior to the campus visits, I conducted an extensive review and analysis of data on the three institutions from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), COPLAC data sets, and the institutional and state system websites. Some of the specific
data examined on the institutional websites include mission statements, strategic planning
documents, presidential speeches, especially state-of-the-university addresses, and
enrollment/student profiles. However, because of the requests by the institutions to
remain anonymous, I have not provided citation references to the websites in my
discussion.

The interviews at the institutional level provided an opportunity to probe issues
more deeply and to ask follow-up questions of respondents. To ensure that the interviews
were sufficiently representative (Yin, 2009) and to avoid member bias, I employed a
“purposive” selection method (Creswell, 2012) to identify interviewees (mix of gender,
disciplinary background, administrative position, race/ethnicity, and faculty rank).
Purposive sampling allows for the deliberate seeking out of participants who include
“outliers.” “It allows for such deviant cases to illuminate, by juxtaposition, those
processes and relations that routinely come into play, thereby enabling ‘the exception to
prove the rule’” (Barbour, 2001, p. 116). Consistent with the snowball/chain-sampling
strategy (Creswell, 2012), I made efforts to expand my interview at one of the sites to
include a faculty member whom three of my initial contacts had referenced in discussing
campus diversity. However, my efforts were unsuccessful.

I reviewed data from the three institutions and their respective state higher
education systems for a 10-year period covering academic years fall 2004 to fall 2014.
My data collection involved a comprehensive review of the literature, existing data sets
from NCES reported in IPEDS, state higher education systems’ websites, as well as the
websites of COPLAC and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). I
conducted on-site interviews and focus group discussions at the three sites between the
third week of August and the third week of October 2015. Before each interview, I described the purpose of the research and provided needed clarification. I requested permission to audio-record each conversation, letting interviewees know that I would turn off the audio recorder for “off the record” comments at the respondent’s request.

**Data Analysis, Validity, and Reliability**

To assist with interpretation of data and to facilitate the validity and trustworthiness of my findings, I employed some of the validation procedures recommended in qualitative research literature—for example, member checking and triangulating sources of data (Creswell, 2012).

To ensure the analytical rigor of the data, I applied both an inductive and deductive analysis to establish patterns or themes (Creswell, 2012, chapter 12) from respective institutional and cross-institutional data. I used “multiple levels of abstraction” (Creswell, 2012, Kindle loc. 1267), moving from particular observations to generalized themes while remaining cognizant of the “mundane, expected and surprising ideas” (Creswell, 2012) that may defy my expectations and preconceptions.

The data gathered included information on state funding trends, demographic shifts, the cost of attendance (tuition and fees), student profiles, restructuring/reorganization, and entrepreneurial initiatives. These categories initially were coded using a framework of organizational change and institutional adaptation. The coding was subsequently refined as themes emerged from my campus interviews and focus group discussions. I conducted 37 one-on-one interviews with faculty, key campus administrators, system heads, and local board members. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. In addition, I had eight focus group sessions (three each at two sites and
two at the third site) with students. To get a system perspective, I interviewed the chancellor and president of the state university system to which two of the colleges belonged. The third college had its independent board of governors and was not governed as part of the state university system. In that case, two board members were interviewed for this study.

I imported 37 interviews into NVivo 10 qualitative software. Each line was manually read and coded to the parent nodes—AQ, for administrators; FQ, for faculty; and SQ for student focus groups (AQxx, FQx, and SQx). Four additional parent nodes were created: A00_Background, FQ0_Background, FQ5_Anything else, and SQ0_Description Focus Group. Multiple subcategory nodes were created as content within each parent node was read and coding was refined within these nodes. The study used “multiple coding” (a process of coding content to more than one node). This is due to the nature of responses from a single interview having meaning in more than one category. The interview document was only counted once within the node; many participants provided a variety of responses to a single question, and the same content or different selections of text from a single interview document were coded to multiple nodes.

The coding in this study is a mixture of inductive, deductive, and axial coding. The first or initial phase (“open coding” or “first pass”) involved a line-by-line coding of the data to develop descriptive themes and assign category titles. This phase includes “in vivo” coding or selection of specific words and phrases from the content for titling purposes. The second phase, “axial coding,” involves the exploration of patterns and emerging themes. This involved merging, clustering, retitling, and eliminating categories.
The third phase—“selective or substantive coding”—involves interpretation and synthesis of meaning. Coded content is compared and contrasted; new themes were created; and additional merging, clustering, and elimination of categories emerged. The three phases involved a cyclical and repetitive process through data collection until redundancy was minimized.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conducting my fieldwork, an IRB was approved by the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. S3 also requested that I complete their IRB approval process. That was done and approved in August 2015. The research complied with the ethical guidelines for case study methodology, and the institutions and participants interviewed were offered the option of anonymity.

**Limitations of Study**

The study relies, in part, on information derived from informants during interviews. This poses potential limitations resulting from inaccurate or biased information from participants. The study addresses this by using more than one method of data collection to answer the research questions. Another potential limitation comes from researcher bias (Merriam, 1988). By the nature of qualitative research, as the researcher and the data collection instrument, there is the possibility for bias in what information is gathered, how it is collected, and how I make sense and meaning from the data collected. Additionally, I am employed at a COPLAC member institution (not the ones included in this study) and this may affect my objectivity. However, my recognition of these potential bias factors is helpful in guarding against them. Another limitation is that this study is specific to three institutions; thus, the findings will not be generalizable.
However, the findings can provide useful information on patterns that may, given appropriate context (Merriam, 1998), inform understanding of other public liberal arts institutions.
Chapter 4: Findings

Public higher education systems in all 50 states have experienced significant changes in policies, funding, and demographic shifts in the past 10 or more years. Funding and policy trends nationally reveal that every state has experienced its share of challenges in adapting to those changes. The three institutions in this study provided a variation of responses to those changes and the impact of both the changes and their responses on their missions. The questions I pose and which this chapter addresses are as follows:

1. What challenges does the changing higher education environment—in particular, declines in state funding, demographics, technology, and, the “public” questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree—pose to the mission of public liberal arts colleges?

2. How are the institutions responding to these challenges and how do their responses impact their mission?

As noted in Chapter 3, my methodology section, to maintain the anonymity of the three institutions, they are identified in this study respectively as S1 (A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences); S2 (A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields); and S3 (A Master’s College and University: Medium Program). Quotations from transcripts identifying the institutions and their states have been removed, and a parenthesis is placed next to the quote to indicate the site to which the quote refers.

All three institutions overwhelmingly serve undergraduate, non-traditional-age first-time freshmen, with very small graduate programs and non-degree offerings. At S3,
an administrator emphasized that more than 98% of the students live on campus, and “our population is overwhelmingly [the] traditional student who either comes to us straight from high school or they are transfer students from another institution.” The chart below for 2013 confirms the findings of my on-campus interviews. The 2013 enrollment numbers of S1, S2, and S3, respectively, are 3,177, 1,943, and 5,702. For S1, 48 of the 3,177 (1.5%) were graduate students. The numbers for S2 and S3, respectively, were 160 of 1,943 (8.2%) and 327 of 5,702 (5.7%). Undergraduate students transferring in for the period are as follows: S1—345 (10.9%); S2—99 (5.1%); and S3—146 (2.6%). The non-degree offerings are as follows: S1, 413 (13%); S2, 43 (2.2%); and S3, 416 (7.3%).

Figure 1: Full-Time Student Degree Profile, 2013 Comparison
The value proposition of the public liberal arts colleges is that they provide the quality of education typically associated with esteemed private liberal arts colleges at a comparably lower cost. These institutions emphasize access, affordability, and a rich and rigorous undergraduate education in “small” residential settings, making this type of education available to students who otherwise could not afford it (coplac.org).

S1 is “primarily undergraduate” and places emphasis on “the centrality of learning and discovery” (information from the college’s website). It “offers a liberal arts education characterized by high faculty-student interaction to all promising students who are committed to liberal learning and personal growth” (information from the college’s website). Its value statement includes a commitment to use its scholarship in the service of its community and the larger geographic region. Its vision is for its students to

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1 Full-Time Student Degree Profile: 2013 Cross-reference with Table Data in Appendix
“experience liberal arts education at its best within a diverse and inclusive environment” (information from the college’s website).

S2 “prepares students for engaged citizenship, enriching professional careers, enduring love for learning” (information from the college’s website). Its vision and value statement recognizes that its success depends on its “ability to preserve continued and affordable access to higher education” (information from the college’s website).

The mission of S3 is “to offer an exemplary undergraduate education to well-prepared students, grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, in the context of a public institution of higher education” (information from the college’s website). To that end, the university “offers affordable undergraduate studies in the traditional arts and sciences as well as selected pre-professional, professional and masters level programs that grow naturally out of the philosophy, values, content, and desired outcomes of a liberal arts education” (information from the college’s website). A common thread in both the COPLAC statement and the respective mission statements of S1, S2, and S3 are the liberal arts educational experience, access, and affordability.

Several things define the liberal arts educational experience. Students, faculty, and administrators within and across all sites used the following descriptive terms for the liberal arts missions: “breadth of knowledge,” “critical thinking,” “opportunities for exploration,” “undeclared major option,” “flexible credits,” “interdisciplinarity,” “small intimate environment,” “small class sizes,” “connection with professors,” “a nurturing, interactive, and an engaging environment that facilitated learning,” “student-centered,” “credibility as graduate,” “affordable education,” “access/equity,” “citizenship and
democracy,” “diversity,” “holistic,” “transformational,” “philosophical,” “employability,” and “student-centered.”

These attributes tend to be used as proxies for quality. This finding does not make that assumption.

**Small Classes/Connection with Professors**

The “small size” speaks to building community and a better opportunity to connect with professors and chances for mentoring that otherwise may not be available. The view expressed by one administrator at S1 echoes the voices of many participants at S1 and the two other colleges:

The faculty sees it as a way to truly engage with undergraduate students . . . an opportunity to teach, to connect, to inspire, to really work with that generation that is coming up through the baccalaureate program. It is a focus on relationships, on building those deep reservoirs of knowledge. The faculty here see it as a way to take a generation of young people, and not so young people when they come to us and give them the best tools of thinking, of inquiry, of curiosity, of tolerance, of respect to be able to engage the wider world. The low student-to-faculty ratio ensures that students are in classes where their faculty knows them so they can do their best work. Emphasis is on the community. We take that very seriously, and it is about being an engaged community.

One S2 faculty member noted, “The kids get to know the professors, and they feel comfortable asking questions . . . it offers the kind of personal attention that you do not get at a larger institution.”

Although acknowledging the importance of low student-faculty ratio, one administrator at S3 cautioned that framing the liberal arts experience in the form of small class sizes might not necessarily be its point of distinctiveness. The administrator observed that one of its state’s flagship universities has an Honors College that models the small campus feel within a larger community:
You can have the broad array of having 30,000 students or whatever they have but you get that small intimate experience. And so, we started realizing that if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we are very flattered, but it is not going to help us move forward. And so it became clear that [S3] really needs to say what it is as a public liberal arts institution.

Rather than looking at liberal arts as discipline-based or in terms of class size, the administrator proposed an organizing theme around three pillars:

Privileging the intrinsic value of learning over the instrumental value of learning . . . with a focus on developing a high order of thinking skills—those cognitive skills like critical thinking and problem-solving and quantitative and qualitative reasoning . . . the types of things we believe the liberal arts and sciences education does better than a mere vocational or technical education; the third pillar would be the social and moral character development for our student. (Personal interview, October 2015)

**Breadth of Curriculum and Interdisciplinarity**

Several respondents across groups and institutions stressed the many dimensions of a liberal arts education, including its breadth and interdisciplinary collaboration that applies even to the non–liberal arts majors at these institutions. One S1 administrator described a liberal arts education as

The education that is going to set us apart competitively; the education that is our best hope for a functioning democracy; and it is the best education to prepare us for the jobs that we don’t even know are coming yet. It is a powerful mission, and states that are smart enough to have an institution designated as the public liberal arts college really send a message about what, as a state, they care about, what they think about. (Personal interview, August 2015)

Another S1 administrator said emphatically, “You are not just going to come here and major in business and only take business courses. If that is what you want, this place is not for you. We have the specific curriculum that we require all students at S1 to take, and I mean, we’re just honest about it from the get-go when we do our recruiting.” An
administrator at S2 described it as a “foundation for a successful life. It is a degree that to me is about empowerment. It is not about specificity; it is about having the empowerment to think larger than the constructs of a certain field.”

Faculty value the interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues and the synergy in teaching, scholarship, and research it engenders. A faculty member at S1 “wanted an opportunity to be interdisciplinary, and [S1] offered that.” One faculty member at S2 observed, “There’s an incredible amount of interest in being collaborative . . . we’re not operating in silos . . . there’s a lot of really exciting complementary connections between the different disciplines.” Another S2 faculty member explained:

My background was very different. I came from a music conservatory . . . it was just music lessons. When I interviewed here, I liked that there were people on my committee who were not in music; I liked the fact there was the possibility for interdisciplinary conversations.

Several faculty members at S3 made similar points. One faculty member who previously had worked at a medical college talked about the liberal arts appeal:

It would not just be about science guys anymore. And that was something I was finding limiting in the medical school context . . . the backbone faculties are all research scientists. My first day on the job as director of faculty development here, my first visitor was a woman from the English Department who’s the head of the Women’s and Gender Studies, and I thought, yes! The world is broader here; I am excited that I would have people from lots of different backgrounds and priorities that I would get to work with.

Students emphasized the appeal of the breadth of the curriculum, small size, and the interaction with faculty. They expressed that they felt supported and nurtured—that their professors made them feel excited about learning, cared about them as a person, and encouraged the pursuit of their goals. They found their educational experience at the respective institutions to be challenging and rigorous, and, for the most part, prepared
them well for life after college, including employment. A student at S1 described his experience as “an education that caters to you,” and everyone in the focus group discussion agreed with this description. Another S1 student also noted:

To me, liberal arts is more than just academics; ... liberal arts is a well-rounded and diversified education. ... I think it also has a lot to do with the community in which we learn and the people who are in our classrooms.

Yet another observed: “I just really like the fact that it’s smaller, and I get to know more people, and there’s a lot more opportunities for advancement working with professors.”

An S3 student, commenting on the Liberal Studies Program (LSP) at the institution, observed:

All these other things may not necessarily be related to your major, but they force you to take these classes in an effort to make you well-rounded. ... It’s an effort to make you understand and see the bigger picture, and I think that’s something not every state school does.

A student at S2 noted, “I took a business class and I am definitely not a business major. In addition, I have explored some more options and added a minor in addition to my major.”

A few students expressed reservations at the broad requirements; they saw them as overwhelming and distracting from their major focus. Though seeing the advantage of “breadth and scope,” one S2 student noted: “Being in secondary and social studies major, I wish I had more time for more classes. ... We have to fit so much into four years; we do not really have a lot of leg room.”
Challenges, Institutional Responses, and Impact on Mission

Collectively, all three institutions identified the following challenges: declines in state appropriations for public institutions, pressures on size and enrollment from a declining number of traditional-age high school students, increasing competition from online for-profits operating across states, students’ and parents’ concerns about careers and jobs, and political pressure to justify the value of the liberal arts.

Challenges: Declines in State Funding

State Funding Trends

All three institutions identified the decline in state funding of higher education as one of the most serious challenges the institutions are facing, though in varying degrees. One system administrator noted concerning funding of higher education in S1’s state:

We've seen a decline in state support just like everybody else, but we started in a better position, I think, than many states because we've always been in the top 4–5 states in terms of the amount we receive per student from our state government, and we continue to be about that same place in the top 4 or 5, but funding has gone down significantly, so the concern is there, like everywhere else, though we are not quite as desperate as some other states yet.

Nevertheless, according to the administrator, “we've seen a steady decline in state support for the last 25 years and that has resulted in a transfer of the cost to parents and students.”

S2 has had flat tuition for the past seven years. One administrator there noted:

Funding at the state level has been stagnant for now probably eight years and most noticeably in the last five. Therefore, we are not getting the infusion of state monies to assist in developing the more innovative sides of our curriculum and being able to attract students from all sorts of backgrounds to our institution. I realize that we are not alone in that . . . it’s a national phenomenon except in very few states but it affects quality, it affects opportunity, it affects innovation, and it affects recruitment and retention.
The charts below show the funding trend in states where the three institutions in the study are located.

![Chart showing public FTE enrollment and educational appropriations per FTE trend 2004–2014](image)

*Figure 3: S1 State: Public FTE Enrollment and Educational Appropriations per FTE Trend 2004–2014*

*Data Source: SHEEO—www.sheeo.org/shef*

Funding for public higher education institutions in the S1 state was at its peak in 2008, with the FTE funding at more than $10,000. It declined slightly every year after that, with an upward swing in FTE appropriation from 2012 to 2013; it returned to the 2012 level, approximately $8,500, in 2014. The enrollment numbers went up from 2004 to 2005 and declined slightly in 2006, followed by an upward trajectory through 2011 and another declining trend through 2014. The FTE funding for the S1 state has been relatively stable from 2004 to 2014; and even at its lowest in 2012, it was still above $7,000 per FTE.
Funding for public higher education institutions in the S2 state was at its peak in 2004, with FTE funding at about $7,400. It declined in 2005 and 2006 and again rose slightly from 2007 to 2008, bringing it to about the 2004 appropriation. The appropriation showed a continuous decline from 2008 through 2013—the lowest in the 10-year period at $6,300. The FTE appropriation rose slightly in 2014 to about $6,400. The FTE enrollment for S2 state rose incrementally from about 34,000 in 2004, peaking at around 38,000 in 2011. Since then the numbers had declined to about 36,500 in 2014.

S3 state enjoyed stable funding from 2004 to 2009 with FTE appropriation at more than $7,000. At its funding peak in 2005, the FTE funding was $7,500. There is a noticeable decline from 2010 at about $6,000 to about $5,500 in 2011 and $5,000 in 2012–2014. S3 state had a robust enrollment at 170,000 FTE enrollment in 2004, rising to around 200,000 in 2014. There was a slight decline in enrollment in 2005 at 160,000, followed by a slight rise from 2008 to 2011, and the rate held constant from 2011 to 2014.
Figure 4: S2 State: Public FTE Enrollment and Educational Appropriations per FTE Trend 2004–2014
Data Source: SHEEO—www.sheeo.org/shef

Figure 5: S3 State: Public FTE Enrollment and Educational Appropriations per FTE Trend 2004–2014
Data Source: SHEEO—www.sheeo.org/shef
**Funding in Institutional Context**

As bad as the funding situation appears to be, my findings show that the three institutions were not subject to discriminatory funding policies and practices based on their liberal arts mission. However, state funding policies and priorities have an indirect impact, either positively or negatively.

According to a senior administrator at S1, roughly 65% of the institution’s revenue comes from “general funds, which would be state appropriation plus tuition and fees. This administrator noted, during a five-year period, the institution has suffered a $10 million cut (from a $38 million budget) in its state appropriation, averaging $2 million (4 to 5%) a year, and the cuts have been done with no regard for the institution’s mission. The administrator observed the limited capacity to create additional revenue to make up the shortfall in state appropriation:

I would say because we are liberal arts, and being true to our mission, our opportunities for incremental revenue are more limited than, say, the big research schools. I think there is a little bit of a shift that is starting to occur. For a long time and even to this day, there has been so much focus on STEM. You’ve heard of the concept of STEAM, adding the arts to STEM.

At S2 state, for instance, appropriations to the state universities gave 50% of the annual appropriation to the flagship campus; 25% to its urban campus; and the remaining 25% was distributed among the remaining campuses based on some formula. An administrator at S2 explains the funding model and argues that it does not take into account S2’s special mission:

It’s a historical formula that we have had. I want to say since the 80s. Late 70s, early 80s. Basically, at some point in time, the system said, “Okay,” or “No, you are getting 45% of this.” Southern Maine, you are getting 30 whatever percent and then all the other campuses are distributed according to some formula. We have been hollering; we have been vocalizing quite a bit over the years that the
funding formula is not fair. If you really looked at what we do, what our budget is, we should be getting a bigger piece of the pie.

At the outset, the legislator gave S3 special funding to implement the liberal arts mission. A senior administrator at the institution stated:

To create that unique mission, at least for a time, for probably about fifteen years after, the state supported us with funding to live that mission. That funding has gone away over the last fifteen years, but to get things started in defining who we are, they actually were giving us financial resources.

The same senior administrator noted that S3 was not subject to adverse treatment because of its mission:

I think funding decline has hit all types of institutions equally, if you will, at least public funding. I don’t think that public liberal arts schools have been hurt necessarily any more than research one or regional comprehensive. I think what’s hurting us, at least I can speak for [S3], is more the long-term declining interests in the liberal arts and, as you said, almost hostile environment for the liberal arts, a suspicion that liberal art majors are not practical or not leading towards employment.

The states in which all three institutions are located have adopted some form of performance-based funding. These funding policies shift focus from input (enrollment) to output (e.g., retention, graduation). Some of the metrics may favor or disadvantage the institution.

S1 state’s performance funding has six indices. These include, percent of first-time, full-time, fall, credential-seeking students who successfully complete at least 12 hours; licensure and certification passing rate; percent of first-time, fall, credential-seeking students who graduate, transfer, or are still enrolled with 36 hours after six years; and percent of community college associate degree completers and those who have completed 30 or more credit hours with a GPA of 2.00 or better at the state four-year
college or university after two consecutive semesters within the academic year (http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/performance-funding.aspx). As a senior administrator at S1 explained:

What has happened in the last five to 10 years is that they’ve become more performance metrics: retention, graduation rate, degree efficiency, education related spending per degree, and then Pell grant recipient. These are some of the performance metrics that have come in, as there’s this move to try to hold the schools more accountable.

S1 is limited enrollment by choice; hence, it would be at a funding disadvantage under an enrollment-funding formula. The performance-funding model allows it to play to its strength and to compete fairly for funding with the remaining 16 institutions in the system.

S2 state instituted an “Outcomes-Based Funding Model” effective fiscal year 2014; 5% of appropriations will be distributed based on this model. The plan is to increase the proportion of outcomes-based funding to 30% by 2018–2019. The model emphasizes four goals: increasing the numbers of adults with degrees or certificates, meeting the workforce needs of employers, contributing to the state’s economic development through research, and improving the productivity of the universities based on degrees awarded (http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/performance-funding.aspx).

S2 stands to gain or lose depending on the weight given to the individual factors. S2’s emphasis on traditional-age students means it will not benefit much from performance-funding allocation based on “degrees awarded to transfer students or adults older than 30.” As a senior administrator said, “we target-market to traditional-aged students . . . we don’t have many adult completers.” In addition, because of S2’s small size and model, it would score low on productivity based on degrees awarded.
Furthermore, because it offers relatively few degrees in the STEM fields, that factor would not work to its advantage. However, S2 would do well on the graduation rate. According to a senior administrator, S2 does well in this category because “it has the highest graduation rate in the university system.” The president also noted that S2 might still stand to gain with the outcomes-based funding model once other state and regional priorities are determined, with the possibility of extra points assigned to degrees in special education, an area where S2 does very well.

S3 state has a history, beginning in the late 1990s, of allocating additional state resources based on performance—what it called “Funding for Results.” This model, however, was used very little and lacked a well-articulated basis for determining performance. With the national trend toward performance-based funding, in 2014, S2 state developed a new model of performance funding. The new model has five metrics, and a sixth performance item, “student job placement in a field or position associated with the student’s degree level and pursuit of a graduate degree.” An institution would be evaluated on a three-year performance average. The new model is being test-piloted and should go into effect in FY2019.

The current funding model is based on the principle of “stable and adequate funding.” According to a document I examined on site, state funding is characterized by “core cuts in bad years, and no increases in better years. Since 2007, there have been no adjustments in the base for differential enrollment increases, changes in program mix, inflationary costs that must be borne by institutions” (Performance Funding for Higher Education, 2014 Department of Higher Education document).
An S3 administrator explained how state appropriation to colleges and universities works:

It is basically your base funding plus performance, so there is not a lot of risk. Some states put a lot of risks on performance, and so initially they (they being the state policymakers and the governor's assistant) wanted 90% to be performance-based and 10% at risk, and we fought that off, and basically we were able to make it just whatever you have this year, then your new money is allocated on performance. And if we go down, they just cut across the board. So, if it is necessary to cut to balance the budget, everyone loses 2%, say. But if money is available, then you get the new money based on performance.

So, of the new money now, 90% is based on the five indicators and 10% is reallocated based on how far away you are from the average funding per full-time equivalent student. So, a spreadsheet calculates all of these.

According to this administrator, the funding formulae also use a “weighted full-time equivalent. And so, you get more weight for the high-cost disciplines, and you get more weight for operative vision and graduate.”

Commenting on the funding allocation, a senior administrator at S3 explained that the funding formula has not been enrollment driven “probably for 30 years here in the state” and between 2001 and 2010 there really was not a formula. The administrator noted:

It was just everyone got it at the same percentage increase or the same percentage decrease. Now, of course, the institutions that were growing a lot were frustrated by that because they thought that they were being punished because their per-student funding diminished as they grew and other schools that either stayed the same or even declined, their per-people funding increased. S3 would be an example of that because we are not about enrollment growth. We have stable enrollment, but we really do not—because of our mission, because of our location, because of our program mix, we're not going to grow unless we started really doing a lot of different things with online, learning, and the like. So, we stayed relatively stable at that time; while the [flagship], for example, has had a very strategic focus on growth. And so, they've probably grown by 7,000 or 8,000 students over the last 15 years but we've stayed the same. So, their per-pupil funding has gone down whereas ours has stayed relatively stable.
This senior administrator also stated that the recent addition of a funding “placement metric” has worked to S2’s advantage:

So far, we have done well, but you know the placement metric is new. It's a new thing. So, we will see how that plays out over time. I'm not exactly sure on that for us; probably what helps us is that placement is thought more broadly. It's not just about economics. It is not just about workforce placement. It is also graduate professional school and about half of our students go on to graduate professional school after they graduate. So, we look pretty good in that regard. So, I think so far, we've done really well on the performance metrics. We are going into our fourth year of having performance funding. We will see; it is an ongoing battle every year but so far so good.

Given the small class-size ratio, the broad array of courses that are offered to give students “the breadth of knowledge” associated with the liberal arts mission, it is an expensive model of education, and the reduction in state funding support has meant that these institutions have had to look for other funding sources to support their missions. Increases in tuition and fees have occurred to varying degrees at the three institutions, and this has implications for the “access” and “affordability” aspect of the mission—twin factors that received equal emphasis among the constituents interviewed on all three campuses. One administrator at S1 commented:

One of the things that, across the board, people on this campus really appreciate is the idea that as a public liberal arts institution, we have not only an opportunity but a mandate to bring what historically has been something only accessible to the elites in society to everybody. . .We believe in the public part of our mission. So part of that public is serving the tax payers of [the state] and making this type of education experience accessible to as many people, that is number one.

An S3 administrator reiterated this point: “Because we are public, we provide a high-quality, broad-based education, and yet it is accessible to many students. Students do not choose not to come to [S3] because they cannot afford it. We truly try to make it affordable.”
Students emphasized the affordability of the institutions. An S1 student chose the institution because

It was cheap. . . I needed a safety school. I went to all the schools in the system and realized that I didn’t like how large the other ones were, and they were more expensive. This one had the best education with the lowest cost.

An out-of-state student at S2 said the school “offered me more financial aid.”

Another S2 student said:

I came here because the other school that I looked at was private, and compared to the education that I would have gotten over there, I am getting a better education here for less than half the price of the other school.

Students at S3 made the same point about affordability, but one S3 student noted that “affordable” is a relative term:

It’s affordable, but I don’t really have anyone helping me, I pretty much fund myself. I have to figure where all the money is coming from. I get assistance from the government, but when compared to the overall cost, especially if you live on campus, which I don’t do anymore because the pricing is crazy. I don’t know if anything is affordable because it keeps increasing every year. . . And then as a transfer student, I knew that I have to be in school longer, so I will be paying more too. Compared to other universities, it is affordable, but at the same time, it depends on your background, because I’m figuring out where all the money is coming from. (Focus group discussion, September 2015)

Like all public institutions, the three colleges have differential tuition policies for in-state and out-of-state students. On-campus expenses are an added cost. The data below compare the cost of attendance at S1, S2, and S3 for 2003–2004 and 2013–2014. Although the net price (the amount students pay after deducting the financial aid awards) may, at first blush, appear to be a better determinant of affordability, the more realistic assessment of the full affordability is the “sticker price,” given that most students end up
borrowing to cover the cost. The money they borrow is not free, and many spend a lifetime paying off their student-loan debts.

Figure 6: S1 Total Price of Attendance 2003–2004 and 2013–2014

The cost of attendance for in-state students living on campus at S1 in 2003–2004 was lower by about $8,000 than for out-of-state students living on campus at $12,000 and $20,000, respectively. The cost of attendance for 2013–2014 was about $19,000 and $33,000, respectively—a differential of $14,000. Students living off campus with family have the lowest cost of attendance relative to other students. For 2003–2004, cost of attendance for an in-state student living off campus with family was about $5,600, and for 2013–2014, it was slightly more than $10,000. For out-of-state students, it was $15,000 and $25,000, respectively.
The cost of attendance for in-state students living on campus at S2 in 2003–2004 was lower by about $6,500 than for out-of-state students living on campus at $12,500 and $19,000, respectively. The cost of attendance for 2013–2014 was about $21,000 and $30,000, respectively—a differential of $9,000. Students living off campus with family have the lowest cost of attendance relative to other students. For 2003–2004, the cost of attendance for an in-state student living off campus with family was about $7,500, and for 2013–2014, it was about $12,500. For out-of-state students, it was $14,000 and $22,000, respectively.
The cost of attendance for in-state students living on campus at S3 in 2003–2004 was lower by about $3,500 than for out-of-state students living on campus at about $14,000 and $17,500, respectively. The cost of attendance for 2013–2014 was about $19,500 and $25,000, respectively—a differential of $5,500. Students living off campus with family have the lowest cost of attendance relative to other students. For 2003–2004, the cost of attendance for an in-state student living off campus with family was about $9,000, and for 2013–2014, it was about $12,000. For out-of-state students, it was $13,000 and $18,000 respectively.

A comparison of the cost of attendance among S1, S2, and S3 shows that they have a similar range for in-state students living on campus—for 2003–2004, from $11,000 [S1] to about $13,000 [S2], to about $14,000 [S3]. For 2013–2014, the total cost of attendance ranged from about $19,000 [S1], to about $19,500 [S3], to about $21,000 [S2]. Of the three, S3 charged the lowest for out-of-state students living on campus at
around $17,500 in 2003–2004 and $25,000 (2013–2014). S2 charged $19,000 and $30,000 for 2003–2004 and 2013–2014, respectively; and S1 charged $20,000 and $33,000.

S3 has a robust merit scholarship program, and according to one administrator,

It would be rare for a student to be admitted to S3 and not have some form of financial assistance. Even if they did not have a financial need, there would be a recognition in a little of their achievement from a merit perspective but then, of course, much of our merit aid then is applied to need as well, so it ends up being about 45% merit that we award actually gets applied to need because we have students with very high need.

S3 relies in part on endowments to fund its scholarships. The institution is currently at the beginning of a $40 million campaign and, according to one administrator,

The institution has just completed a $30 million campaign two years ago, and the majority of that campaign was for students’ scholarships; even though many of those scholarships are earmarked to very specific entities, we have worked really hard to try and get those dollars into the hands of students.

S3 also supplements its scholarship funds with institutional dollars—a form of tuition discounting. According to an S3 administrator, the discount rate is

Around 38%. So we are more like a private college with that kind of discount rate.

So if you look at our statistics, in an entering freshman class, 95% of them get some kind of financial aid. It might be anything from $500 to full ride. . . . So, everyone is practically getting something.

The same senior administrator explained that state funds for scholarship are allocated on a “cost-plus basis”:

The way that formula works was for scholarship—whatever you said you spent the previous year, they took the average tuition increase for all campuses. So, say it was 4% and they let you add 4%, they add 4% for that. So, if you added a million dollars to scholarships, the next year, you can get that million plus 4%. So they started spending money on scholarship as part of the mission change, and then we got hooked on it. So, the theory was once your reputation grew, people
knew how great it is to come here, we would not have to give such large scholarships, but it did not work out that way.

Administrators and faculty expressed concern that the decline in state support, coupled in some instances by a hold on tuition increase, would significantly impact the quality of the students’ educational experience and faculty and staff morale. An administrator at S1 identified two main challenges to the mission:

Keeping up with technology and the resource that you can bring to bear on a liberal arts education; it is expensive. There is a reason private liberal arts cost $35 to $50 thousand a year. There is no end; there no limit to what you could spend to make the education experience better. There is always new equipment, there is always new technology, there is additional faculty you like to hire, additional areas of inquiry you like to pursue. So, finding the balance between doing everything and becoming obsolete is always a challenge.

According to one S3 administrator: “We are seeing diminishing resources, and how do we continue to be relevant into the 21st century?” Another administrator at S3 reiterated the same point:

We’ve been facing a bit of an existential crisis regarding how we preserve the core of our liberal arts experience in an era where there are diminishing resources and, unfortunately, diminishing interest in some core liberal arts and science majors. How do you begin to generate revenue and resources and maintain enrollment around that mission?

Another S3 administrator commented, “With diminishing resources, it is hard to hold onto that fulltime faculty. . . It’s difficult to pay our faculty what we would like to pay them to be competitive.”

**Responses and Impact of Declines in State Funding**

**Increase in Enrollment**

In addition to raising tuition and fees, all three institutions have increased enrollment to varying degrees. At S1, for example, 64% of students who applied were
admitted, and 28% of those enrolled in fall 2013. S1 had an enrollment increase of 16% in fall 2014—750 freshmen.

One student focus group at S1 commented on the pros and cons of increased enrollment, noting that it would provide additional resources but would detract from the small-campus feel:

There’s been a lot of changes happening with the university trying to get enrollment up and things like that, and I know a lot of it has worked because our enrollment is up this year. I am kind of excited about our increase in numbers. I know it’s going to be weird like we want these things to happen on campus and all these new initiatives which you need money for, but in order for our tuition not to go up, we need more students. If we have more students, we’re going to have this weird flex space over a couple of years of kind of feeling crowded, but if we can add, like, one more professor to each department that’s going to improve our education, our class sizes will still be small and we still have more students to interact with. Getting there will be hard, but I think the end product would be great. Even if we stayed under 4,500 to 5,000 students, I think that would be really good for our university and where we were trying to go.

One student participant agreed, but noted the downside of enrollment growth. Enrollment attracts more resources but negatively impacts the class size and the value students and faculty place in that kind of intimate classroom environment: “So, I think funding went up because of the increase in class size, and now you have a bit more funding in these places but there are more students now.”

A constant concern expressed by students, faculty, and administrators at S1 is keeping the enrollment at the “right size.” One administrator noted:

The other thing that has been an issue in [S1] is what is the appropriate size of this institution and nobody wants to see us grow . . . and what’s interesting is when you look at COPLAC, there is quite a breadth of size. And so we’re about 3,300, 3,400 or 3,500, 3,600. Somewhere in that neighborhood. We could grow to 4,000, many of us believe. I am one of them. We could grow to 4,000 students; most of the people in the campus wouldn’t notice the difference. It would dramatically change the culture and the environment in this campus. But the
number of new faculty positions it would give us, the amount of new budget it would get us from the state is noticeable.

We all recognize now, and the administrators have all been preaching out to the faculty, look, the pie right now is only this big. So we can continue to fight over who gets the biggest piece of the pie or we can grow the pie, right? Now how big a pie do we need? Do we need one of those big cookies you get at the mall or we just need a few more cookies? And so I think that has influenced the graduate program.

An S3 administrator made a similar point about tuition dependency, noting that the institution has “become more tuition-driven, we’re much more enrollment sensitive.”

The admission profile chart below confirms the statement of another S3 administrator:

Admission rate is about 70–75% of students who apply would be admitted. It is a little higher for in-state students than for out of state. Forty-one percent of the students who are admitted will enroll. It is a pretty high yield for a public institution, and we don’t have an application fee either. When you factor that in, it is really a high yield.

Its enrollment strategy includes increasing its out-of-state and international student enrollment and, to a limited extent, tapping the nontraditional student population.

According to one S3 administrator:

The growth has to happen with the nontraditional and, I mean, nontraditional in quotes, not the nontraditional-age students (they can be included in that). It is this alternative kind of delivery system that is where we have to continue to focus energy because the traditional number of students is static, and to keep stable, it is our best-case scenario.

Unlike S3, state law limits the number of out-of-state students in every freshman class in S1. According to one S1 administrator:

By state policy, our incoming freshman class cannot be over 18% of out of state. Tuition for this group of students has gone up 12 to 13% . . . high. What we run into in the out-of-state is more market pressures because that’s more like the private type thing and we’re staying at about that 12 to 13%.
Figure 9: Admission Profile: S1-A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences. Data Source: IPEDS

Figure 10: Admission Profile: S2-A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields. Data Source: IPEDS
Without hiring additional faculty, enrollment increase will raise the faculty-student ratio, altering one of the much-vaunted characteristics of the liberal arts institution. This may affect the quality of the students’ experiences in the following ways: at all three institutions, faculty observed that there has been an increase in the use of adjunct faculty, increase in faculty teaching load, and suspension of professional leave, with consequences for student learning and faculty productivity and morale.

A faculty member at S1 said:

Basically, what’s happened is, we are smaller, we are trying to do the same amount of stuff, and we just cannot. I think our research productivity is a little bit less, maybe the quality of what we do is a little bit less because we are constantly running to be ready to do the things we need to do.

Figure 11: Admission Profile: S3-A Master’s College and University—Medium Program. Data Source: IPEDS

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% of Students

Applicants Total
Admissions Total
Enrolled Total
Admitted/Applicants
Enrolled/Admitted
**Tuition Increase**

Tuition has been held relatively steady at all three institutions; state policies limit the capacity of the three institutions to increase tuition. S2 has maintained flat tuition held over a five-year period at state directives. At S3, according to one administrator, the institution could not raise tuition for in-state students above 0.8% of the CPI, and

In the last several years that has been minimal, and there have been a few years where the governor will say, OK, college presidents, if you will hold the line on tuition, if you will freeze tuition, then I will fight for just that much more of state funding.

Albeit there was no state-imposed limit on tuition increase for out-of-state students, S3 set a limit of no more than 1.6% above the CPI by simply doubling the limit set for in-state students. The administrator noted:

There really is a commitment, we have been so willing to look at what we can do without in order to keep [the institution] affordable for students, so really, the tuition for an in-state student is just over $7,000 for the year, and for an out-of-state student, it is just over $13,000 for the year . . . so very affordable at the sticker price but then we work hard to try and make it affordable in other ways as well so that students are not even paying that full amount.

There has been a slight tuition increase at S1; it charges significantly higher out-of-state tuition and fees than S2 and S3, and has the highest rate among COPLAC peers. A system administrator at S1 observed that it faces “the challenge of affordability and that’s going to be an ongoing challenge and we've got to figure out ways to meet that challenge.”

One of the systems heads interviewed noted about S1:

We've seen a steady decline in state support for the last 25 years and that has resulted in a transfer of the cost to parents and students and reduced access, affordability, making it more difficult for students to attend our public universities, so I worry about that decline in state support. I think that is a real
problem. Fortunately in [the state] we are still relatively well funded, compared to most of the country, so it's a little bit less of a problem for us in some places, but it is a growing problem for us as well . . . and we tend to raise tuition, our tuition is still quite low compared to most of the country but we still have had to raise it significantly in order to be able to continue to fund the university based on the cuts we've received, so I think we're doing as much as we think we can do internally to be as efficient as we can but also to show that we're using our money as wisely as possible and as much as possible for student education. (Phone interview, November 12, 2015).

The administrative structure has a bearing on programming, budgeting, and the ease with which institutions can respond to changes. One administrator at S3 emphasized the flexibility that their decentralized system permits:

Our system is more decentralized so . . . when I say system, there really is not a system. So, there is not an equivalent system of the state college and universities . . . so we set our own tuition, our own salaries, our own benefits packages and all that, and so we have quite a bit of independence. So, we turn in a request to the state department of higher education.

And then there is a group called the Coordinating Board for Education. So, the coordinating board is really . . . more of what’s called the weak coordinating agency as opposed to strong. So, they make recommendations on budgets, they do give for the state universities approval on programs. So, if we want to add a new, say, Master’s in Computer Science, we have to get their approval and document the need for it. So, what happens is it goes from that group to the state budget office, which is the governor side of things, and then they make a recommendation, then it goes on through our general assembly (that’s what our legislature is called here). Ninety-nine percent of the time, what the governor recommends is what you get. The governor, like most governors, is very powerful when it comes to finances in the state. And so, unlike other states, we have to run a balanced budget, so he has the power of holding back money if it doesn't look like there is enough money coming in. So, the last few years we have been on a, what is called Performance Funding Model.

Commenting further on the decentralized budgeting process, the administrator observed:

Yeah, so we present to our board, but typically, that discussion is maybe 20 minutes in all. The president has kept them up to date on the situation so they know . . . that is the difference of having a local board. I think the local board has really helped us, because they understand enrollment, they understand what we're getting from the state. So, it's no shock if you go in there and say, "Well, we can’t get a raise," or "Here's all we can do," they may say, "Gosh, I wish we could give a bigger raise," but it's not a shock to them because they know what’s been going on and they know the situation.
S2 is on an opposite trajectory to S3. S2 is undergoing a systemwide transition toward a more centralized system. According to an S2 administrator, this is an opportunity to work on quality, work on access, but also, and really, I think this is the primary driver, to make the university of [name of state] system financially sustainable into the future, given the demography, given some of the challenges we are facing in [the state]. So, within that context, the issue for me at [S2] is how we work to preserve this particular education opportunity for our faculty, for our students, and residents of [the state], the citizens of the state, and beyond. That is something we are going to be very creative about and persistent, and I think going forward, trying to hang on to the differentiation piece, while there is a whole lot of systematizing taking place in terms of back-office operations.

**Alternative Revenue Streams and Gaining Operational Efficiencies**

Given the limited ability to increase tuition, the institutions have adopted a two-pronged approach—finding alternative revenue streams and finding operating efficiencies that have included administrative reorganization and staff reduction, increased use of adjuncts, and suspension of faculty professional leaves. At S1, according to the system head:

Well, I think from the system level we have taken a lot of steps to become more efficient and to share operational costs across our campuses so that we can redirect some of that money into educational spending, which we have seen reduced by the state. We’re still not where we need to be in terms of compensation of faculty and staff. I think we are trying to put in place some systems, early-warning systems, other kinds of electronic advising systems to help students navigate their transfers from community college . . . anything we can do to help students be successful. I think we’re trying to accomplish from the system level and it’s from our limited resources and we’re trying to make our case to the general assembly to continue to support the university.

Some of the revenue-generating strategies employed by S3 include dual credits and transfer-friendly programs. According to one administrator, “We partnered with a lot of high schools, and we have hundreds of high school students taking college algebra and
college trigonometry from S3 for credit. That has helped us. We are looking for more opportunities to do that.”

To different degrees, all three institutions are employing fundraising in their arsenal of responses to reductions in state appropriations. An S1 administrator offered:

Fundraising is a big focus. In other words, the board of governors recognizes and they are saying we have to now go after raising funds. There are metrics along the lines of cost to raise a dollar that did not used to exist before or not clearly understood and that kind of thing. That’s probably one of the most significant pressures on us—raising money. Other profit-making things are really relatively small.

Responses to the financial and funding challenges on all three campuses include not filling vacant positions, consolidation of positions, and outright elimination of positions. Faculty hire and retention, and roles and rewards have been impacted, as they are asked to do more with less. At S1, faculty professional research leave was put on hold for many years, with plans announced in fall 2014 to reinstate it. Other measures include increase in faculty teaching load and faculty-student ratio. An S3 administrator noted:

You might hear some faculty complain that they are teaching more than before and that might be slightly true, say, prior to the financial crisis of 2008. I don’t think it’s dramatically so . . . as I said, our faculty-student ratio has not changed much. At one point in 2008, it was 14 to 1, and now it’s gone up to 16 to1. Administrators on all three campuses admit that in the face of current funding challenges, the model is not sustainable as is. Discussions and plans include significant reduction in the size of the workforce.

One S3 administrator acknowledged the challenges of an appropriate response:

But we also have a physical plant that is in place that we have to maintain and support, not to mention the economics support this institution has for the local community. We're in a small town. If we were to cut the size of our enrollment in half, it would have devastating results for the local economy. And so, I have a sense of responsibility for not only this university and the people who work here but also for those who live in this community.
So, it’s not as simple as just saying, we're going to be just pure liberal arts and sciences, but I also personally believe that, you know, there's very few institutions that are purely liberal arts. (Personal interview, October 2015)

Another administrator at S3 reflected:

We have some faculty on our campus who believe that the academic year is sacrosanct, and outside the academic year or outside the undergraduate curriculum is fine. I also think that it was clear to them if they wanted to make additional salary during the summer teaching face-to-face courses on campus we weren't doing it because students are not staying around in the summer, for the most part. So, if they wanted to protect that, they needed to consider doing it in other ways. So, I think there was a very practical reason on the faculty's part, but what becomes fascinating about that is they haven't yet resolved the cognitive dissonance. So, at the faculty senate meeting, a student senate president said, help me understand, you say online classes are not as rigorous, but we have all these summer online classes. Are you telling us that the summer classes are not as rigorous as the academic year classes? And they threw up all kind of strawmen for him because they couldn't really answer that question, and I thought it was a very appropriate, legitimate question from our student. (Personal interview, October 2015)

The tables below provide a summary of the funding challenge, responses, and impact on the respective campuses.
S1—A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences: Responses and Impact of Funding Challenges

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Funding Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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</table>
| • Reduced state appropriation  
  • Tuition and fee freeze  
  • Retention of full-time faculty because of non-competitive salaries | Increased enrollment (state policy limits enrollment of out-of-state students):  
  • Enrollment increased by 16 percent in fall 2014  
  • Instituted an early-warning system to help students navigate their transfers from community college | Access and affordability:  
  Undergraduate Student experience:  
  • Larger class sizes with implications for the much vaunted value of a close-knit campus community and the opportunity for faculty-student mentoring relationship  
  • Additional revenues, if properly redirected, may enhance mission |
| Raised tuition and fees. Charges significantly higher out-of-state tuition than COPLAC peers. | | Access and affordability:  
  • Risks making S1 much less affordable |
| Alternative revenue streams:  
  • Plans on adding limited graduate programs  
  • Geared up its fundraising efforts | | S1’s identity as an undergraduate institution will be altered, but the addition could provide added revenue since graduate programs generate more state funding and tuition charges are higher |
| Efficiencies in operation:  
  • Administrative reorganization  
  • Reduced operational cost across campus and redirecting some of those gains to educational spending  
  • Did not cut faculty, but vacated lines may remain unfilled  
  • Low compensation for faculty and staff  
  • Increased use of adjunct faculty  
  • Suspension of professional leave for faculty | | Undergraduate student experience:  
  • Reduced faculty research productivity  
  • Larger classes and higher faculty-student ratio |
### S2—A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields: Responses and Impact of Funding Challenges

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<th>Funding Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced state appropriation</td>
<td>Limited enrollment growth:</td>
<td>• Adverse effect on revenue for mission implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Enrollment held steady; S2 wishes to remain small, but it welcomed a higher freshman class in fall 2015 than in previous years.</td>
<td>• Stifles innovative curriculum, ability to attract students from diverse background; affects quality, opportunity, and recruitment and retention of students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in tuition and fees:</td>
<td>Help sustain the access and affordability mission</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative revenue streams:</td>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaining efficiencies in operation:</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mistrust in the administration and low faculty morale affecting productivity and the learning environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Layoff of faculty and other significant reduction in staff</td>
<td>• Uncertainty on campus on how the One-University initiative will affect mission</td>
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<td></td>
<td>System moves to a One-University model, with centralized operation and shared services</td>
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## S3—A Master’s College and University—Medium Program: Responses and Impact of Funding Challenges

<table>
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<th>Funding Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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| Reduced state appropriation | **Limited enrollment growth:**  
  - Keeping up enrollment target by focusing largely on enrollment in the professional and pre-professional programs (nursing, exercise science, accounting, and communications disorder)  
  - Increase in enrollment of out-of-state students  
  - Increase recruitment of international students  
  - Limited tapping of non-traditional students (broadly defined) | **Access and affordability:**  
  - Increase in enrollment of out-of-state students may displace in-state students, with implications for S3’s public mission to serve residents of the state |
| Increase in tuition and fees: | **By state policy, increase in tuition for in-state students cannot exceed 0.8% of the Consumer Price Index (CPI)**  
  - S3 capped the tuition increase for out-of-state students to no more than 1.6% of the CPI | **Affordability and access are negatively impacted** |
| Alternative revenue streams: | **Increased offerings of dual and transfer credits**  
  - Established a competency-based program in data management  
  - Increased fundraising | **Increase in revenue** |
| Gaining efficiencies in operation: | **Reduction in size of workforce through retrenchment**  
  - Increase in faculty teaching load  
  - Increase in faculty-student ratio from about 14:1 to 16:1 | **Impact on student learning, faculty and staff productivity, and morale** |
Challenges: Shifting Demographics

Demographic challenges address the question of who gets to attend these colleges? For whom is access and affordability granted? As public institutions, which publics are they serving? At what cost? What role does a selective admission practice have on the access mission? Does the flexibility and opportunity to explore—one of the things students said they liked about their experiences—increase the cost of attendance? Diversity is implicit in the mission of access and affordability and it is an essential attribute of the kind of educational experience that these institutions claim in their mission.

Yet the majority of the student population at all three institutions is white. The pie charts below show the student demographic composition for each of the institutions. (See Appendix J for a table showing the demographic trend for a representative three-year period.) The charts reveal that the three institutions are remarkably similar in their racial/ethnic composition, with white students making up more than 80% of the student population. Other categories are similar except for the “non-resident alien” category, where S3 has 6% representation compared to the 1%, respectively, of S1 and S2. S1 and S3 have a 3% black/African American representation, respectively, and S2 has 1%; Hispanic is 4% at S1, 2% at S2, and 3% at S3. Both S1 and S2 have 1% Asian and S3 has 2%.
Figure 12: S1—A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences. Race/Ethnicity. Data source: coplac.org

Figure 13: S2—A Baccalaureate College: Diverse Fields. Race/Ethnicity. Data source: coplac.org
All respondents agree that diversity is critical to the liberal arts mission, and the absence of it detracts from the quality of a liberal arts education. An S1 administrator observed:

Having this kind of institution in a public setting is essential because it is a point of access for all of us. For those who don’t have the means or even the knowledge of this tier of comparable private liberal arts education, the public provide a phenomenal access point.

The experiences of students confirmed the administrator’s rhetoric with respect to quality of education experience. However, there was one area of dissonance—diversity. In my interviews and focus group discussions, I asked participants for their views on the importance of diversity to the liberal arts mission and asked them to define diversity, as they understood it. On all campuses and across all groups, there was a broad definition of diversity. Even as all acknowledged race and ethnicity as an important category, several...
shifted the focus to the type of diversity represented on their respective campuses.

Participants defined diversity broadly to include diverse perspectives, ideology, race/ethnicity, first-generation college students, students from low socioeconomic groups, nontraditional student populations, gender, religion, and sexuality. They all identified the limitation of institutional location as a factor in achieving diversity.

S1 emphasized that its campus was LGBTQ-friendly. One administrator at S1 admitted that they have “been rethinking what diversity means.” The institution has broadened its understanding of diversity to include all kinds of dimensions and that has been a struggle too, because those who are committed to issues of ethnicity may feel as if their issues have been shunted to the side or marginalized in some way through consideration of sexuality, identity, and perhaps ideology.

A faculty member at S1 confirmed this feeling of marginalization and expressed the view that race/ethnic diversity has been given short shrift in the process of “dilution” of what diversity means.

A student at S1 noted, “The university does not know how to foster a culture that is not white; it just doesn’t happen.” Another S1 student noted:

To me the one thing that’s wrong with this university is that they do not allow the minorities to speak in any way or form you look at it. If you do not conform, you don’t, at least, pretend to conform, or you do not keep your mouth shut, the campus will shut you down.

Another S1 student observed:

[S1] is nowhere close to being diverse, and coming from my school and my town . . . my town was primarily African American . . . I came to this school and I’ve never seen so many white people in my life. It was ridiculous.

At S2, an administrator stated that the institution is
Quite diverse . . . in terms of intellectual, political, and other sorts of points of view. . . . I think there is a broad spectrum of representation among faculty and administrators and probably students as well. We are trying to increase diversity regarding international exposure, sending more students abroad hopefully, and bringing growing numbers of international students to our campus as well by way of enriching the community.

One S2 faculty member noted:

When I first arrived here in 1992, there was no diversity to speak of. I think the only type of diversity we had would be some socioeconomic diversity, but no other type of diversity. I’ve seen that changed over the years and I think it is especially important for the students that we get here are often first-generation students from rural [state name deleted]. . . . They may come from families that may not have a lot of means and that exposure to the world. . . . [We need] to bring the world to them because they don’t often get to go outside of [state name deleted]. (Personal interview, September 2015)

According to one administrator, S2 faces challenges regarding people of color within the state . . . given the fact that our demographics show a downward trend in [the region as a whole], we are having a hard time attracting a diverse population to our institution.

In [state name deleted], the demographic issue is very big and ultimately I think is what is driving the university system to rethink itself, reinvent itself . . . moving from being a system of [x] autonomous universities . . . transitioning from that model to becoming a single university comprised of [xx] geographically mission-differentiated campuses.

One S3 administrator commented on the locational disadvantage of the college:

In a rural environment, diversity is a challenge, and I would say that one thing I have set as a target is to increase our under-represented student population. We have been successful in increasing it incrementally in this past year probably most successful in terms of our first-year class. . . . Probably our biggest challenge is that, of course, you always want to reflect the diversity that you seek and the people who work here and attracting a diverse faculty to [S3] is a challenge because of the rural environment. Minority faculty do not always want to live in a rural environment such as this.

A faculty member at S3 noted:
Ethnic diversity is an ongoing challenge for us. Our location makes it difficult . . . we are not in an urban area and so a lot of the services that would attract people who are used to a multicultural environment, we just don’t have that and, like many institutions, it’s especially African American men who are very difficult to recruit.

The student focus group expressed a similar view, describing S3 as “a blue dot in a red sea” and observing that the institution itself is a “safe zone” in the rural and conservative community in which it is located. Another student noted:

I grew up close to the border in Arizona, so I am used to seeing diversity every single day. Moreover, coming to a very small town . . . this is the smallest town I have ever lived in. It was quite a culture shock.

An S3 administrator acknowledged:

Our majority students will be the white . . . students, more the middle-class type of student, but diversity is also the student who comes from the rural high school and who is perhaps coming from a challenging social and economic background. We have many students who are the first generation.

However, a faculty member at S3 thought that the institution could do more to achieve greater ethnic/racial diversity despite its apparent locational disadvantage:

In a world that is crying for more information and more education, if we are not finding students, it must be because we have self-imposed limitations on who we consider being potential students.

Another aspect of diversity relates to first-generation students. Of the three institutions, S2 is the most deliberate in serving first-generation students. In the fall 2014 cohort at S2, 262 of its 497 (52.7%) entering freshman class were first-generation students. An S2 faculty member commented on S2’s commitment to first-generation students:

I was a first-generation college student. We have about 51–52% first-generation college students. I know what they are going through, and I know the difficulty
there is coming to an institution of higher education without the support from home or the understanding of what it is like. What’s interesting about the public liberal arts is that these voices, the first-generation college students, become yet another perspective on the liberal arts.

One group that was not the focus of these institutions are the non-traditional-age students.

At S2, according to one administrator:

Nontraditional students are more than welcome, absolutely more than welcome . . . although given the model we have set up, traditional face-to-face residential . . . we do not have a large population of nontraditional students. . . . Our sister campus at [xxx], for example, offers a great percentage of its curriculum online in alternative times and so forth, and it tends to be more access oriented in a much broader way than [S2].

Another factor that may affect access is the level of selectivity of the institution.

S3 is “highly selective.” S3 made strategic decisions in creating a class of high-achieving students by granting tuition discounts to in-state and out-of-state students, applying the model used by private liberal arts colleges.

One administrator who was a graduate of the college before the mission changed had this to say:

We were [xxx] University when I left; the name change happened about ten years later. . . [I came] back and found it to be more like a private school. Faculty and students noted the quality of students at S3, and students talked about the rigor of the academic program and competitiveness among students.

One S3 faculty member said S3 “is a place for highly prepared students, very bright students.” Commenting on the student body, a faculty member noted, “The students that we attract now are a completely different caliber than they used to be. I will not say better. I will say prepared in the classic college-prep line of preparation.”
As one faculty member at S2 observed, “The institution is focused on the residential 18–22-year-old traditional-age population . . . and that demographic is shrinking. That puts a lot of external pressure to find students to stay sustainable.”

Shifting demographics affect who goes to college and how they go—what one S3 administrator referred to as the “easy portability of credit” may pose a challenge to the liberal arts mission. The administrator noted:

We hardly have any traditional freshmen anymore because almost all of our students are transfer students. Even if they are coming to us at age 18, they are technically transfer students because they are transferring a lot of credits in. Most of our students are transferring anything from 15 to 40 credits . . . . How do you infuse the liberal arts experience for students who maybe are going to be here for their junior or senior year, for example?

One system administrator expressed concern about transfers and online offerings affecting the liberal arts brand:

I see it as a legitimate concern but in a larger context. The fact that we have to respond to the fact of how students are choosing to be educated. . . . In 2014, of the students receiving four years degrees in the United States, 60% of them did not receive their degrees from the institution in which they began. And that is not anything you or I or people at [S2] can stand up and say, hold, we need to go back to the old way, and we may as well try to hold back the tide. So, while it’s a concern, and I think legitimate concern, it also is not realistic to expect students who transfer to [S2] after one or two years to start over, nor is there research that I’m familiar with really that says somehow the value of what they are going to get by being in [S2] is going to be dramatically compromised as a result of coming in from somewhere else after a year or more.

S2, in particular, is a victim of its state’s aging population and the decline in the number of students graduating from high schools in the state and heading to college. As noted by one administrator, “Eighty percent of students at the college are from the state, and given the state demographics, you are, as a matter of fact, drawing from a student population that is not particularly diverse.” Other administrators made similar points:
In [name of state] the demographic issue is very big and, ultimately, I think, is what is driving the University System to rethink itself, reinvent itself . . . moving from being a system of [xxx] autonomous universities . . . transitioning from that model to becoming a single university comprised of [xxx] geographically mission-differentiated campuses.

The system head reiterated the same point:

Our problem is, we’re one of only a few handful of states in the demographic winter. We have only 1.35 million people in the entire state and all our public high schools together are graduating 12 to 13 thousand students a year. So, the demographic challenge here is huge and it’s magnified by the fact that between our public universities and our public community colleges, we have a large number of institutions and limited resources. . . . We have to look to not just our young people, but to adults of every age. If we accept the president’s target that by 2025, we’d like to have 60% of our adult population with some postsecondary credentials . . . if we took every student in our public school pipeline right now from K–12 and got everyone of the 100% over the next 12 years between now and 2025, got 100% of them a 2-year or a 4-year degree, we would only get halfway to the president’s goal. And so we have to engage with the adult population and that’s causing a shift in how we do business.

For the same reason of state demographics and economic outlook in the state, more than 50% of S2 students are first-generation students. According to a senior administrator,

One out of two students here are first generation . . . not that that has anything to do with income, but it does correlate. Eighty-five percent are on financial aid and Pell grant is about fifty-five percent and about a quarter have zero Expected Family Contribution.

Responses to demographic challenges are greatly influenced by state and institutional contexts. S2’s strategy includes tapping the pipeline of international students recruited by private schools in the state who might wish to stay on for college, including strategically “trying to encourage more attendance of students of color by targeting the refuge communities from Africa.” Despite these efforts, an S2 administrator admitted, “Comparatively . . . you come from a state that doesn’t fall into that category [diverse population], our category makes it tough.”
Responses and Impact to Demographic Challenges

The three institutions show different approaches to efforts at addressing their demographic challenges. At S1, 40 to 50% of the incoming freshman class for fall 2015 was first-generation college students. S2’s strategies include recruiting graduates of the local high school to attend S2 by waiving their room and board fees for the first year.

One S3 administrator explained the institutional efforts to foster not only diversity but also inclusiveness:

We work very hard to support our underrepresented students and to create a strong sense of community, not only among the under-represented student population but right now our focus is integration. How do we do a better job of integrating those students into the larger community of [S3] working with some student organizations, and in that regard certainly our multicultural affair center is actively involved in trying to create a much more integrative student population. International students are an important part of that, and we have seen an increase in international student population just like a lot of other schools. Ours has been a little bit more purposeful, strategic, and methodical, but we now have 400 international students on campus that represent about 50 countries. And so, I think it has helped us in diversity and adding that kind of diversity to campus has been very beneficial to students. (Personal interview, October 2015)

According to an administrator at S3, programs targeting the under-represented population include the Bridge program, which is free to the students: “We are absorbing the cost of that so they can come, and it is room and board.” The administrator explained further:

Other things we are doing are very deliberate partnerships; so, for example, two years ago, an organization called RAISE ME contacted us. They were searching for a high-quality institution to partner with them in their micro-scholarship programs. . . . Students were to sign up as early as their freshman year of high school, and then we assign money or micro scholarship for achievements. . . . It is an incentive program to be college bound from the outset and to do the things that will keep them on the college-bound track, and . . . when they apply to [S3] and they are admitted, they already have this certain pot of money they can apply to S3. Another S3 partnership with Phoenix Pact . . . students take college-bound courses; agree they will earn no less than three credits every semester; file FAFSA and if 0
EFC, then in partnership with the institution with what will [be] award[ed] in federal and institutional aid, the student accepts their federal loans, [and] they must accept work study if they have 0 EFC. Phoenix Pact will make up the difference; they will pay up to $3,500 to attend S3. These kind of targeted partnerships are focusing in on the student who is prepared and who can be successful at S3.

To a limited degree, the institutions have developed programs to attract demographics outside of the traditional 18–24-year-olds. Different programs increase recruitment of minorities and first-generation students, including the BRIDGE program and many locally created programs. S1 also has moved from test-score admission to holistic admission. S3 initiated a competency-based data-management program; S2, on the other hand, has been deliberate in its decision to focus on a particular type of transfer students—in the words of an S2 administrator, “the traditional-age student who had initially moved away to go to college but who has now decided to move back home.”

S1 had the largest diverse class in its fall 2015 enrollment because of changes in its admissions criteria and a deliberate policy to attract more students of under-represented groups. Commenting on the changes they made, a senior administrator explained:

Previously, we had such a strong emphasis on maintaining the higher SAT and we found we were declining enrollment to students that we knew would be successful here because they would lower the average SAT score that we reported. . . . This year, we decided that was not important to us any longer. . . . Now the SAT is just one factor among many . . . it is not as important as the GPA, the class rank, and taking into account how well a student did depending on the resources of their high school. . . . As a result of that, our class has gone from fifteen or sixteen African American students last year to forty-five. The number of first-generation students has increased, as have the number of Hispanic students. It has precisely the effect that we wanted to have, and we have one of the largest classes coming in, in the school’s history. We can see a direct evidence of what happens when you got one set of standards that worked fifty years ago, and it is no longer relevant, so you change those standards based on current demographics.
### Summary Table of Challenges, Responses, and Impact

#### S1—A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences: Responses and Impact of Demographic Challenges

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<tr>
<th>Demographic Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>Changed admission criteria from being SAT-centric to a mix that took into consideration students’ high school GPA, evidence of students’ potential to succeed at S1.</td>
<td>40–50% of the incoming class for fall 2015 was made up of minority students, resulting in the largest diverse class in the institution’s history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-generation</td>
<td>Partnered with the AVID program.</td>
<td>Number of African American students increased from 15 to 45 in fall 2015.</td>
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<td>Lower socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Provided support network from freshman year through the second in a cohort-type program for the AVID students.</td>
<td>Increase in Hispanic student population.</td>
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<td>Geographical challenge of institution’s location</td>
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<td>Increase in first-generation college students.</td>
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#### S2—A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields. Data Source: Responses and Impact of Demographic Challenges

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<th>Demographic Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>The state demographic challenges are one of the drivers for the One-University initiative</td>
<td>First-generation students make up 51–52% of S2’s student population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-generation</td>
<td>Strategic efforts to recruit graduates from the local high school and providing a waiver of room and board for the first year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Tapping the pipeline of international students in the state high schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geographical challenge of institution’s location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographics pose a challenge to recruiting students of color</td>
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<tr>
<td>States’ aging population and decline in the number of students graduating from high school who are college-bound pose significant challenges for S2</td>
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### Demographic Challenges | Responses | Impact
--- | --- | ---
- Race/ethnicity  
- First-generation  
- Lower socioeconomic  
- Geographical challenge of institution’s location poses a problem to recruiting students and faculty of color | 
- Highly selective admission criteria and tuition discounting to attract high-performing students (applies the private liberal arts model)  
- Established programs targeting under-represented groups, including BRIDGE (free tuition and board to participants)  
- Partnership with private non-profit groups focused on college access, such as RAISE and the Phoenix Pact.  
- Does not charge application fees  
- Has a generous merit-based scholarship  
- Heavy recruiting of out-of-state students  
- Recruitment of international students, with an increase in this group during the last several years (400 international students representing 50 countries)  
- Programs targeting transfer students  
- Limited online offerings/non-traditional delivery models | 
- Enrollment of minority students still small, but the needle inches slightly up. The location disadvantage and highly selective admission criteria appear to militate against huge gains in this area.  
- Makes up for the lack of diversity in its domestic student population by the high number of its international student body  
- Access and affordability for minority students negatively impacted by the highly selective admission criteria that tend to favor middle- and upper-middle-class students with the high school preparation for college success  
- Merit-based scholarships and the associated high tuition discounting transfers resources from students with the greatest financial need to students who probably can afford to pay  
- S3’s model challenges the “public” aspect of its mission
**Challenges: Technology**

One area of tension on all three campuses was with online/distance education course offerings. There is a reluctance to embrace online courses. Many faculty and administrators expressed the view that online education is anathema to the liberal arts mission, but others were more pragmatic and acknowledged the need for the adaptive use of technology to enhance mission. An S3 faculty member expressed the view that seem to echo faculty sentiments at all three institutions:

> We [are] loath to have online courses during the school year because we are a residential college, and who wants a new freshman to come to campus . . . and sit in their dorm for six months and take all their courses at their computer when all the resources are right here . . . that’s the whole idea of a residential college. Why would you have online classes at a residential college except to reach people remotely, which is what we intend to do in the summer?

In particular, some administrators who tend to have a broader view of institutional challenges saw online education and other new models as essential to institutional and mission sustainability, and key to their meeting their responsibility of access and affordability. The system administrator and the board of trustees/governors interviewed for this research agreed. The system head at S1 state noted:

> We need to learn how to use technology more effectively and help our faculty improve their use of technology . . . It doesn’t mean that we’re going to eliminate campuses and have only online education. I think what we are saying is much more of the blended classroom model and flipped classroom model, but we will still be educating on campuses [so] I think we need to be smarter about how we do it. It’s particularly important, that campus environment, the residential campus model that you find in most of the liberal arts colleges and universities is really important because it creates a sense community as a lot of learning takes place out the classroom, so we do need to focus more on how we can use the technology and be more efficient.
Responses and Impact of the Challenges of Technology

The three institutions have done very little to embrace technology in advance of their mission. Technology, including online and other forms of new-model learning, offers both challenges and opportunities, especially with the new demographics of college-going students. However, I observed a reticence about online and other new models of education from both faculty and administrators, even though they recognize that these have the potential to increase access and affordability. There are two arguments against online course offerings—one is that they would significantly alter the brand and identity of the institutions; the other centers on quality. At S1, an administrator admitted that they “have done very little” with online education.

We have been somewhat resistant, we don’t have total online degrees . . . so part of our smallness in our liberal arts mission is that we still value that contact with the professor and the interaction of people in the classroom.

This administrator saw the utility of cost sharing and online offerings in language courses “since there is need across the system but not everybody can afford an Arabic instructor” (personal interview, September 2015).

Another S1 administrator noted:

We have not moved towards distance education, more online education as some of our colleagues have. We have utilized technology more in the classroom, there is much more blended classroom, some experimentation, flipping the classroom, but not totally . . . it is more that we have created modules and podcasts that people use as preparation for the day’s class. We still meet fifty minutes a week for every credit hour. There is an increase in use of technology in the classroom itself as well, but we have not made the transition as a university towards distance education or online education. But we are getting some pressures to do that, but we are not interested, frankly. We find it difficult to imagine it; maybe this is a failure on our part, but we find it very difficult to imagine delivering the same quality liberal arts education with engagement of issues without face-to-face work with our students.
At S2, the focus is equally on serving residential students in a face-to-face format. Hence, as one administrator noted:

> We have strategically committed to serving traditional-aged university students in a residential setting, primarily face-to-face instruction, although we've certainly been expanding the use of technology for online or hybrid ... types of delivery as well.

Another S2 administrator commented:

> Part of our identity, and what we think is our brand, if you want to put it in those terms, is that we believe in that face-to-face experiential, really not experience, we believe in that modality. And when online education has kind of run these technologies, certainly the use of technology has been across the campus. So we’re doing interesting things with that. DNA splicing in our biology class, but we have consciously resisted because we don’t believe it to be our strength nor do we believe it to be the kind of teaching that we value. We had not done online courses to a higher degree, have not done MOOCs to any degree, have done some hybrid work primarily at the graduate level, come in three times a semester to be together, but the rest of it is online.

One S2 administrator acknowledged the need for adaptive use of technology and help for faculty to improve their use of technology. However, he did not think the college would eliminate campuses and have the online education. I think what we will see is much more of the blended classroom model and flipped classroom model, but [we] will still be educating just on campuses; I think we need to be smarter about how we do it. It’s particularly important that campus environment, the residential campus model that you find in most [of] the liberal colleges and universities is really important because it creates community as a lot of learning takes place out[side] the classroom, so we do need to focus more on how we can use the technology and be more efficient.

Some faculty agreed to use online offerings during the summer while arguing that it is inappropriate for the regular semester. One S3 administrator calls this

A perfect case of cognitive dissonance. ... Their behavior, their teaching online classes in the summer don't match their attitude that online classes are less
rigorous and not appropriate. And so, they haven’t yet resolved that cognitive dissonance yet.

An S2 administrator acknowledged that the institution experiments with online courses in the January, May, or summer terms. The administrator noted, however, that of all the public institutions in the state,

if you were to look at the data for all system schools [in the state] and the percentage of their courses that are taught online, we’re the ones that hardly register, and [another state school] miles down the road or something, they’re up at let’s say 60%. So, we have completely different approaches to that change. Having said that, the conversation that we had at [S2] wasn’t do we like it or not like it, that’s too facile and it was too simplistic; it was what, what does a public liberal arts college bring to new technologies? Or what does that new technology bring to us? How does that, a set of opportunities—digital humanities, for example—how do we use these new tools and opportunities to still stay true to what we are without being old-fashioned? Without being sort of, putting up a barrier to what might be really interesting, cool new things going on. So, there is variation across the campus, but I have been interested in watching some of the steps toward that.

But we all have to recognize there’s a self-selection from the student side to come to [S2]. If you wanted the kind of education that you can sit at home in your pajamas and log on and learn something in an online community, you probably wouldn’t have chosen [S2] in the first place. So, my guess is that the pressure to change in those ways is not coming as much from our students as some of the other external expectations. Every one of these changes, we’re trying to filter it through, and what does it mean for a college like ours? What kind of a contribution can we continue to make to higher education given that we believe that this should be an option? This kind of education should be an option without so hewing to that tradition that we work ourselves out of business.

Faculty and administrators concede the need to adapt to changing times within reason while staying true to the mission. As with S1 and S2, faculty at S3 have resisted the move to online course offerings, but with a nudging acquiescence to teaching online courses in the summer sessions. However, S3 seems to have done more than S1 and S2 in adapting to new models of learning. S3 offers a competency-based course in graduate-level data management and many of its education faculty offer courses fully online.
Commenting on online and other forms of new learning models, one S3 administrator observed:

What we’re trying to achieve is exactly the same. So, for example, on our competency based, you can be either competent so you can achieve competency or you can achieve mastery. Our logic is people may want to know. If you are building a bridge, I don't want to know that you are just competent. I want to know that you have mastered how to do that. And so, we have two levels for our competency-based. You can either be competent or pass through or you can have a mastery. And so, we’re designing it very much like we would design our other courses on our campus. We’re not changing the rigor. We're not changing expectations. We’re not changing learning outcomes. It's a different pedagogy. It’s a different mode of delivery.

**Summary Table of Challenges, Responses, and Impact**

**S1—A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences: Responses and Impact of Technology Challenges**

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<tr>
<th>Technology Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>• For-profit online institutions competing with traditional brick-and-mortar institutions for students</td>
<td>• Reluctance among faculty and some administrators to embrace online course offerings. Argument: it is anathema to the liberal arts mission; it dilutes the brand; online courses lack quality.</td>
<td>• Marginal impact on changing the preference for the traditional face-to-face residential model</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The rising ubiquity of the online delivery model even among traditional brick-and-mortar institutions.</td>
<td>• Technology-embedded classes but no separate online courses</td>
<td>• Limits the broadening of access to new non-traditional-age students who may be place-bound</td>
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<tr>
<td>• New demographics and demand for online degrees by students seeking more flexible options, including adult students, who, for a variety of reasons, are place-bound.</td>
<td>• Experimentation with flipped classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing public interest in new models for learning and degree completion, for example, competency-based learning</td>
<td>• Some blended classroom</td>
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## S2—A Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields. Data Source: Responses and Impact of Technology Challenges

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<th>Technology Challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• For-profit online institutions competing with traditional brick-and-mortar institutions for students</td>
<td>• Reluctance among faculty and some administrators to embrace online course offerings. Argument: it is anathema to the liberal arts mission; it dilutes the brand; online courses lack quality.</td>
<td>• Marginal impact on mission and the face-to-face residential delivery model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The rising ubiquity of the online delivery model even among traditional brick-and-mortar institutions</td>
<td>• No online course, no MOOCs</td>
<td>• Anxiety on campus that the allowance for easy transferability of credit of online courses across the One-University institutions might dilute S1’s brand as the public liberal arts university for the state</td>
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<tr>
<td>• New demographics and demand for online degrees by students seeking more flexible options, including adult students, who, for a variety of reasons, are place-bound</td>
<td>• Limited blended offerings in some graduate programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing public interest in new models for learning and degree completion, for example, competency-based learning</td>
<td>• Experimentation with online courses in the January, May, and summer terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing public interest in new models for learning and degree completion, for example, competency-based learning</td>
<td>• With the One-University initiative, students can take online courses at institutions where that is compatible with their mission and transfer the credits to S2 or any other institution in the One-University system</td>
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### S3—A Master’s College and University—Medium Program: Responses and Impact of Technology Challenges

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<td>• The rising ubiquity of the online delivery model even among traditional brick-and-mortar institutions</td>
<td>• Some summer courses offered fully online</td>
<td>• Limits the broadening of access to new non-traditional-age students who may be place-bound. Particularly important since part of S3’s strategy to maintain its enrollment includes tapping this new demographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New demographics and demand for online degrees by students seeking more flexible options, including adult students, who, for a variety of reasons, are place-bound</td>
<td>• Some education faculty offer fully online courses during regular semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing public interest in new models for learning and degree completion, for example, competency-based learning</td>
<td>• Competency-based graduate program in data management</td>
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### Challenges: The Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

#### Justifying Mission

As states shift their focus and performance metrics to include producing graduates who are work-ready, public liberal arts institutions have been forced to justify their mission. One point of agreement among faculty and administrators interviewed, as well
as student focus groups, is a critique of the linkage of the worth of a degree to the job obtained upon graduation. My findings show a mixed reaction and level of anxiety among students about their post-graduation employment prospects. Their choice of institutions was deliberate and many believed that the breadth of education and exposure that the liberal arts provides would put them in good stead; they saw their liberal arts education as more of an advantage than a disadvantage. Students who were in professional programs or planned to go on to graduate or professional schools expressed no anxiety about job prospects. An S3 student expressed this view articulately:

Focusing on job placement is something I feel is one of those trade-offs for liberal arts institutions, especially at [S3]. The emphasis is towards graduate schools, so they really offer many research opportunities. And so if you’re going to grad school for [a] PhD and master’s or medical or law school, professional graduate school, you’re like, this is the perfect institution; but if you plan to get [a] bachelor’s and start working in a particular field, depending on the field, a liberal arts education isn’t really necessary for you. It has been great for me. I just do not know if it is the right fit for everyone. (Focus group discussion, October 2015)

One S1 student said:

I was not concerned because no matter what school I went to, I wanted to be a physician and they are always in demand. So the schools that I chose to apply to I wanted to make sure they had low-cost, great education and a good name behind them so wherever I went for undergraduate really does not matter when you are applying to med schools and things like that. It just had a good name behind it so they knew that I got a good education and then let my grade speak for themselves. So I wasn’t really that concerned. (Focus group discussion, August 2015)

Another S1 student was

not really worried about jobs. . . . I had a set plan. I looked at it like it did not really matter what school you went to as long as you get a four-year degree and affiliated study related to your job and you can hack it.
A student at S2 said: “I really don’t have any anxiety right now about job placement. I am thinking about going to grad school now.”

Another student at S2 said:

I’ve been told that if you have an [S2] education degree, you are almost guaranteed a job because [S2] is very well known among high schools, middle schools, and everything. Many of the education majors come to [S2] and it looks good on resumes. No anxiety whatsoever.

There was a similar refrain by students at S3. One student said:

I think I will excel at whatever I do. I think my liberal arts education gives me an edge. It’s just . . . convincing people to give me that first chance . . . that may be what makes me a little nervous. I’m sure five years from now, I’ll look back and wonder why I was even worried, but you know . . . when you’re in the midst of applying for everything, you can’t help but feel nervous that you’re not going to get any of it.

Another student in the focus group discussion concurred:

My parents are, like, super worried about me and I’m not even worried because . . . the only thing I’m nervous about is not getting enough out of my job. . . . That sounds really bad but, like, you know, I really think I’m going to go to interview like more interviewing them because I know I have a lot to offer and that I can pretty much adapt. . . . If I don’t think I can adapt to it, I’m probably not going to apply.

Administrators, for the most part, responded by reiterating the value of the degrees they offered—in some cases as if this were a self-evident truth. An administrator at S1 noted:

One of the things that we have is our number 1 distinction in undergraduate research. I do think from a marketplace standpoint, what’s really important is that in addition to great critical thinking skills and so forth that kids come out from a liberal arts point, that they have [an] undergraduate research project or projects where they can apply that thinking, and that gives them the practical, real-world experience to help them when they get out into the working world. . . . It’s certainly part of our mission to make sure that our students can take their liberal arts education and go out and become gainfully employed and productive, not just
be productive but ultimately we’d like them to be able to excel. (Personal interview, August 2015)

On career readiness, one S2 administrator noted:

I think it’s increasingly difficult to make the case for the public liberal arts education, especially when you go back to the issues we talked about in terms of first-generation students and family perceptions about career path and employability. I think folks in [state name], which is also not the wealthiest of state[s], but in some ways challenged economically, . . . students and families are looking for some reassurance that if they make an investment in higher education that there is going to be some tangible payoff after graduation in the form of a career or a job . . . something that they can depend on.

**Does the Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree Put the Mission at Risk?**

Faculty and administrators also spoke to the fact that they are not doing enough to explain the value of a liberal arts education to the public and to state legislators and governors. Yet my findings did not show a waiving in state support for the liberal arts mission of these institutions. The head of the university system for S1 reiterated support for the mission of the institution:

What we're trying to do with our liberal arts college and university is to do our best to keep it strong even though we're not likely to grow the enrollment too much because we believe in support to keep it small. We've tried to . . . as we've taken budget cuts to exempt them from some of those cuts so that they can continue to thrive and their tuition is not much out of line with the rest of our institutions and so we're doing a pretty good job with that. (Head of State University System for S1 state, phone interview, November 2015)

The head of the state university system for S2 affirmed support for the mission of S2. Even though the system is undergoing reorganization into a One-University system, there is a commitment to mission differentiation among the individual campuses and to maintaining S2’s liberal arts mission:
What we know here in this state, first of all, we want it to stay with that model, and we think that, that is their brand; that is their niche; that is what they do best. One of the things that we’re doing within [the] One-University framework is asking each campus to develop a strategic vision of how it sees itself in the context of the whole system.

So you’ll get, for example, you know, the flagship university is positioning itself as the research center for the hard sciences, you get the university of [xxx] located in an urban center in [xxx] is developing [a] metropolitan university approach. In [S2], it is self-identifying itself as the small residential, small-class, teaching-intensive liberal arts program, with some specializations, for example, in education and some other areas. And actually, what we’re hoping for and what we’re driving for in [the] One-University model, when we speak to One University, there is a natural tendency for people to hear that as a move towards modularization and making everything the same and therefore save money, whereas what we are consolidating and coordinating are the back-room functions, finance, IT, et cetera; we’re looking to support each of the campuses and developing their own niche, their own competitive advantage and then looking across the whole system. . . . . So, for example, at [S2] we want to reinforce that residential model, small student-teacher ratios [and] emphasis on the liberal arts.

What we’re doing that is saying, all right, we’re not going to require [S2] that they have a major, for example, a major online outreach, because that’s not how they, that’s not their pedagogical model. And now what we do have to do across the system is to provide online education for many of our citizens especially those who are older and are place-bound either because of jobs or family whatever and they can’t—they are not going to get up and move to a campus. So, we do have to provide good online opportunities to those people, but what this kind of integration means is that we don’t have—not every campus has to do that. We have other campuses whose mission have really involved providing those kinds of things. (Phone interview, December 2015)

For S3, its change in mission in the 1980s

at a time when policymakers thought it was important to have schools with differentiated missions; there was a belief back at that time in [the state] that there were too many schools trying to do the same thing and they needed to try to create a niche for some of the institutions. [S2] emerged as the institution that would become the state’s public liberal arts science university. . . . it ended up being a great thing for [S2] to do. To create that unique mission at least for a time for probably about 15 years after, the state supported us with funding to live that mission. That funding has gone away over the last 15 years, but to get things started in defining who we were, they actually were giving us financial resources. (Personal interview with a top administrator, October 2015)
Though the start-up funding ended, S3 appears to continue to enjoy support for its mission. The same administrator noted that S2’s focus on being a highly selective public liberal arts and sciences university with a residential campus worked very well for the institution:

That's kind of preserved us in terms of our uniqueness within the state and what's interesting is that it's a pretty conservative state politically, but down . . . . in the capital, both Republicans and Democrats alike are very respectful of [S2]. They couldn't articulate anything about the liberal arts mission, but what they know is that we have smart kids; we produce good graduates who do good things. It's a high-quality education and it's got a good reputation, and so, they don't want to do anything to hurt that.

A member of the board of trustees for S3 made a similar point:

We are very committed to the mission of the liberal arts education and I believe that that is true campus-wide and has been for a long time so I don't think that that is a problem at all. I think it may be a perception among other people in the state that a liberal arts education isn't important or isn't as important as what they're doing at other institutions but I think that [the state] as a whole is totally committed to the mission of the liberal arts education. (Member of the board of trustees, S3, phone interview, October 2016)

The board member also noted, “[S3] has such a fine reputation in the state, it would seem that the current governor and legislators are very supportive of what we're doing.”

Overall, my findings show that state support for the mission of the three institutions remains strong.

Responses and Impact: The Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

The responses to the “hostile environment to the liberal arts” challenge have been mixed, ranging from defiance to pragmatism. One approach was to court the skeptics. An administrator at S3 commented:
Being a state university, the state senators, legislators have trouble understanding the liberal arts concept, and so a lot of them tend to be more practical of, you know, it doesn’t lead to a job, does it . . . is it a high-demand area, and so they look at what we’re spending on, say, history, English, political science, you know, they’re kind of classics, liberal arts fields and wonder about it. So the way we've overcome that to a certain extent we . . . in political science primarily, we have a really strong internship program in the state capital and so a lot of the folks down there really want our students because they're hard workers, they are very smart. So I think over the years we've built up a recognition that our kind of liberal arts isn't . . . their kind of a stereotype of . . . I do not know how to describe it without . . . it sounds like I am knocking the liberal arts, the stereotype of useless information.

Similarly, at S1, one of the approaches is to bring the systemwide board of trustees to the campus so they can witness firsthand what a liberal arts education is about. According to a senior administrator at S1:

The best way to convince them was to get them to come to campus and see what we are doing, to meet our students, to see what the faculty are doing every day in terms of providing hands-on experience to students who translate knowledge to practice; to be looking at our alumni; to point to a successful story and say “here is what we are doing with the liberal arts education.” Not being afraid to share, and listening to what’s on their mind, what they are concerned about; what they are thinking about what we are doing or not doing to educate them. (Personal interview, August 2015)

Some administrators acknowledge the need to adapt if they must survive. A top administrator at S3 stated:

We’re going to stay focused on being a highly selective public liberal arts and sciences university with [a] residential campus. That’s kind of preserved us in terms of our uniqueness within the state. And what’s interesting is that it’s a conservative state politically, but both Republicans and Democrats alike are very respectful of [S3]. They couldn’t articulate anything about the liberal arts mission, but what they know is that we have smart kids. We produce good graduates who do good things. It is high-quality education, it has a good reputation, and so they do not want to do anything to hurt that.
The head of the university system of one of the institutions critiqued the linking of degrees to jobs:

There's an increasing of focus . . . on tying higher education directly to the workforce and to jobs and that's not what a bachelor's degree ought to be about. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't be prepared for a job, but I think the idea that they're trying to prepare somebody for their first job is a mistake. I think that what we need to be doing is to prepare people not for their first job but for their last job. In other words, . . . no one’s going to stay in the same job their whole career; nowadays, in fact, some projections are that students who graduate in the next five years will hold as many as 40 different jobs in their lives because there'll be so much transition at that time. So, I think that we have to avoid that focus of too much on the workforce and think more broadly about education and so we have to change that conversation.

Yet there is a recognition that while maintaining the core aspect of its mission, it must adjust the changing landscape. A faculty member at S3 suggests what many of those interviewed would consider a radical proposal:

One of our responses is to say, we cannot survive as a liberal arts school . . . we can still say we are a liberal arts school but we should lower our standards . . . accept more students for revenue, change our programs to accommodate that as we go into the future. Have a lot more online . . . we are doing some of that, certificate programs. Do all these things, abandon our old mission, and develop a new mission. I think that would be reasonable in the climate that we are in. I would not be happy about it, but that might be a reasonable response.

At S3, more than at the two other institutions, administrators emphasized that their survival depends on a willingness to adapt. One administrator commented:

How do you adapt to the current realities and, for us, I think it was time because we have a curriculum that has been in place now for 20 years . . . predates many of our students who are here now; they weren't in existence when the curriculum was created.

A lot of things have changed in the world. What we noticed here at [S3] is that more and more of our students were getting their education at other institutions. Many of our students who are coming with credits—either they are AP credits, dual credits, credits from local community colleges—we were starting to see an erosion of this aggregate liberal arts experience. And so, I think some of our
questions were practical, some of the reasons why we came to this point of examining who we are and how do we continue [the] liberal arts mission was a practical reality that we're seeing diminishing resources and how do we continue to be relevant into the 21st century?

But some of it was also pedagogical in that how do you have this liberal arts and sciences mission when students are getting their education from multiple sources and some of those sources are not from liberal arts institutions? So, how do you promote the ethos of a liberal arts education in this environment? (Personal interview, October 2015)

One head of the state system made a similar point:

I think we have a difficult job in higher education of trying to help policymakers understand what we're talking about when we talk about the liberal arts. I think they assume that it refers to only the humanities or only the social sciences. We must help them realize what we're really talking about is the broad-based education that exposes students to a number of different disciplines. It helps to make them understand how to think about the disciplines, help them understand that the problems that the world faces are problems that are not going to be solved . . . [unless you] work across a number of fields. . . . I think we have a job to do ourselves in helping people better understand what we are talking about with the liberal arts and why it is important to invest in them.

There is a noticeable resistance to change and adaptation in how faculty see the mission.

For example, one S2 administrator noted: “S2’s identity around liberal arts has been rocky for years. You know, it’s been we want to be this and that, but if we do too much of it then we lose our identity as a premier teacher education school.” An S3 administrator, commenting on the resistance to change, said:

I think you see through the curriculum and through other expressions, the remnants of that Phi Beta Kappa conceptualization still through [S3’s] culture that is most clearly spelled out for us in the requirement that all students take 63 credits in what we designate as liberal arts and science courses. The definition of that by Faculty Senate again is largely based on a Phi Beta Kappa definition. What the liberal arts means and how that mission has been implemented, I think, for faculty who initially created the curriculum around that mission was largely based around this concept of liberal arts and science courses as defined by Phi Beta Kappa. In some respect, a very kind of strict construction of what a liberal
arts institution is. What you end up getting as a result of that is some disciplines feeling that they are at the heart of the institution and others at the margin. I don’t think it’s a healthy environment in moving the university forward.

We still have some faculties, especially those who were around at the time of the mission change and were part of the initial creation of this concept of a public liberal arts, who are still holding very tightly to the Phi Beta Kappa definition . . . whereas you have several others who are trying to articulate a much more fluid concept of our liberal arts mission.

The administrator mused, referring to the group resisting change: “They're convinced that any change will tarnish what they've created.” Despite this resistance, the administrator continued:

I feel a sense of responsibility and I believe that for this institution to continue to be as successful as it has been over the last generation, it needs to adapt. I am not looking for a revolution. I believe in its mission as [a] public liberal arts and sciences university, but I believe it has to adapt to these current realities in order for it to be successful into the 21st century. So, I am so committed to that. I feel that it would be professional malpractice for me to sit here and to preserve the status quo at a time when the status quo, I think, is more dangerous than attempts to change. So, I am going to go ahead and push even though I have had some caution, even though there are some cautionary tales that might tell me to move with caution. So, I guess to answer your question, from the experience that predates me, I'm very respectful of the challenges that I have and I do not take for granted for one minute that the faculty or the campus at large has the will to change. I don't take it for granted. I think there's a real question and in no way do I mean to denigrate the commitment of those who are resisting change because I believe they're just as committed to the mission of this institution as I am.
Summary Table of Challenges, Responses, and Impact

S1—A Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences: Responses and Impact of the Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

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<tr>
<th>Value of a Liberal Arts Degree</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tr>
<td>State and federal government emphasis on workforce needs and the perception that students with degrees in the traditional liberal arts field are not readily employable</td>
<td>• Defiance—making the case that, despite what the public perception is, there is value in the liberal arts and in promoting learning for learning’s sake • Challenging the narrative about the value of a liberal arts degree, including the perception about employability • Bringing board members to campus to showcase what students and faculty do and what the liberal arts is really about • Pragmatism evident in how the institution tailors its programs so that students can connect theory and practice through. For instance, internships and undergraduate student research are emphasized.</td>
<td>• No evidence that the questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree impacts S1’s mission as the public liberal arts institution for the state • By all indicators, the state remains vested in S1’s mission as the liberal arts institution for the state • It is not subject to any direct adverse funding decision by the state based on its mission • The performance-based funding formula applied by state has an indirect effect on the portion of the performance-based funding S1 receives in any one year based on its performance regarding the funding metrics.</td>
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S2-A Baccalaureate College-Diverse Fields: Responses and Impact of the Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

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<tr>
<td>• State and federal government emphasis on workforce needs and the perception that students with degrees in the traditional liberal arts field are not readily employable.</td>
<td>• S2 has a mix of professional and traditional liberal arts programs. It is well known around the state for its education programs, and majority of the degree awarded is in the of Education field.</td>
<td>Despite the One University initiative, there is a commitment from the system office for mission differentiation that would allow S2 to continue as a public liberal arts university.</td>
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<td>• Impatience with what is believed to be “learning for learning’s sake.”</td>
<td>• Its strategic plan (approved by the system Board of Trustees) affirms its intention to remain a liberal arts college.</td>
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<td>• Concerns by students and parents about the worth/value of a liberal arts degree</td>
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S3—A Master’s College and University—Medium Program: Responses and Impact of the Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Degree

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<th>Responses</th>
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<td>• State and federal government emphasis on workforce needs and the perception that students with degrees in the traditional liberal arts field are not readily employable</td>
<td>• Pragmatism—focus on how to adapt to new realities while staying true to mission. An ongoing campus conversation reenvisioning what it means to be a public liberal arts and sciences university</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Impatience for what is believed to be “learning for learning’s sake.”</td>
<td>• Modernizing its curriculum from the PBK model emphasizing the classical liberal arts to a broader view that takes account of the 21st century</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Concern by students and parents about the worth/value of a liberal arts degree</td>
<td>• Mix of pure liberal arts program with pre-professional, professional, and graduate programs</td>
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<td>• Emphasis on preparing students for graduate school and an aggressive internship program for students who plan on joining the workforce upon graduation</td>
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<td>• Showcasing the quality of its students through key internships at the state capitol and other places</td>
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<td>• Strong support remains at the state level for S3’s public liberal arts mission</td>
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<td>• S3 received special funding to help implement mission at the inception of that mission. Though the special funding was discontinued, there is no evidence that S3 is subject to any adverse policies or actions because of its mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• S3 has done well on performance-based funding as some of the metrics play well to its strength. The post-graduation “placement” metric in the performance-funding formula defines placement broadly to include graduate school.</td>
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Summary of Findings

The main question that arises as an outgrowth of the challenges on the three campuses is, how do we deploy resources in support of our mission? The challenges posed by the changing landscape as well as the institutional responses to them affect access, affordability, and the quality of the liberal arts educational experience, which in turn go straight to the heart of what these institutions claim makes them unique.

Wedded deeply to the liberal arts mission, all three institutions mainly have demonstrated continuity in the face of change regarding aspects that address their core identity—the residential, face-to-face model serving traditional-age students. Yet there is a recognition that while maintaining the core aspect of its mission, it must make adjustments to the changing landscape. Remarkably, despite the public questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree, the three institutions appear to have the continuing support of their state for their public liberal arts mission.

The three institutions represent different models of administrative structures ranging from emerging highly centralized (S2), centralized (S1), and decentralized (S3). These structures have implications for mission implementation and how quickly they can adapt to changes.

S1 (a Public Baccalaureate College of Arts and Sciences) desires to maintain mission—small size, focus on face-to-face residential. The sentiment on campus against growing bigger is captured in the statement of one top administrator: “The people here on campus take the mission to heart. We believe deeply in it and it makes us worry about being changed in some way or another.” However, in a state with shifting policies and priorities regarding higher education, S1 appears to have legislative support for its
mission. Enrollment is doing well, but challenges remain in terms of diversity of students. Some of the intentional actions taken to address this seem to be yielding positive results. S1’s model is one of continuity and limited adaptation. Most faculty and students value the small size of the institution. Although they see the resource advantages of enrollment growth and addition of graduate programs, they consider the trade-off far too great to be worthwhile.

S2 (a Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields) appears to have the most challenges of the three institutions. State funding policies and demographic shifts have had a huge impact. There is evidence of deferred maintenance as well as low faculty and staff morale due to resource constraints. State demographic shifts are a huge factor in enrollment decline. The One-University initiative they have tried—flat tuition held over a five-year period at state directive—affects the trajectory of the mission. The strategic plan calls for remaining small and maintaining its reputation for teacher education. S2’s model is one of continuity—even with the system-driven flat-tuition initiative; S2 expects to maintain its mission differentiation as the state’s public liberal arts university. My interview with the head of the system indicates that it has system and state support for the continuation of that mission.

S3 (a Master’s College and University: Medium Program) is the largest of the three institutions. It maintains its high-selectivity approach, high discounting to attract highly qualified students. S3 is engaged in more experiments with alternative delivery models. During my campus visit, S3 was having conversations about how to adapt to changes in the education landscape. Its reputation and affordability, as well as its perceived value of education, continue to attract students to its rural location. Although in
a state with strong performance-funding policies, it has done well according to the
matrices by which it is measured. Its model can be described as an adaptation to change.
Yet, as the discussion above shows, there is a recognition that while maintaining the core
aspect of its mission, S3 must adjust to the changing landscape.
CHAPTER 5: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter sets out to do two things:

1. Provide an analysis of the challenges faced by these institutions in a broader national context;

2. Explore the nature of responses by these institutions using the analytical framework of change and adaptation and determine whether their responses represent adaptation, continuity, or change, or a blend.

Public higher education systems in all 50 states have experienced a significant decline in state appropriation that became more pronounced after the recession of 2008—the watershed year for public financing of higher education. The chart and table below show the national trend in funding and FTE enrollment from 2004 to 2014. FTE enrollment rose slightly from 9,714,196 in 2004 to 9,895,854 in 2005. The numbers declined slightly in 2006 to 9,848,903 but saw a steep increase from 2007 to 2011 before they started declining again through 2014. There was an uptick in enrollment starting in 2008. This is consistent with studies that unemployed workers or new graduates who could not secure a job simply went back to school (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Long, 2013; Zumeta, 2010)—thus, the enrollment boom. Funding and FTE enrollment were on the same upward trajectory from 2005 to 2008, but post–2008 FTE funding declined as enrollment increased. In 2010–2011, FTE enrollment increased from 11,357,769 to 11,644,123 while FTE funding declined from $7,013 to $6,737.
Figure 15: Data Source: State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

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<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Public FTE Enrollment</th>
<th>Educational Appropriations per FTE (constant $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9,714,196</td>
<td>$7,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>9,895,854</td>
<td>$7,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,848,903</td>
<td>$7,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>9,974,563</td>
<td>$7,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10,254,148</td>
<td>$8,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>10,721,466</td>
<td>$7,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11,358,769</td>
<td>$7,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>11,644,123</td>
<td>$6,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11,585,214</td>
<td>$6,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>11,288,232</td>
<td>$6,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>11,137,541</td>
<td>$6,552</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
Enrollment and Tuition

How do the states in which the three colleges studied are located fare compared with the national trend? The S1 state has the most FTE funding of the three. Its peak funding was in 2008 at $9,958 per FTE. From 2004 to 2010, the FTE funding was more than $8,000, even in the immediate two years after the 2008 recession and again in 2013. The lowest funding was in 2012 at $7,750, still better than the best years in S2 and S3 states, and above the national average. S3 state, in general, is funded below the national average, and S2 is funded below or about the national average. Its peak funding years for the period studied were $7,464 (2004) and just before the 2008 recession at $7,438. It has declined every year since then to $6,481 in 2014. The S3 state has the lowest FTE funding of the three. The year 2005 was the peak for funding at $7,635, followed by 2007 at $7,421. Just before the recession in 2008, FTE funding was at $7,334. It has been on a downward trend since then, declining to $5,296 in 2014, lower than S2 state.

S3 state showed a similar enrollment growth pattern as the national trend, with 2011 seeing the highest enrollment at 197,890 FTE, but it then declined by about 100,500 in 2012 and picked up again in 2013. The number for 2014 was 196,831. S2 state has comparably much lower FTE enrollment than S1 and S3, but its numbers increased from 2009 to 2014. Enrollment for S1 state peaked in 2011 at 425,799 FTE. The post–2008 national surge in enrollment that was also true of the S1, S2, and S3 states did not apply uniformly to the three institutions in the study. S1’s total enrollment (graduate and undergraduate FTE) declined from 3,967 in 2010 to 3,863 in 2011, declining further to 3,751 in 2012. It rose slightly to 3,784 in 2013. The enrollment numbers for S2 are 2,430 (2010), 2,310 (2011), 2,179 (2012), and 2,061 (2013). Only S3 showed an increase in
enrollment during the period—6,035 in 2010, 6,101 in 2011, and 6,237 in 2012, with a slight drop to 6,225 in 2013.

Public colleges and universities have addressed the decline in state appropriation in different ways, including enrollment growth, increasing reliance on tuition and fees, as well as adopting cost-saving measures that include reorganization/restructuring, staff reduction, and finding additional revenue streams. Breneman (2005) suggests that all higher education sectors have been forced to demonstrate entrepreneurial responses—in both style and substance—to the pressures of the marketplace. He argues that while the nature of the response may vary among institutional types, they are more alike than they are different. Breneman (2005) concludes, “Each sector in its way is subject to external forces that influence behavior and reduce the autonomy of action” (p. 4). Finkelstein and Pfinster (1984) point to the importance of institutional contexts as far as how institutions respond to changes. These include “the array of environmental and internal attributes that characterize a particular institution—its location, the nature of the community in which it was founded, the clientele, basic resources, and administrative, student, and faculty characteristics” (p. 307). State context is another important factor—the economy of a state and its politics can produce policies and funding decisions that could fundamentally affect the sustainability and viability of public institutions (Finney, 2014).

Lambert (2014) notes that while finance and autonomy are driving the privatization trend, institutional and state context—especially “the mission, history, and culture of an institution and its state” (p. 21)—are equally critical. Lambert’s “foundation of privatization framework” situates institutions within a private/public continuum (markers of “whom or what the institution serves”) (p. 21). He notes that institutions are
no longer either public or private, but rather exist “on a continuum between public and private institutions” (p. 222). He examines six characteristics, reflecting the “layered nature of privatization” (p. 23): state context; mission, history, and culture; autonomy; finance; enrollment and access; and leadership (pp. 21–26, 222–62).

The three colleges’ responses to the financial pressure from reduced state appropriation confirm the importance of state and institutional contexts. Of the three, S2 manifests the most serious loss of autonomy through the One-University initiative that is centralizing operations of all universities in the state. Although emphasizing that mission differentiation would continue to be respected and that the liberal arts mission of S2 is assured, one senior administrator at S2 noted that they have limited autonomy in whether vacant positions get filled. S2 has had to hold tuition steady while facing declining enrollment and rising cost of operation. Using Lambert’s (2014) public/private continuum framework, S3 leans more toward a privatized model. Its selective admission and merit-based aid put it to the right of the continuum of the enrollment and access category. By contrast, S2—with its higher in-state enrollment, higher Pell Grant enrollment, and need-based aid—is to the left of the continuum and therefore has a more public focus. S1’s low tuition, high support is at the public end of the continuum in the finance category. In their responses to the challenges of funding and other pressures, how do they maintain their public charge of access and affordability while striving for sustainability?

Albeit many public institutions have responded to decline in state appropriation by increasing their enrollment (Education Advisory Board, 2013; Lambert, 2014), that playbook may not necessarily work at public liberal arts institutions that desire to keep
their numbers small. Moreover, in the increasing competition for students, some may not fare well. Two of the colleges, S2 and S3, expressed concern about meeting their enrollment targets. For S2, the goal was not to grow its size. Its strategic plan—approved by the system-level board of governors—shows it wanting to remain “a small, increasingly selective public liberal arts college.” The challenge for the institution had been meeting that limited-enrollment target. Commenting on the importance of enrollment to the revenue base, one S2 administrator said, “Our revenue for tuition and fees is directly related to the number of students we bring in. It is all generated by credit hours. Over the last three years, we had a very small class. As a result, we have not had revenue.”

S2 exceeded its enrollment target for fall 2014, and this caused considerable excitement on campus. The dollars generated in tuition helped close some of its funding gaps. One S2 administrator commented: “We actually have a bit of breathing room this year. We can close all but $560,000 of our gap for FY16.” Although the prevailing view on campus at S1 is that the university will maintain its small size, there is no strategic plan that speaks to that. Unlike S1 and S2, S3 is pursuing a growth model and its enrollment numbers reflect this.

The option for tuition increase has been limited for all three institutions due to a moratorium at the state/system level. An S2 administrator noted that they have held tuition flat for four years: “The bargain with the state is, if you agree to hold state appropriation flat, we would hold tuition flat. On the other hand, if you drop our appropriation, we are going to be forced to increase tuition.” The same administrator commented on the hardship that the flat-tuition policy has had on the college: “Because
cost-of-living increases are going up, benefit rates are going up, supply services are going up, our operating cost has been rising while the tuition has been flat and state appropriation has been flat.”

For the first time in several years, the system board approved a tuition increase for S2 for the 2015–2016 academic year. It was a 1.7% increase. According to a senior administrator, the increase “does not make up for five years of no tuition increases.” Though all three institutions have experienced a decline in state funding, S1 seems to fare better than the other two, with S2 suffering the most negative impact from funding decline. Its problem is compounded by the fact that the system imposed a freeze on tuition increase that has remained flat in the last five years.

In his three-state system of higher education study, Lambert (2014) compared the funding of flagship institutions in three states. The study found that institutions in the state where S1 was located “remained strongly committed to its system of higher education, even if it has declined slightly” (Lambert, p. 248). The study found that on a per-student and per-capital basis, the higher education system of S1 state held true “to its constitutional mandate that higher education should be as close to ‘free’ for the people of the state” (p. 249). He further noted that in his interviews with state legislators, policymakers, and institutional leaders, “All agreed that the level of historical support for the university was virtually unheard of across the fifty states” (p. 249). This view was confirmed in my interview with the head of the state system of higher education, who also stressed support for the state’s liberal arts college:

Well, I think, obviously, financing of our education is critically important in the public arena. We've seen a steady decline in state support for the last 25 years, and that has resulted in a transfer of the bunch of the cost to parents and students
and I'm thinking of a time where we reduce access, affordability, and make it more difficult for students to attend our public universities, so I worry about that decline in state support. I think that is a real problem. Fortunately in [our state] we are still relatively well funded, compared to most of the country, so it is a little bit less of a problem for us than in some places, but it is a growing problem for us as well. (Phone interview, November 12, 2015)

A commitment to providing broad access and affordable education remains critical if public institutions are to preserve their historic mission to serve the public good. As research has shown, an increase in tuition and fees make college less affordable, especially for middle-class students who are “not needy enough to get financial aid but not wealthy enough to pay the full cost of tuition” (Lambert, 2014). Administrators at all three schools noted the potential for a tuition increase to limit access and expressed concerns as to what that will do to their mission—in particular, that of “providing quality education at an affordable price.” On the other hand, even some students who are opposed to tuition increase acknowledged that their education was a bargain at the price they were paying.

As noted, the other enrollment strategy employed by the institutions is increasing enrollment of out-of-state students. Commenting on this trend among public institutions, Lambert (2014) observed:

Out-of-state students are helping to subsidize the in-state students by paying closer to tuition-market prices. If there were fewer of them and more in-state students, there would be a double hit to the bottom line for public universities unless the state provided significantly more funding—a highly unlikely prospect. (p. 145)

This strategy, however, is not without its downside. Jaquette et al. (2014) found that increase in out-of-state entering first-year students at public research universities corresponded with a decline in the share of low-income and under-represented minority
students. They argue that this displacement of low-income and under-represented students has implication for campus diversity and the educational experience of the students at research universities. Though my findings make no such direct connection, the strategy of increasing out-of-state student enrollment to generate tuition revenue challenges the traditional notion of public higher education institutions as access points for affordable higher education to residents of the state.

**Efficiencies in Operation**

Fethke and Policano (2012) call for a “strategic acceptance and recognition” by university leadership that the decline in state funding is permanent. Such recognition should include

Understanding the behavior of new and existing rivals, selecting a defensible positioning strategy, and focusing on the capabilities that are required to operate effectively. A vision that differentiates a university is important. Imitating others or continuing with an excessively broad program scope leads to ineffective straddling positions that are threatened by both low-cost providers and high-value niche players. (p. 218)

All three institutions have found ways to gain efficiencies in their operations, including changes in hiring, faculty/staff workload and compensation, and the expectation to do more with less. S2 and S3 have had to reduce staff, but S1 has not gone that route. Commenting on how the previous administration responded to the budget shortfall, one administrator noted:

In 2008 when the funding got shorter and shorter, she did not cut faculty. Did not cut programs, but they operated leaner. At one point, we were told no adjuncts; we just cannot afford part-time instruction; we could not afford for a single faculty member to be on leave, but everybody kept their jobs, and we kept the doors open, and we kept the students educated.
S1 plans to reinstate professional leave for faculty, and guidelines were being established for submission of applications in fall 2015.

At S2, the college looks carefully at every open position and decides whether to fill them. The college also laid off faculty and staff in 2008. According to one administrator:

We laid off to downsize and we were at that point where we were carefully looking at every single position. Last year we did not fill some of the positions that were open. We recouped those savings to balance the budget. Over the years, we have had to close budget gaps with cuts of people. The administrative side of the house has received a lot of cuts; we are very thin right now.

Another senior administrator seconded this comment, saying, “There is no fat left to cut after three years; we have cut down into the muscle. It literally has been difficult.” The administrator worries about how these cuts affect efficiencies as well as staff and faculty morale. She noted, “People do not have backups and there are not people trained to step in if something happens to someone.” Commenting on the effect of cutbacks on faculty and staff, another administrator noted that cuts were “borne more by professional staff than by faculty and that created a kind of tension on campus.”

S3 also has responded to its budget shortfall with cutbacks and by running a “leaner and meaner operation.” Commenting on the steps the university has taken, one administrator noted:

I have lost five director’s-level positions. . . . I have lost an assistant dean’s position. We have been taking on those additional responsibilities. We have also lost some administrative support positions. One clerical worker now handles the student union and the Center for Student Involvement. We have not had to fire anybody, but I just have not been able to fill positions and so people have taken on additional responsibilities.
Revenue Generation

Graduate programs and certificates, distance and offsite education, and growth in professional programs are all examples of entrepreneurial revenue-generation models that many public institutions have explored to increase revenue (Breneman, 2005; Fethke & Policano, 2012). S3 established a competency-based graduate program in data management. Revenue generation is the primary driver of the move to online and alternative models. S1, on the other hand, has resisted developing a graduate program, even though it recognizes that this would increase its state appropriation based on the funding formulae the state uses. An administrator at S1 noted, “We are not going to have graduate programs; we are always going to be focused on the undergraduate liberal arts experience.”

Demographic Shift, Access, and Diversity

High school graduating classes are declining in most states, and this demographic shift is significantly affecting college enrollments. Albeit this trend is not taking place in all 50 states—California, Texas, Florida, and other southern-tier states are seeing continued population growth and larger high school graduating classes—New England and the Midwest are facing the challenge of the shift in demographics. Connecticut, for instance, predicts an 18% decline in high school graduating classes during the next decade. The result of declining demographics has been an increasingly competitive educational market with public and private institutions spending more time and money attempting to recruit “fair share” from a smaller pool of students.

A commitment to providing broad access and affordable education remains critical if public institutions are to preserve their historic mission to serve the public
good. Lambert (2014) noted that enrollment and access are twin concerns essential to striking a balance between access and affordability “for the best and brightest students, regardless of financial ability, and the political reality of the need to fund the ever increasing costs of higher education” (p. 257). Robert Zemsky (2009) had referred to access, affordability, accountability, and quality as the “Four Horsemen of Academic Reform.” Diversity is another critical element.

One part of the mission that has been a challenge for all three colleges is ethnic/racial diversity of their student body. All three institutions expressed challenges in attracting a racially and ethnically diverse student body and had taken initiatives to address that problem with various degrees of success. S1 was successful in increasing the ethnic/racial diversity of its incoming class for fall 2014. S2 does very well regarding another aspect of diversity—first-generation and low-income students (as determined by the number of students on Pell Grants).

Breneman’s (1994) study of private liberal arts colleges revealed a similar lack of demographic diversity in the student body at these colleges:

I was surprised that officials on several of the campuses remarked that their college had been slow to adjust to the changing demographics and the declining number of high school graduates in the 1980s and thus had been forced to scramble to make up for lost time. One would have thought that the much-heralded enrollment decline could hardly have been missed and that few colleges would have failed to move promptly to enhance their recruiting activities, but apparently, inertia is a powerful force even on campuses that are heavily dependent on tuition. Most of the campuses were still struggling to increase the enrollment of minority students, but few were reaching the goals they had set. (p. 94)

Considering that an overwhelming majority of the students at state public institutions are residents of those states (and public liberal arts colleges are no exception
to this rule), the student body reflects the state demographics. Although the majority of students are white, that population has been decreasing since 2004—from roughly 68.5% to 59.6% in 2014. Conversely, the proportion of blacks and Hispanics has increased. Attendance of blacks increased from about 13% in 2004 to 15.3% in 2014. Enrollment of Hispanic students increased from 10.8% in 2004 to 15.2% in 2014, showing the largest increase in any ethnic category. (See chart below showing the national trend in fall enrollment of U.S residents in degree-granting institutions by race/ethnicity from 2004 to 2014).

### Fall Enrollment of U.S. Residents in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity 2004–2014 (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>11,423</td>
<td>2,165</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>1,109</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11,495</td>
<td>2,215</td>
<td>1,882</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>11,572</td>
<td>2,280</td>
<td>1,964</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>11,756</td>
<td>2,383</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>1,218</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>12,089</td>
<td>2,584</td>
<td>2,273</td>
<td>1,303</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>12,669</td>
<td>2,884</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>1,335</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12,721</td>
<td>3,039</td>
<td>2,749</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>20,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12,402</td>
<td>3,079</td>
<td>2,893</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>20,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11,981</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>19,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>11,591</td>
<td>2,872</td>
<td>3,091</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>19,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>11,582</td>
<td>2,966</td>
<td>2,951</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>19,426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The issue of diversity goes beyond representational diversity; it is at the core of a liberal arts educational experience and important for achieving what the American Association of Colleges & Universities refers to as “inclusive excellence.” This requires enough of the “other voices” to make a difference in the curriculum and in the educational experience of the students. Breneman (1994) notes, “To succeed, political movements require a critical mass of people of similar mind, . . . and the typical liberal arts college is limited in ethnic and racial diversity” (p. 115).

Another practice that potentially could limit access is “selective”/“highly selective” admission practices, especially if the “selectivity criteria is based on test scores.” S3 advertises itself as a “highly selective public liberal arts institution” with a highly discounted tuition rate. The student profile of S3 is more similar to those of the
private liberal arts. The use of "merit" scholarship shifts aid to those who have the financial means to attend S3. S2’s new strategic plan also positions it to become “increasingly selective.” On the other hand, in a move to improve the racial/ethnic diversity of its student body, S1 recently moved away from its “selective” admission practices. According to one senior administrator,

This year, we altered our admission profile. Previously we had such a strong emphasis on maintaining higher SAT and we found we were declining enrollment to students that we knew would be successful here because they would lower the average SAT score that we reported. This year, we decided that was not important to us any longer; that the pristine significance of the SAT, if you will, and its indication of a high-quality institution was being challenged.

**Retention as a Factor in the Demographic Shift**

Given that public institutions continue to depend upon state funding support, and many are limited in their ability to dramatically increase their recruitment efforts, the obvious direction to pursue is the retention of existing students. In the retail sector, the axiom—proven with data—is that it is cheaper to retain existing customers than to court new ones. In higher education, while retaining students does result in operational cost savings (i.e., lower recruitment costs), there are more critical long-term benefits. Retaining students means increased graduation rates and the knowledge that more students are achieving their academic and career goals. Lowering attrition rates also has a positive impact on the campus community—the residential experience, student clubs, and other aspects of campus life all will exhibit more cohesion by virtue of a more stable student body. In addition, as more native students persist and graduate, their loyalty and commitment to the university grows, which also can have a positive impact on long-term alumni relations and alumni giving.
Seeing the value of increased student retention is an easy task—how to get there is the challenge. Clearly, step one is doing a better job of recruiting students who are the “right fit.” Too many students on college campuses discover that while they are ready for a college education, the institution they have chosen is not right for them. Time and resources devoted by colleges and universities to analyzing student applicants and matching those students to their institutional values, culture, and programs can only enhance the likelihood that a student will stay at those institutions.

An equally obvious area of focus is on-campus services. We know that retention is often an issue of personal finances, so shoring up financial aid is key to retaining more students. So is strengthening advising services, tutoring, supplemental instruction, and other academic support services. National data have shown a high correlation between residential housing, major selection, engagement in student clubs, and other factors that create connections between students and faculty, students and their peers, and students and the institution. Any efforts made to engage students as soon as they arrive on campus will positively influence retention.

In the end, college campuses cannot control external forces. Sometimes they can predict those forces, but more often than not, they are in a reactive mode. What they can control is how they serve the students who entrust them with their futures. Retaining them is the best way to manage demographic change.

**Challenges and Opportunities of Technology**

Jansen (1984), making a projection about the responses of private liberal arts colleges to technological changes, had surmised that the technological revolution would “lead to new roles for the faculty with resulting changes in their relationship with
students, and diminished role of the campus as the quintessence of higher education.” That was not true of the three colleges in this study. The residential experience remains the focus, and there is a reluctance to embrace distance learning. The general refrain is that online learning is antithetical to their mission. Nevertheless, faculty reluctantly have endorsed online courses for the summer months for pragmatic reasons—students leave campus for the summer and faculty need summer income. Of the three institutions, S3 has done more to embrace online and other nontraditional formats, including starting a competency-based graduate program in data science. According to one senior administrator, “We are using this as a proof of concept to show that competency-based learning can be rigorous and engaging, and challenging, and full of liberal arts and sciences’ perspective, and be able to be done online.”

The three institutions reflect varying degrees of adaptation and change. A key feature of the DNA of liberal arts colleges is their focus on a residential, face-to-face model and the low student/faculty ratio that enables opportunities for critical engagement between students and faculty. However, as the study’s findings show, institutional responses (faculty attrition, hiring freezes, increased teaching load, and increasing use of adjuncts) threaten this key part of the liberal arts experience. For public liberal arts colleges, this—more than adaptation to a new higher education model or increase in professional programs—constitutes a far greater threat to their mission and unique characteristics.

Technology offered both challenges and opportunities at all three, but there was a significant amount of resistance among faculty to adapt to the use of technology. The argument from faculty is focused mainly on the incompatibility of online offerings and
other forms of new models (competency-based education, offsite offerings, etc.) with the residential, face-to-face liberal arts experience. My observation in my conversation with faculty is that they tend to be disconnected from the external realities and challenges facing American higher education. Faculty live in their world, concerned about getting their teaching and research done. However, faculty in disciplines such as education were quicker to see the opportunities and adapt accordingly. Part of the reason for this appears to be the highly structured scheduling with a commitment to school placement that reduced students’ flexibility for on-campus course schedules.

Administrators at the institution and the higher education leaders at the system office were more pragmatic and saw online education and other new models in learning as essential to their sustainability. The student focus groups at all three institutions welcomed the flexibility that online/distance education provided. To resist online and other new models in higher education outright without looking creatively at how they can help enhance institutional mission and goals is unrealistic. This burying-our-heads-in-the-sand approach is reflexive and contradicts the underlying approach of critical thinking and creativity that higher education is known for, and, in particular, what liberal arts institutions claim as part of the uniqueness of their model. More important, it fails to acknowledge the force of globalization and how that alters our concept of place and location.

This is one area where doing business as usual (continuity) may hurt rather than help. Christensen and Horn (2013), in their studies of institutional responses to “disruptive technology,” found:
Institutions that have been used to operating in the traditional mode sometimes survive and thrive amid disruption—in every case, because they are able to create independent divisions, unfettered by their existing operations, which can use the disruption inside a new business model that reinvents what they do. (p. 43)

These observations suggest some paths for these institutions looking to remain sustainable while holding true to their mission—to embrace technology for the improvement of student outcome and to gain greater efficiencies.

Revenue generation is the primary driver of the move to online and alternative models. However, in doing so, the college is careful that it remains consistent with its mission. The key is asking hard questions: “Are we doing it for the right reasons?” “Does it take away from our mission?” “How can we reenvision ourselves in a way that responds to societal needs while still retaining our mission?” This is the classic liberal arts dilemma. As a senior administrator at S2 put it:

We are really in an interesting and important, I think, great period in which we have to think very carefully about the learner as an individual learner, the nature of the tools we are using. That what we’ve done for 40 years is not what’s going to keep on working. So, how do we evolve our public liberal arts to continue to be effective? (Personal interview, September 2015)

Although technology might enhance access, it ironically could increase operating cost given that technology is not cheap. Christensen and Horn noted in their 2011 piece that online learning has not yet led to lower prices. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* discusses the experience of a liberal arts college, Belleview, with technology and concludes that it has not resulted in cost savings (January 30, 2016, pp. 1–9). The question is how to reduce instructional costs and use technology to advantage. For institutions already experiencing resource constraints, that poses a real dilemma. It is true that institutions can charge appropriate technology fees to offset the
cost, but that means higher cost of attendance, thereby making education less affordable and access more restrained.

For liberal arts institutions, an important core principle is preserving the small class size and face-to-face interaction that creates the sense of community and engagement. Students attending public liberal arts institutions are self-selecting—they chose a liberal arts college in part because they want a personalized experience. Certainly, any change that fundamentally alters this takes away from the mission. The reality, though, for public liberal arts colleges and universities—and indeed the private liberal arts colleges—is that they cannot afford to bury their heads in the sand and resist the shifting landscape of American higher education and its implication for their mission and business model. How can public liberal arts institutions’ use of technology enhance learning and be put in the service of their mission? Christensen and Horn (2011) observe that traditional institutions, rather than see the possibilities that technology offers, tend to "regard them as mere side shows to their core operations" and have done little to adapt and reinvent themselves by using technology as a sustaining innovation (p. 42). Technology provides “disruptive” (Christensen & Eyring, 2011) opportunities, and public liberal arts institutions need to think of how they can use it to increase access and enhance their mission.

**Public Questioning of the Value of a Liberal Arts Education**

The hostile environment to the liberal arts can be seen in the context of the broader questioning of the value and the return on investment for state dollars given to public institutions.
My interviews with the system heads of the state university systems in S1 and S2 indicate state support for these institutions and a value of what they do. At issue, however, is whether they are meeting their mission and public purpose. As the system head in S2 state observed in my interview:

It is not so overly hostile to the liberal arts, but are [saying] this is all very nice but it’s an extra, and at a time when we cannot afford extras, when we have just to support the critical mission of career preparation and career training for jobs, can we support them as well as they have been—that’s the form the objections usually take, and not, at least in my experience, not in the form of overt hostility to the liberal arts. . . . However, regarding the liberal arts colleges and universities, in general, they don’t run a tight ship, there are many extras, there are many facets in the institution, and surely, you can cut back so that you do not take as much taxpayer support. . . . It is not in the form of we do not like history and literature—you pick your three or four favorite liberal arts topics—therefore we are going to cut you. It is, you have not shown us the social and economic utility of everything that you do. (Phone interview, December 2015)

This call for accountability is not limited to public liberal arts colleges. As Lambert (2014) observed: “Perhaps because higher education has received such generous public funding historically, legislators are increasingly wary of how those tax dollars are being used and what outcomes the state is achieving as a result of the investment” (p. 239).

**Adaptation, Continuity, or Change?**

Institutional mission is an articulation of institutional values (Hartley & Morphew, 2006). As Hartley (2002) noted, mission is the “internal compass” that empowers institutions “to retain their bearing and not lose their way” (p. 4). Ideally, the mission should drive institutional change and responses to external threats and opportunities. The works of Pfnister and Finkelstein (1984), Cameron (1984), and Ellen Chaffe (1984) on how higher education institutions (specifically, small private liberal arts colleges) respond to external threats are instructive. All address similar questions—does
the marketplace drive the educational agenda, or is institutional response tempered by the
institutional context and a need for a mission-centered response?

To “adapt” is to make adjustment or modification in response to new conditions
while retaining the core character of the organization. On the other hand, “change”
involves fundamentally altering the key nature of an organization in significant ways
as “modifications and alteration in the organization and its components to adjust to
changes in the external environment” (p. 123). Cameron identifies four conceptual
approaches for understanding adaptation to change by educational institutions: The
“population-ecology,” the “life-cycles,” the “strategic-action,” and “symbolic-action”
approaches.

The population-ecology approach assumes a prominent role for the environment
and virtually no role for management action; the life-cycles approach assumes a
prominent role for environmental and evolutionary forces, with some discretion for
management to manipulate intervening outside forces; the strategic-action approach
assumes a role for both environment and management, with the balance shifted toward
management; and the symbolic-action approach assumes a prominent role for
management, through the ability to manipulate symbols and social definitions, and a less
significant role for external environment (p. 132). Cameron explains how outcomes may
depend on the degree of control and influence managers and administrators have, or
perceive they have, over the external event. In this sense, the study emphasizes the
importance of leadership.
Cameron’s symbolic-action approach parallels what Ellen Earle Chaffee (1984) refers to as the “interpretive approach” to change. Chaffee’s study on how colleges in financial crisis responded to change points out the importance of a mission-sensitive response. She examines two sets of institutions that are in trouble; half turned themselves around, and the other half did not. What made the difference, she argued, was clarity of mission—engaging in “interpretive” rather than “adaptive work”—the latter being merely trying to respond to the environment in a reactive way (Chaffee, 1984).

My findings show that all three institutions were mission-focused in their responses to the funding challenges. Emphasis was on maintaining the residential, face-to-face model and serving traditional-age students in a residential setting—all of which was, as they saw it, part of their mission. Forays into online and alternative-delivery models were marginal, with S3 being the most willing to experiment with these alternative-delivery models. For S1 and S3, the changes in response to the decline in state appropriations did not fundamentally alter “the key nature of [the] organization in significant ways” (Finkelstein & Pfister, 1984, p. 302). Rather, they were “modifications and alteration in the organization and its components to adjust to changes in the external environment” (Cameron, 1984, p. 123). S2 is a different story with the One-University Initiative, a systemwide effort to consolidate the public universities in the state to address funding and enrollment decline in the state-system institutions. Although the process promises to maintain mission differentiation, it fundamentally has altered how S2 operates, with implications for its power to make autonomous decisions, even with regard to something as basic as whether or not a vacant position should be filled. This
fundamental alteration in S2’s structure and relative autonomy constitutes a “change” (Finkelstein & Pfister, 1984, p. 302) and not an “adaptation.”

It is important that institutions look intentionally at how the external environment (economic, social, and political) impacts the college’s trajectory and how such understanding can inform its response to an increasingly competitive landscape. Such intentionality requires that institutions ask the following questions: What are the educational needs of the older, place-bound population in the host community of the institution? How are the institutions responding to these needs in ways that are mutually beneficial to both parties—meeting the educational needs while serving as additional sources of revenues for the institution? Moreover, what is the best way to deploy resources in the service of mission? At S3, the initiative was internally driven. The impetus for the reenvisioning work on campus was to help achieve better alignment of practice with the mission and to enhance its distinctiveness.

Summary

Studies on liberal arts colleges have been almost singularly about private liberal arts colleges. Discussion about the threat to the mission and institutional responses have looked at it more from the threat of career-focused or so-called professional programs. Such studies have concluded that the expansion of professional programs reflect a lack of fidelity to the mission and therefore that such institutions are liberal arts in name only (Breneman, 1984; Delucchi, 1997; Hartley & Morphew, 2006). However, the colleges in this study always have had professional programs. They are comprehensive institutions with a liberal arts mission. All three had strong teacher-education programs, and S2, in particular, continues to be renowned for its teacher-education program. For these
institutions, the types of programs/majors or absence thereof did not define their mission; rather, it is the totality of experience and a way of knowing and learning that makes a liberal arts experience. Faculty, staff/administrators, and students at all three institutions identified the totality of the educational experience as a core aspect of the liberal arts. Whether a student is a nursing, education, or business major at a liberal arts institution, the question is how the liberal arts values are reflected in the content and approach of the professional programs. This calls for a different paradigm for understanding mission and the impact of changes in mission.

This study shows that a liberal arts education at these colleges offers a breadth of experience and opportunity for engagement and interaction with faculty that may be hard to replicate given the size and scale of the larger institutions. The funding challenges and institutional responses to them, more than anything else, constitute the greatest threat to the sustainability of the model. However, all three institutions have remained mission-focused and avoided the tendency toward mission creep (Delucchi, 1997; Jaquette, 2013) and the hubris of wanting to be all things to all persons. Except to a limited extent in S3, the findings of my study do not support the “marketization” trend noted in the literature.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

Declining state funding for public higher education, demographic shifts, as well as challenges in and the increasing competition for students pose significant challenges to the mission of public liberal arts institutions. Although these institutions are not alone, their unique mission and business model, a historic reliance on state funding subsidies, and the questioning of the value of a liberal arts degree, make these challenges particularly daunting.

State funding decline, demographic shifts, and diversity appear to pose the most challenge to the three institutions but with varying degrees of impact and forms of responses. State context was a significant factor in how these factors played out at the three institutions, and the location was an additional factor concerning the demographic challenges. The demographics are shifting in the three states represented in the study, as they are in the entire country. The socioeconomic diversity—that is, the growing wealth gap—will intensify the struggle for affordability and access, and this will be further exacerbated by the declining state support for public higher education. One sees these dynamics playing out in the story and experiences of the three institutions in this study. These institutions revealed a steadfast commitment to maintaining their mission, aware of their public purpose and recognizing that while funding is a huge challenge, the mission must serve as the organizing principle for responding to external threats and making critical decisions about types of programs, scope, and quality. They recognize that purely market-driven responses to the funding debacle will weaken and divert from their missions and public purpose.
What I found at S1, S2, and S3 was somewhat of a disconnect among the faculty regarding the challenges their respective institutions are facing and how those play out in a broader state and national context—declining tax revenues; competition for resources among many state funding obligations; the state public policy agenda, including priority on workforce needs; national completion agenda; rising tuition; and increasing student loan debts. And even as the institutional leaders discussed the pressures from funding that they are facing, there was an absence of campuswide conversation about the broader implications and how they can position themselves to respond. Exceptions were that the S2 president provided this broader context in her state-of-the-university address during my campus visit in September 2015. In addition, S3 discussed some aspect of the wider state and national context in a campuswide discussion about reenvisioning its mission. Public liberal arts colleges cannot be dismissive of the state’s accountability demand and call for public institutions to respond to the state’s workforce needs. University leaders have an obligation to engage their campuses in conversation about changing the environment and the threat and opportunities it poses to their mission and operation.

Public liberal arts colleges must avoid the deceptively easy response of tuition and fee increases. This will not be a tenable solution in the long run, as public pressure mounts against rising cost of higher education. Technology offers both an opportunity and a challenge. Adaptive use of technology can enable these institutions to reach a wider group of underserved students, thus helping further their access mission.

Given the historical trend of declining financial support from the state, the challenge is how these institutions can pursue their distinctive educational mission while maintaining fiscal stability. The loss of state dollars, as one administrator said, limits the
ability of the institutions getting to develop “the more innovative sides of our curriculum and being able to attract students from all sorts of backgrounds to our institution . . . it affects quality, it affects opportunity, it affects innovation, and it affects recruitment and retention.” These institutions must find alternative revenue streams to supplement revenues from the state. Tuition revenues mainly have been the default source of alternative revenues, but the increase in tuition affects the mission of access and affordability of these institutions. A comprehensive strategy must include finding ways to gain operational efficiencies that are equitable and will not sacrifice the quality of academic programs along with developing entrepreneurial programs and services that are consistent with the mission.

It is also incumbent on the leadership to develop the political understanding and shrewdness to get the support of the state legislature and the board of regents/board of trustees for distinct funding criteria that recognize their unique missions in the state system of higher education. A compelling case for the survival of liberal arts colleges is not just an emotional attachment to history; public liberal arts institutions are critical to maintaining the broad diversity in types of institutions in the American higher education system. Equally important is their role in advancing access, diversity, and affordable college education that prepares students for more than their first jobs.

**Future Research**

Distinct state context (history and culture) means these findings may not necessarily apply to other public liberal arts colleges and universities. It would be fascinating to know what more ambitious research of all the public liberal arts institutions would reveal about these research questions. The value proposition of public liberal arts
colleges is that they offer the same quality of education as that offered at esteemed private liberal arts colleges but at a comparably lower price. Future research can look into the following questions:

1. Do public liberal arts colleges offer a comparably better value than private liberal arts colleges?

2. Are public liberal arts institutions delivering on the educational outcomes promised in their mission statements and claimed by faculty, students, and administrators?

3. A deeper look at whether strategies to address challenging conditions are substantively or significantly different from those of other small, comprehensive public universities. Does the commitment to a liberal arts mission truly change the nature of the responses?
Appendix A—Personal Interviews

1. S1_Admin_Chancellor_F_W_Yrs-0.5
2. S1_Admin_Dean_Humanities_F_W_Yrs-28
3. S1_Admin_Dean-NaturalSciences_M_W_xYrs
4. S1_Admin_Dean-SocialSciences_M_W_Yrs-19
5. S1_Admin_DirectorAdmissions_F_W_Yrs-4
6. S1_Admin_VC-Finance_M_W_Yrs-28
7. S1_Admin_VC-Provost_M_W_Yrs-1.25
8. S1_Admin_Associate Provost
9. S1_Admin_System President_M_W
10. S1_Faculty_ComputerScience_F_B_Yrs-4
11. S1_Faculty_History_F_W_Yrs-20
12. S1_Faculty_Philosophy_F_W_Yrs-18
13. S1_Faculty_Physics_M_W_
14. S1_Faculty_Political Science_M_H-
15. S2_Admin_ChiefBusOfficer_F_W_Yrs-26
16. S2_Admin_President_F_W_Yrs-3
17. S2_Admin_VPAA-Provost_M_W_Yrs-2
18. S2_Admin_VP-Enrollment_M-W_Yrs-0.67intern
19. S2_Admin_VP-StudentCommunityAffairs_F_W_Yrs-11
20. S2_Admin_System Chancellor_M_W
21. S2_Faculty_Biology_F_W_Yrs-23
22. S2_Faculty_Economics_F_W_Yrs-9
23. S2_Faculty_History_F_W_Yrs-21
24. S2_Faculty_Music_M_W_Yrs-22
25. S2_Faculty_Psychology_M_W_Yrs-12
26. S3_Admin_President_M_W_Yrs-7(4Pres)
27. S3_Admin_VPAA-Provost_F_W_Yrs-1.4
28. S3_Admin_VP-EnrollmentMgmt_W_F_Yrs-13+7
29. S3_Admin_VP-FinancePlanning_W_M_Yrs-42
30. S3_Admin_VP-StudentAffairs_W_F_Yrs-32
31. S3_Board Member_W_F
32. S3_Board Member_W_F
33. S3_Faculty_Education_F_W_Yrs-13
34. S3_Faculty_EnglishLinguistics_M_W_Yrs-28
35. S3_Faculty_Mathematics_M_W_Yrs-17
36. S3_Faculty_Physics_M_W_Yrs-23
37. S3_Faculty_Psychology_F_W_Yrs-17
Appendix B—Student Focus Group

1. FG_S1_FG1_1FB-1FW-3MW
2. FG_S1_FG2_3MW
3. FG_S2_FG1_2FW-3MW
4. FG_S2_FG2_6FW-1MW
5. FG_S2_FG3_3FW-2MB
6. FG_S3_FG1_2FB-3FW
7. FG_S3_FG2_1FAisan-6FW
8. FG_S3_FG3_1FB-2FW-2MW
Appendix C—Interview Protocol: Administrators

1. What does the liberal arts mission mean to this institution?

2. How is that mission implemented?

3. What are the challenges posed to the vitality and viability of public liberal arts colleges by the rapidly changing higher education environment?

4. What changes in the higher education terrain have had the most impact on the institution’s public liberal arts mission?

5. How has the institution responded to these challenges? In particular, what have you done about academic programming, student enrollment, faculty hire and retention?

6. What changes has the institution made to respond to changes in demographics, technological revolution, and state funding policies for higher education?

7. What external forces, singularly or in combination, influenced the change?

8. What are the implications of these changes for your mission—in particular, access, affordability, and quality education?

9. What lessons, if any, can public liberal arts colleges learn from private liberal arts colleges? What processes did you put in place to deal with the challenges? What did you find most challenging, most frustrating, and most gratifying in leading the university through these changes?

10. What role did your deans, provosts, department chairs, faculty, and students play in the decision-making?
11. When you have conversations with the board or even with the legislators, what kind of questions are they asking, and how do you convince them of the value of this institution both to the state and to the nation? (Specific to president/chancellor).
Appendix D—Interview Protocol: Faculty

1. Why did you choose to teach at this institution?

2. What is your understanding of this college’s liberal arts mission?

3. What changes have you observed over time relating to curriculum, students, and programs?

4. Have the changes observed affected the implementation of the mission? If so, how?
Appendix E—Focus Group Protocol

1. Why did you choose to attend this college?

2. What were your expectations?

3. Have those expectations been met? Explain your answer.

4. What do you consider the value of your educational experience at this college?

5. If you could change one thing about your experience, what would that be?

6. Have you observed any significant changes in the curriculum, co-curriculum, and your classroom experience in your years at the college?

7. What does the term “liberal arts college” mean to you?
Appendix F – Interview Protocols: University System President/Chancellor and Local Board of Governors

1. Would you please share your perspective on the role of public liberal arts colleges in American higher education and the challenges facing liberal arts institutions in general, and your state public liberal arts institution in particular, and how best to respond to those challenges?

2. How do you see the role of public liberal arts colleges within your state system of higher education?

3. Is the institution under pressure from the state to expand its mission and enrollment?

4. Are there currently special funding formulae to enhance the mission? If so, is that special funding in jeopardy?
## Table 4-2: 2013 Student Degree Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>S3</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S1</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALL STUDENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>All students total</td>
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<td>3784</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate total</td>
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<td>3736</td>
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<td>3323</td>
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<td>First-time</td>
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<td>596</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other degree/certificate-seeking</td>
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<td>1419</td>
<td>2727</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Continuing</td>
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<td>2349</td>
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<td>Non-degree/certificate-seeking</td>
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<tr>
<td>All students Graduate</td>
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