Revamping Remedial Education
City University of New York grapples with a complex web of issues surrounding programs for underprepared students

By Jon Marcus

New York

The SQUAT GRAY central administration building of the City University of New York is wrapped in a giant blue wooden scaffolding topped with barbed wire, awaiting renovation. It’s an irresistible metaphor for a system undergoing a dramatic reconstruction of its own.

Beginning this semester, CUNY, the nation’s largest urban university and the third-largest public university of any kind in the United States, began to exclude students from its bachelor’s degree programs who could not demonstrate that they are ready to begin college-level work in math and English. And, for the first time in three decades, applicants to the system’s four-year universities will have to meet minimum scores on national standardized tests.

The change, urged by the city’s belligerent mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, and approved by the university’s highly politicized board of regents in November, is revolutionary for CUNY, which is distinguished by the free tuition once famously offered immigrants by its City College, and the open admission policy it adopted in 1963.

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at a time of heightened racial tensions in the 1960s. But it has wider implications as a potent of uncomfortable realities already facing many other public, and some private, universities in the United States: increasing political and financial pressures; taxpayer hostility toward remedial education; the deterioration of urban public schools that supply large numbers of underprepared students; the stratification of the poor into community colleges and the rich into four-year universities; and the impact of all of these things on maintaining racial diversity. It is also an instructive example of how remediation often quietly continues under another name until the pressure is off. And it has exposed the growing rift on campuses between the old guard, generally represented by left-leaning but aging faculty, and more entrepreneurial—and political—trustees and administrators.

The protracted debate at CUNY has gotten to the core of these divisions, putting adversaries at each others’ throats. A group of outside consultants called it “an invasive political theater in which outrageous claims are the norm, policy comes to reflect anecdote rather than analysis, and almost everyone feels free to talk without restraint about lines drawn in the sand, about the fundamental negation of the institution’s basic mission, about an institution being adrift”—a reference to the title of a sweeping critical report about CUNY’s new admissions examinations.

“Revamping Remedial Education: City University of New York grapples with a complex web of issues surrounding programs for underprepared students” by Jon Marcus. (continued on page 5)

“The Scary Cost of College”
Public concerns remain about the escalating expense of higher education

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

Washington

Two years after a national commission reported on the escalating cost of attending college, the report has been largely forgotten, but a booming national economy, and growing sensitivity to charges of price gouging, have led to smaller annual tuition and fee increases at both public and private colleges and universities.

The soaring stock market has inflated the endowments of many private (and some public) schools, making large price increases less necessary and also making them harder to justify. At the same time, unexpectedly high tax revenues have enabled most states to spend more on higher education; a few have frozen or even reduced tuition and fees at public colleges.

As a result, the College Board reported last fall, tuition and fee increases for the 1998-99 academic year were the lowest in at least a decade. Average tuition at public four-year colleges rose 3.4 percent—from $3,243 to $3,356—for the 1998-99 academic year. For private four-year institutions, the average increase was 4.6 percent—from $14,508 to $15,380.

However, the price hikes were still ahead of the Consumer Price Index, which grew by 2.7 percent in the 12 months ending last November. Although median household income rose 3.5 percent last year, the largest increase in more than 30 years, this was still lower than average tuition increases.

“The times are good and this has helped greatly” to moderate tuition hikes, said Stanley O. Ikenberry, president of the American Council on Education (ACE), the major Washington lobbying group for colleges and universities.

“All boats are rising, except the community colleges,” said Robert Zemsky, director of the Institute for Research in Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

Public discontent over the hefty price increases of the late 1980s and early ’90s also has played a role in holding down costs.

In This Issue

Jamie Pueschel, legislative director for the United States Student Association, displays a $150 billion check, representing money students have borrowed to pay for college.

Kath Robinson is regional coordinator for partnership schools at UC Santa Cruz, which has launched an ambitious outreach program to generate interest in higher education among K–12 students in predominantly low-income, minority schools. The University of California is spending more than $150 million annually on such programs. (See Page 7.)
AN INTERVIEW

ALEXANDER W. ASTIN

Alexander W. Astin is director of the Higher Education Research Institute and Allan M. Cartter professor of higher education at UCLA. He is nationally known for annual polling of freshmen over the past 34 years, revealing that youthful goals have changed strikingly: Saving the world has become less important to them than getting ahead in business.

One of the most frequently cited authors in his field, Astin has published 18 books and hundreds of articles containing research and recommendations for sweeping reforms in higher education.

This interview was conducted by Carl Irving, a San Francisco Bay freelance writer and frequent contributor to National Cross-Talk.

Carl Irving: Your writings point out all sorts of faulty, inflexible traits in American higher education which downplay teaching and curtail help for those who need it most. How can one avoid pessimism about the future?

Alexander W. Astin: I have to be hopeful, because otherwise what’s the point? I have to believe we can work on our problems, and I think in the case of the things I write and speak about, it’s partly a problem of recognizing the problems that we have. A lot of it is definitional. We don’t see what the problems are.

Take the case of the underprepared student as an example. Our attitude about these students almost turns the whole problem on its head. We use medical analogies because they can be useful in understanding how we approach education. Our current view of remediation would be like saying, “Well, you know, the problem with health care is that people get sick. If people didn’t get sick, the health care system would be in much better shape. We could do a much better job if people could just stay well. So let’s not treat the sickest people.”

People are currently talking about getting rid of remedial education, and you can see how preposterous it would be if we talked that way about health care. People who are in need of a lot of educational help and intervention are the very people to whom we ought to be devoting our greatest resources, because the stakes are so high in terms of what happens to these people.

Cl: Why are stakes so high?

AA: Voluminous evidence, hard data, show that of all the things about people that relates to their ability to become productive and contributing citizens, their degree of educational development is the single most powerful factor. It’s more important than their race or their social status or any other thing. How much education people have—their level of educational attainment—is powerfully related to whether they become dependent in some way on society, or whether they become predators as opposed to productive and contributing members of society.

Education also relates to the kind of parenting they are capable of, the kind of family stability they show, how much they add to the tax base, and whether or not the offspring that they produce become productive and contributing citizens themselves. We have such a huge stake in raising the educational level of this society. And the social and human costs associated with people at the lowest levels of educational attainment are enormous, way out of proportion to the economic cost of raising their performance.

In other words, educating everyone is a whole lot less expensive to society, both monetarily as well as socially and emotionally, than to carry along in society large numbers of people with minimal skills, with minimal educational development. There are many reasons why we don’t appreciate this problem, and one of them is that our educational system has tended to mimic private industry in the way it conducts its affairs.

We use a kind of a Darwinian perspective: We provide opportunities for people, and “if you can’t hack it that’s your tough luck.” Survival of the fittest, and so forth. That kind of thinking in education is also reflected in the notion of competition. It’s a sacred cow.

Cl: Isn’t that part of our history from the beginning?

AA: Not in education. Initially, believe it or not, it was predicated on the radical proposition that the purpose of education was to educate people. Today this is seen by some as a radical proposition. If, in fact, your job as an educational institution is to educate, then why would you not want to educate the people who are most in need of it? It’s crazy.

But wasn’t that kind of thinking limited to a very homogenous New England?

AA: Sure. But a lot of elite private institutions still think that way. So even if they recruit relatively underprepared students, they still make a commitment: “Look, we admitted you. Now it’s our job to make sure you get through this institution.” And indeed they are very successful. So it’s not that we can’t educate certain groups of people or that they’re beyond being educated, it’s just a question of whether we value them enough to invest what we need to invest to help them get through the system.

There are a lot of other problems where higher education, not just K–12, is ultimately responsible. Higher education not only defines the standards and the norms of practice for all levels of education, but also the beliefs that shape our system. For example, there’s the enormous emphasis paid to the highest achievers. We put a high value on teaching the “best students,” and conversely there’s a stigma attached to teaching the poorer students.

In medicine, this would be like assigning the field of oncology very low prestige because people with cancer are very sick and in need of a lot of medical attention.

Cl: If you look about you, every respectable campus seems to push in that direction.

AA: We have a very schizophrenic higher education system. Foreigners tend to look at our system this way: It’s wide open. Practically anybody can go to college somewhere. On the other hand, they fail to see that the internal structure of the system is very elitist. We have these centers of excellence where everybody’s smart, where there’s plenty of money and facilities, laboratories and libraries. And only the best prepared students can go to these institutions.

And then we have the poorest equipped and poorest funded institutions for the least well prepared. And what the educational rationale for that is, I don’t know. I’m still searching for a rationale. But these arrangements are all supported by our beliefs. To me, the first step in trying to deal with these problems is to surface the beliefs that underlie these processes and practices. Some of these beliefs are very deeply imbedded in the academic psyche. They’re so deeply embedded that we never acknowledge, much less question them.

One such belief is that it reflects poorly on me if I have to teach poorly prepared students. It would be painful—but perhaps a little bit refreshing—if we could come to admit that. Another belief has to do with seeing education from a competitive point of view where you look myopically at your school or your kid or your college: ‘only thing that matters is maximizing benefits your kid gets or your college the school gets, and not being able to fix systemically all the schools and the kids.

There’s an analogue here with ecol and the environment. You throw the t carton on the ground. This has implicat ions. It may be a short-term benefit you: You get rid of it and don’t have to look at it any more. It doesn’t clutter your house or your car anymore. It makes the overall environment worse.

You might vote for vouchers because you want some extra money to send your kid to a private school. But you do realize that by stripping your kid from the public school, you contribute to the crippling of those schools, to further stratification of the K–12 system. And, of course, increasing inequities absolutely predictable if we ever got a voucher system. Inequities will be even more “savage” and more widespread. It’s a prescription for educational disaster.

To promote vouchers by arguing that somehow will benefit poor people or that color of ple is disingenuous. And the “o petition” argument is so transparent business, if more people want to buy your product, you expand; but in educ ation: when a lot of people want to buy your 1 duct, you have to become more selective.

Harvard could be ten times bigger it is and CaTech could be 50 times big given the applicant pools to these pla But they don’t expand, they just be more selective. And that’s the difference with. Profit is not what the sch and colleges are after. They’re after chasity and uniqueness and selectn. The voucher system would just cre more stratification.

Cl: Over the years, you have publis studies contending that the goal of “is smart” had been overcome. You o wrote, “We need to focus more on m uring how effectively we develop kn
five years ago you published a study in which you praised a number of elite private, residential, medium sized campuses that do make progress with diverse enrollments because your study found that they were blessed with first-rate teaching by faculty members who simultaneously did respectable research. Competition among students was less important than else-where, and they were more likely to study interdisciplinary courses in their research, and more interested in undergraduate courses in their faculty on their research. It's a tremendous success. It continues to grow. The faculty like it.

Despite the stereotypes about “publish or perish,” there are many faculty in this and every other research university who care deeply about their teaching and their undergraduates. But the norms of the institution don't support that. So, a lot of faculty are demoralized about that, because they realize they don't have permission, so to speak, to really engage with the undergraduates, because they don't have competitive expectations from their colleagues.

CE: Will it take a Great Depression or some similar disaster to shift more decisively in this direction?

AA: The leadership in our institutions has a lot more influence than they're willing to admit. Those institutional heads and deans, they have plenty of power, and one way to use that power would be to mobilize the faculty who do care about these issues. In service learning, for example, you can extend a traditional academic course to include a “laboratory” or field experience where students perform service in some community agency that gives them an opportunity to apply the course theory in the field. That's one of the most promising elements; it's still a marginal activity in most institutions, but the trend is definitely upward. There's a lot of stirring in academia around these issues of student engagement, citizenship, and paying more attention to undergraduate education.

We can fix some of the problems that we have, but we have to undergo changes in some of our attitudes and beliefs about certain things. I think higher education has got to take the lead on this, because we need to change ourselves before we can expect others to change.

CE: Your studies discovered that residential students were more likely to benefit. But your case depended on those people for years about the way we go about tracking students' progress: what do you argue for measuring student progress at individual campuses? You urged educators to adopt what you termed “value added” or “talent development” to measure students' progress once they were enrolled on a campus. Was anybody listening?

AA: One of the problems with research and scholarship and the new ideas they generate is that they take a long time to germinate. About 15 years ago, I had very serious melancholia about my work because I felt I was just writing books and articles that had no benefit. But I learned that if you've got a good idea it takes time for it to get into the culture, the folklore of the people who can think about it and act on it.

But the idea of tracking students' progress over time really caught on. I would guess that by now more than several hundred institutions have, in one way or another, adopted or used it. Thoughts came out of a critique I've been making for years about the way we go about trying to become “excellent.” If you're in a nut-shell, my criticism was that in most institutions “excellence” meant the acquisition of resources or pumping up your reputation: You can become “excellent” either by virtue of having lots of resources—endowment, smart students, a famous faculty, a good physical plant—or, you are “excellent” because others think you are.

I've been on several boards of trustees and I can see that same thinking among the board members. Nothing would make the board happier than to acquire more resources, and to build up their reputation. The new U.S. News ranking comes out, and they all get excited.

I've been arguing that we ought to define our excellence in a completely different sense—in terms of our educational effectiveness, our goal being to develop the talents of our students. The economic idea of “value added” is a similar concept: You have a product and by intervening in the development of that product you make it more valuable.

The intent of the educational “intervention,” then, is to improve the condition of the students in some way, adding to their capabilities. So I began saying we need to rethink the whole notion of excellence: It's not what resources you have, or what others think of you, but rather what you contribute to the student's development. A number of institutions have picked up this idea.

Increasing inequalities are absolutely predictable if we ever go to a voucher system. Inequalities will become even more “savage” and more widespread. It's a prescription for educational disaster.

CI: Do you sense enough change in sentiments in recent years to support the changes you recommend?

AA: Educators are not waiting around to have people like me advise them on how to change their programs. You've just got to keep plugging. If you think you've got a good idea, or you have some important new research evidence, you keep pushing it and, if it has any merit, eventually people will start to pay attention and it will start to register. But it's not just doing good research; you also have to push people to look at, reflect on, the results.

My newest agenda is that we need to get more into knowing who we are, being aware of the beliefs of the things that drive us and make us do what we do. I think academicians have got to start sitting down and talking with each other about the meaning of what they're doing. Why are we doing this? What does it mean to us? What do we really care about?

A lot of us in academe don't talk about spirituality and stuff like that. It makes us very uncomfortable. But the fact is that we're spiritual beings. We do things because of our passions and beliefs and the things we care about. All the great philosophers, all the great religious traditions, say it starts with knowing yourself.

Increasing inequalities are absolutely predictable if we ever go to a voucher system. Inequalities will become even more “savage” and more widespread. It's a prescription for educational disaster.

CI: Do you think a smaller, de-centralized situation would change that?

AA: It would force people to work to-gether across disciplines. That's one of the things that happens in a good liberal arts college. You can't just live in your department, because it's not a large enough venue to do your work. You're not just a biologist or a historian, but you're a member of the faculty of this college.
Board of Directors

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education met last fall in El Paso, Texas, site of one of the nation's most successful partnerships between public schools and higher education—the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence.

Board members heard Diana S. Natalicio, president of the University of Texas-El Paso, describe the work of the Collaborative, which includes UTEP, the local community college, the three largest school districts in the area and local business and civic leaders. Natalicio said that introducing reform at all levels simultaneously, from kindergarten through college, has enabled the Collaborative to help the area's predominantly Mexican-American students increase their reading and math test scores dramatically.

Board members also heard from Susanna Navarro, executive director of the Collaborative, and from Arturo Pacheco, dean of the UTEP School of Education, and they visited one of the elementary schools involved in the reform effort.

The Center continues to develop a 50-state higher education “report card” that will be the Center's major continuing project. States will be evaluated in six areas, three dealing with postsecondary educational opportunity and three with educational attainment and achievement.

The Center's hope is that the report card will help to stimulate a discussion among educational, political and business and civic leaders in each state, with a goal of expanding college opportunity and achievement.

The Center expects to publish its first report card next fall.

A national advisory panel met in Durham, North Carolina, recently, to review the project and to offer suggestions and criticisms. The panel is chaired by David W. Breneman, President and Dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia.

Other members are Robert Atwell, president emeritus, American Council on Education; Julie Davis Bell, program director, National Conference of State Legislatures; Anthony P. Carnevale, vice president for public leadership, Educational Testing Service; Ronald R. Cowell, president, The Education and Policy Leadership Center; and Alfredo G. de los Santos, Jr., former vice chancellor for educational development, Maricopa Community Colleges.

Also, Virginia B. Edwards, editor and publisher, Education Week; Emerson Elliott, former commissioner, the National Center for Education Statistics; Milton Goldberg, executive vice president, National Alliance of Business; Elaine H. Hairston, chancellor emerita, Ohio Board of Regents; and Mario Martinez, assistant professor of education management and development, New Mexico State University.

Also, Margaret Miller, president, American Association for Higher Education; Michael Nettles, professor of education and public policy, The University of Michigan School of Education; Alan Wagner, principal administrator, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Richard D. Wagner, former executive director, Illinois Board of Higher Education; and Joan Wills, director, Center for Workforce Development, Institute for Educational Leadership.

Virginia B. Smith, president emerita of Vassar College and a member of the Center's Board of Directors, is herself the recipient of the first Virginia B. Smith Innovative Leadership Award, given jointly by the Center and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

The award was established a year ago to honor creative and innovative achievements in higher education. The organizations decided that no one better represented these accomplishments than the person for whom the award has been named.

Nominations for this year's award should be sent to CAEL care of Innovative Leadership Award, 55 East Monroe, Suite 310, Chicago, IL, 60603.

The primary purpose of National CrossTalk is to stimulate informed discussion and debate of higher education issues. The publication's articles and opinion pieces are written independently of the National Center's policy positions and those of its board members.

Subscriptions to National CrossTalk are free and can be obtained by writing a letter or sending a fax or e-mail to the San Jose addresses listed above.

FROM THE CENTER

Virginia B. Smith

Higher Education and the Schools, a report by J. Michael Timpane, has been published jointly by the Institute for Educational Leadership, the State Higher Education Executive Officers and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

In the report, Timpane, senior advisor for education policy at RAND, summarizes the key elements of contemporary school reform, identifies the reform issues with the most significant policy implications for higher education, and proposes that state-sponsored leadership forums be created to promote regular discussion of reform issues between higher education and K–12 systems.

"Higher Education and the Schools" is part of a series, “Perspectives in Public Policy: Connecting Higher Education and the Public Schools.” Other reports published in this series include:

• All One System: A Second Look, by Harold L. Hodgkinson and


Reports in this series are available for $15 per copy; quantity discounts are available for orders of more than nine copies. Send requests for information and orders via e-mail (ihel@hel.org) or by fax to the Institute for Educational Leadership. (202) 872-4050. •

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Northern Virginia Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., chairman of the Center Board of Directors, visits an El Paso elementary school.

North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., chairman of the Center Board of Directors, visits an El Paso elementary school.

NEWS FROM THE CENTER

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Virginia B. Smith
Great majority of institutions, both public and private, seem to have assuaged public concern among students and families.

Association "have taken the pledge" to keep tuition increases in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Some private college leaders grumble that they are being forced to hold price increases to unreasonably low levels.

Charges next year—the college now charges $31,500 for tuition, fees, room and board. Instead, Williams will dip into its $1 billion endowment to balance the budget.

A handful of small liberal arts colleges, most notably Muskingum College, in southeast Ohio, actually have cut tuition in recent years. At Muskingum, the results have been higher enrollment and an increase in net revenue, but few institutions have followed their example.

Some private college leaders grumble that they are being forced to hold price increases to unreasonably low levels.

"Institutions are responding to the pressures of the marketplace, although they are very nervous because there is not enough money at some institutions for needed improvements," said David Laird, president of the Minnesota Private College Council. "I'm real concerned that these unilateral pressures on cost, without regard to educational quality, is not a very rational approach."

Laird is among those who blame the news media for focusing on the high cost of attending one of the nation's relatively few highly-selective colleges and universities, like Pomona College (total cost $30,920 for the 1999-2000 academic year) or Princeton University ($34,898), while ignoring the great majority of institutions, both public and private, that charge much less.

"A lot of the people who write about this have teenagers who are about ready for college, and these people haven't prepared for the cost," Laird said.

So far, smaller tuition increases do not seem to have assuaged public concern about the cost of higher education for students and families.

A recent Washington Post national survey of more than 2,000 voters found that college costs were among the top ten worries for all respondents, among the top five for registered Democrats.

"These increases may be going down but they're still the number-one reason why kids decide whether or not to go to college," said Jamie Pueschel, legislative director for the United States Student Association and a 1998 graduate of California's Claremont McKenna College.

Pueschel also said students' ever-increasing dependence on loans to pay for college was prolonging the time it takes to earn a degree, causing some students to drop out and others to forego graduate or professional school.

The average undergraduate has borrowed more than $14,000 by the time he or she earns a baccalaureate degree, Pueschel pointed out.

"One of the things that bothers me" is that students are being asked to pay for an increasing share of college costs, said Edward M. Elmendorf, vice president for government relations and policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. At four-year public institutions, the student share rose 27 percent between the 1988-89 and 1996-97 academic years, according to AACSU calculations.

Although tuition charges and other college costs had been gradually increasing for at least a decade, it was not until the early to mid-1990s that the issue dented the public consciousness and aroused concern among some politicians. Major newspapers and weekly magazines began to write about the issue. Most notable, perhaps, was the April 29, 1996, Newsweek cover story: "$1,000 a Week. The Scary Cost of College."

A September 1998 report from the U.S. General Accounting Office noted that average tuition for a full-time resident undergraduate increased by almost 44 percent between 1990-91 and 1995-96, while in the same time period the Consumer Price Index increased by only 15.4 percent, and there was a 13.8 percent increase in median household income, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

As college costs were rising in the early 1990s, state and federal support for higher education was generally declining. In California and some other states, smaller appropriations led to enrollment cuts at public institutions. The maximum Pell Grant award—the federal government's main financial aid program for low-income students—dropped 24.2 percent between 1980-81 and 1998-99, again in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Last November, Thomas G. Mortenson, editor of the monthly publication Post-Secondary Education Opportunity wrote, "This, in a nutshell, reflects the higher education financing dilemma faced by families: higher costs, stable incomes, declining financial aid."

Washington was slow to respond.

"When it comes to higher education, the federal government really steps back," said Joseph J. Egdun, co-author of the General Accounting Office report. "There's a hesitancy about seeming to dictate what colleges and universities should do."

"Congress tends to see this as a 'states rights' issue," said his co-author, James W. Spaulding.

"Thank you, but I've already provided for my children's college education."

The Clinton Administration proposed, and Congress approved, a massive tuition tax credit program that benefits middle- and upper-income families but offers little help to low-income students.

Several states followed the example of Georgia and launched ambitious merit scholarship programs—again, helpful to the middle and upper-middle classes but not to those most in need of financial aid.

In Congress, there were whispers of possible federally imposed tuition price controls but few took such talk seriously, especially with Republicans in control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

"That's just a lot of rhetoric," Edward Elmendorf said. "The 50 states simply aren't going to let the federal government set tuition levels."

When the Higher Education Act was up for reauthorization last year, some consideration was given to penalizing states that had increased tuition sharply. There was talk of reducing their federal appropriations for special "opportunity grants" and work-study programs, a key congressional staff member said, but it was decided there was little point in punishing students for the actions of a state.

"Congress can't figure out how to do anything about tuition increases without hurting students," said Jay Diskey, a Washington public relations consultant and former communications director for the House Education and Workforce Committee.

Diskey also said congressional inaction could be blamed in part on the lack of sustained news media interest. "I kept hearing from the same 20 reporters all the time," he said, so Congress felt little public pressure to deal with escalating tuitions.

In fact, the pressure came from the opposite direction—from higher education leaders who argued that increases were justified.

"Colleges and universities are an incredibly powerful lobby here," said a congressional staffer who deals with higher education issues. "College presidents know members of the House and Senate personally, and they're seen as working in the public interest. There is a lot of respect for them, so we can't, on the basis of a bunch and some anecdotes, run out and impose price controls."

College officials argue that they have trimmed costs and have become more efficient, but that higher education is a labor-intensive activity in which only limited savings are possible. A companion argument, made by research universities, is that they must spend vast sums on libraries and laboratories to be effective.

Terry Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, argued that tuition increases have run ahead of the Consumer Price Index “for most of the 20th century, except in the '70s, when they were slightly below the CPI, and the late '80s and early '90s, when they were higher. Now we seem to be returning to a normal range of two to three percent above the CPI."

continued next page
there were 11 members, all with ties to higher education, none with special cost-cutting credentials. The commissioners included four college or university presidents, one chancellor of a statewide system, four higher education lobbyists, a think tank scholar and a political science professor.

Several Congressional sources said the make-up of the commission was heavily influenced by ACE and by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

“...was a life-or-death issue for the four-year schools,” said one. “They needed a friendly commission.”

The commission’s final report, published in January 1998, said colleges and universities should do a better job of containing costs and should be “more transparent” in explaining to the public why tuition and fee increases were necessary. But there was no criticism of the increases themselves.

The commissioners spent a lot of time trying to figure out why college costs were rising. Too many administrators? Too many government regulations? Too many expensive new facilities? Are faculty members not devoting enough time to teaching? Is there too much remedial instruction? They reached no conclusions.

“Linking specific cost increases to price increases is a tricky matter,” the report stated. “Quite simply, the available data on higher education expenditures make it difficult to ascertain direct relationships between cost drivers and increases in the price of higher education.”

For some higher education finance experts, however, the reasons for rising college costs, and for resulting tuition and fee increases, are not that mysterious.

David Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, sees little reason to question the conclusions reached by economist and former college president Howard R. Bowen, in his 1980 book, “The Costs of Higher Education.

“My own view is that Bowen had it right,” Breneman said. “Revenues determine costs, in the sense that institutions raise all the money they can and spend it, and that determines cost. In order to cut costs, therefore, revenues have to be cut.

Higher education is highly adept at finding new sources of revenue and keeping the juggernaut going. Simple, but I think broadly accurate.”

William E. Troutt, who chaired the commission, is pleased with the results.

“When we began our work, there was quite a bit of conversation about federal price controls,” said Troutt, who was then president of Belmont University, in Nashville, Tennessee, and is now president of Rhodes College, in Memphis. “I haven’t heard much about that since.”

David L. Warren, president of the independent college association, said the report has prod- ded many private schools into becoming more cost-effective—by such measures as contracting out jobs that once were done by campus employees and by forming cooperative groups to share expensive equipment, even to hire new faculty.

However, others think the report has had little impact and already has been forgotten. Indeed, several people interviewed for this article had to be reminded that there was a national “cost commission” and that it had issued a report.

“Most people think they dodged a bullet and they’re happy about that,” said Arthur Hauptman, a Washington higher education consultant.

Said a key congressional aide, “They were able to keep Pandora’s box closed… most of the important questions weren’t answered.”

In the report’s aftermath, the American Council on Education commissioned an opinion survey which revealed that the public thinks higher education costs much more than it actually does and has inadequate knowledge about financial aid that is available to students.

“There was an incredible gap between actuality and the public view,” ACE President Ikernberry said in an interview.

ACE then launched a “College is Possible” campaign that so far has spent more than $1 million on everything from tee shirts to an “800” phone number and a Web site to persuade young people and their families that higher education is not beyond their reach financially.

Since this campaign began, media coverage of the tuition issue has been “much more balanced and thoughtful and better informed,” Ikernberry said.

Ivan Frishberg, director of the Higher Education Project for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, sees it differently. “If you fundamentally believe this is a PR problem, then you engage in a PR effort,” Frishberg said. “That’s what ‘College is Possible’ is all about.

Another consequence of concern about rising tuition levels was a congressional mandate to the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the Department of Education, to study college costs and also to improve and speed up the nation’s higher education data collection system—IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System).

However, Congress appropriated no money for this work in the budget for fiscal year 2000, so what originally was envisioned as a $6 million study apparently will be done for about $200,000, and few people are expecting the results to be especially enlightening.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NACUBO) is attempting to produce a “template” that will measure college costs and prices in a “uniform, simple, accessible” way, said Gregory Fusco, a former Lumina University vice president who is now a NACUBO consultant on project.

Thirty-eight institutions are participating in this effort to create a document that would enable colleges and universities to compare their financial practices and make them more understandable to general public.

There is still some flickering interest in Congress. Senator Joseph Lieberman (Connecticut) might hold hearings spring on college costs and tuition increases, but an aide said they would “more of a dialogue…we don’t have particular legislative goal in mind.”

An occasional Cassandra warns that good economic times won’t last forever and, when state budgets tighten again higher education, which is a large discretionary spending item for most states, will be slashed again, as it was in the early 1990s.

“Now is the time when the federal governments ought to be making investments in student financial aid, in anticipation of economic downturn,” David Warren said. “Otherwise, institutions will have to increase their tuition budgets for many, that’s their only other source of income.

But most of those interviewed in Washington doubt that the subject of college costs and tuition increases will receive serious attention again until the Higher Education Act once again comes up for reauthorization in 2004.

“Congress has a hard time doing this unless there’s a national crisis or a significant economic crisis,” said consultant Diskey. “Right now, nobody sees this crisis.”
After Affirmative Action

Educational outreach programs help minority students onto the college track

By Pamela Burdman

WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA

UNDER THE BAKING SUN in the courtyard of Alianza Elementary School, Cynthia Fernandez revealed her dream of becoming a doctor or dentist. Occasionally slipping from English into Spanish, the demure ten-year-old recalled the university visit that helped plant her aspiration—and surprised her migrant worker parents, who had hoped she would become a supermarket cashier.

It began when Cynthia's class read a Spanish/English book called Kids Around the University, and she was impressed to learn that women can be scientists. Then they visited the University of California at Santa Cruz: "I saw many exciting things, a lot of things you can do when you get big," Cynthia said.

Cynthia's teacher, Ken Konviser, said the visits to UC Santa Cruz and nearby Cabrillo College seemed to transform his entire class of fourth and fifth graders. Few of the youngsters' parents speak English, and none are college grads. "You could almost see it with your eyes, a big change in perspective, a radical paradigm shift in terms of who they think they are and where they think they’re going," said Konviser.

Cynthia doesn't know this, but her visit to UC Santa Cruz might never have happened—and her medical ambitions might never have been kindled—were it not for California's elimination of race-conscious admissions policies nearly five years ago. Since then, the University of California has more than doubled its budget for pre-college programs, such as the one that brought Cynthia to UC Santa Cruz, to more than $150 million. Last year the university appointed former Santa Cruz Chancellor Carl Pister to a new Vice President for Educational Outreach position.

In this brave new race-blind world, students like Cynthia are targeted for reasons other than race (typically they represent the first college-going generation in their family, or are students at low-performing schools), but many are minorities. The belief is that the programs, by emphasizing partnerships with K-12 systems that start in the early grades, will eventually bring more minorities into the college pipeline.

That is a goal that the University of California's Board of Regents wasted little time pursuing. In the same vote that struck down preferences at the nine-campus system, they resolved to seek "new directions and increased funding" to increase the eligibility rate of those disadvantaged economically or in terms of their social environment.

They also vowed to "achieve a UC population that reflects this state's diversity through the preparation and empowerment of all students in this state to succeed." If the outreach experiment succeeds in making UC a mirror of the state's diversity, Regent Ward Connerly, who led the drive to end racial preferences, and his allies will consider themselves vindicated.

Not only do the anti-affirmative action regents find outreach acceptable, several of them have become active supporters. "This is near and dear to my heart," said Regent Meredith Kachigian, a Republican appointee to the board. "Getting rid of affirmative action forced us to put our attention where it should be—on getting all students ready for a college education."

It won't be an easy task, but elsewhere around the country, as public universities in several states are in various stages of the transition to race-blind admissions, similar ideas are surfacing:

• Three years ago, retired Duke University historian John Hope Franklin, the leader of President Clinton's advisory panel on race, called for more programs that prepare low-income and first-generation students for college, stressing the importance of promoting diversity without racial targeting.

• Last year, Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry of Texas, another state that no longer employs racial preferences, directed the state legislature’s education committee to study K-12 partnerships that help students prepare for college. A 1996 federal court ruling ordered Texas campuses to end preferences.

• Universities in Washington state stopped using racial preferences after an anti-affirmative action referendum passed in 1998. In addition to seeking state dollars for outreach programs, the flagship University of Washington has received a $9.7 million federal grant to run tutoring and support programs for middle school and high school students in the Yakima Valley, an area with a high proportion of American Indian and Latino students.

• And last year, after a conservative legal group began scrutinizing its admissions policies, the University of Virginia stopped giving black applicants extra points—instead considering race as part of a "holistic" review. At the urging of its Board of Visitors, the school is seeking $1.5 million from the state to bring promising minority and disadvantaged students to campus twice a year starting in the eighth grade.

"The universities never used to talk like this," said Ronald Stevenson III, founder of Break the Cycle, a math tutoring program for elementary school students. "They're helping us now like never before." Stevenson's program struggled along for a few years until UC Berkeley embraced it as part of the Berkeley Pledge outreach program.

The outreach umbrella includes a wide range of programs: Some motivate students to go to college, and advise them on how to get there; others, like Break the Cycle, supplement the school curriculum with tutoring; still others mentor and train teachers in anything from classroom management to writing instruction.

Such efforts have been around in earnest for at least 25 years, and, as Santa Cruz Vice Chancellor Francisco Hernandez likes to point out, UC began dabbling with outreach even earlier. Back in the 1970s the university briefly ran a "fifth class" beneath the freshman (or fourth) class to help students, including a significant number of Hispanics, to prepare for the university's entrance exam.

Despite more than two decades of experience with the current outreach programs, however, their effectiveness is not well established—partly because few studies have been conducted, and partly because even when they are conducted, outcomes are difficult to measure. Even those programs that appear successful are often hard to replicate, because it is not clear why they work.

"The evaluations are often puff pieces about how many kids went on to college, but there's no comparative evaluation, no use of control groups, so you don't know what happened to kids who didn't get the treatment," said Michael Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University who has researched outreach programs, including UCs.

Chief Adelman, a senior researcher at the U.S. Department of Education, agreed. "You can't disparage those efforts," he said. "But when you ask what they add up to in terms of national impact, the highly successful programs are still 'creaming' students who were already likely to succeed."

In a longitudinal study of 1982 high school graduates who were followed for 11 years, Adelman found that 60 percent of students who had participated in college prep programs entered higher education, compared to only 50 percent of other students. But when it came to finishing their degrees, the students who had participated in outreach programs were no better off than the others.

One of the programs Adelman studied was the federal government’s Upward Bound program, a model for many other outreach programs. "The turnover rate is horrendous," he said. "You add up the total hours the kids are spending, about 250 hours, and it looks pretty decent. But when you ask what's being done with the time, the number-one objective is the development of social skills. Social skills may help you get into college, but they certainly aren’t going to help you get out." These dubious successes have given rise to new approaches.

One involves partnering with entire schools to improve overall school quality instead of targeting students after school, on weekends or during the summer. Unlike Upward Bound, the U.S. Department of Education's new GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) program focuses on middle schools, and requires universities to form partnerships with schools and community organizations.

Since the state's elimination of race-conscious admissions policies nearly five years ago, the University of California has more than doubled its budget for pre-college programs.

Watsonville, California, teacher Ken Konviser thinks outreach efforts have broadened horizons for his fourth and fifth graders.
from preceding page

munity organizations.

Partly in response to a study by the research group Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), outreach plan also reflects this new thinking. “The University can only accomplish its goal of enrolling and graduating increased numbers of well-prepared disadvantaged students if it does not focus exclusively on

Despite more than two decades of experience, even outreach programs that appear successful are often hard to replicate, because it is not clear why they work.

offering life rafts but also helps to save the ship,” wrote the authors of the PACE report.

The system’s outreach goals, drafted by a university task force and later adopted by state legislators, focus not just on students in outreach programs (those with life rafts) but also revolve around some 60 high schools with low UC-going rates (sinking ships) and their feeder schools. Most partner schools have high percentages of minority students.

But UC’s goals go beyond helping students transition to higher education; they entail making the students eligible to attend UC.

The university aims to double by 2003 the number of partnership school graduates and outreach program participants who meet the system’s entrance requirements, and to increase by 50 percent those who are competitive enough to be admitted to the highly selective Berkeley and UCLA campuses.

The state legislature endorsed those goals when it augmented the university’s outreach budget by $38.5 million.

Given the university’s stringent entrance requirements, reaching those goals would mean bridging a well-documented school achievement gap between whites and Asians on the one hand and blacks, Latinos and Native Americans on the other. It is that gap that made racial preferences an issue at UC in the first place.

Nearly 80 percent of students in California who perform in the bottom quintile statewide are underrepresented minorities. In 1996, just 3.8 percent of Latino students and 2.8 percent of black high school graduates had the grades and test scores to qualify for UC. That compares with 12.7 percent of white students and 30 percent of Asian Americans. And with so few students qualifying on the undergraduate level, it becomes even harder to recruit substantial numbers of blacks and Latinos into professional school.

Changing those eligibility rates has been elusive, particularly when the state remains among the bottom ten in per-student spending, and ranks lowest nationwide in the number of high school counselors per student.

The difficulties were evident when UCLA outreach officials met with teachers, counselors and principals from eight Los Angeles inner-city high schools at an all-day conference last fall.

The district announced a new plan to monitor the schools to make sure promising students are taking college-prep courses.

“The schools, known as the ‘Super Eight,’ are Los Angeles’ most troubled. And UCLA Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Winston Doby has made them a special priority. But, perhaps in an acknowledgment that the state’s numerical goals aren’t attainable everywhere, UCLA hasn’t dared sign them up as full partners, instead working with a small number of gifted students who have the resources to turn the entire school around,” said Doby. “Attracting in

Outreach, Texas Style

State’s affirmative action ban leads to new programs

Texas, the other state affected by an affirmative action ban for the last several years, has not spent nearly as much money on pre-college outreach programs as has California.

That may be partly explained by the lower level of competition for seats at Texas’ top universities. Whereas 31,000 students sought one of 3,500 seats in UC Berkeley’s current freshman class, the University of Texas’ Austin flagship received 18,000 applications for 6,500 slots.

“They’re so much less selective,” noted Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl, who served as UT-Austin’s president for four years before moving to Berkeley. In California, even students in the top four percent of their class, who will now be considered eligible for UC if they complete the right courses, won’t be able to choose which one of UC’s eight undergraduate campuses they attend.

Andrea Venezia, a researcher at Stanford University, noted that Texans don’t view their university system in the same hierarchical fashion as do Californians. Many students, she said, are content to attend the campus in their region.

Besides being less selective, UT-Austin also has been less diverse—with 18 percent underrepresented minorities in the final years of affirmative action, compared with 23 percent at Berkeley.

After a federal court decision outlawed preferences, the proportion of underrep-

represented minorities in UT-Austin’s freshman class dropped significantly, but this year it has returned to 18 percent. Admissions director Bruce Walker credits the system’s $100 million scholarship program for needy students who complete a series of college-prep courses, together with a 1997 law guaranteeing students in the top ten percent in each high school graduating class a seat at the public university of their choosing.

Though Texas’ outreach picture hasn’t changed as dramatically as California’s, Texas universities continue to run various outreach programs. The El Paso Collaborative Linking UT-El Paso and area school districts, for example, is a national model for K-16 partnerships.

Another highly successful program that is now being replicated in Newark and Los Angeles has been Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) in Houston. This collaboration among corporations, universities and schools has resulted in higher test scores, as well as fewer discipline problems.

No statewide inventory of the various school projects exists, and policy makers do not know how much is being spent on them. Only one Texas program is mandated by the state: a million-dollar network of six outreach centers that serves about 3,000 students a year.

“Right now, there’s not a state strategy. The schools do it on their own individually,” said Lynn Rodriguez, director of access and equity at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Texas has spent money on a different kind of outreach altogether: financial aid. The legislature has authorized $100 million in scholarships for needy students who complete a series of college-prep courses. The UT-Austin campus, meanwhile, has identified about 60 high schools where test scores and family incomes fall well below state averages. Up to six students from each school are eligible for $4,000 scholarships to attend the university.

That is not to say Texas has ignored the racial divide in K-12 education. Instead ofchanneling money and policies through higher education, the state has gone directly to public schools.

For example, an accountability system launched in the 1980s and ramped up in

1993 mandates that if fewer than half any sub-group of a school’s students—whether African American, white, Hispanic or poor—passed the state’s ten-grade achievement test, the school would be labeled “low-performing,” and monitor could be assigned.

That system, while raising the performance of students across the board, yielded dramatic improvements in test pass rates of minority students, according to state officials. Last year, 68 percent African Americans and 66 percent Hispanic students passed the test, compared with just 29 percent and 1 percent five years earlier.

But the test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), has not been free of controversy. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) has argued that the test is unfair to minorities, saying the pass rates are skewed because minority dropout rates increased after the test was implemented.

To the extent that Texas education has improved, MALDEF attorney Al Kasman credits more equitable funding in smaller class sizes and higher teacher salaries—not the TAAS. However, a federal judge recently rejected MALDEF argument, saying the test does not discriminate against minorities, and therefore can be used as a graduation requirement.

Though Texas’ outreach picture hasn’t changed as dramatically as California’s, Texas universities continue to run various outreach programs.

—Pamela Burcham
duals to hard-to-staff schools in very diffi-
cult neighborhoods is always going to be a
challenge. Getting students to and from
school without serious harm is, for some
schools, an important objective. Their
problems are myriad.

Dorsey High School, predominantly
African American, is an example. Of the
nearly 2,000 students, close to 400 live in
foster care, and some 300 are being raised
by grandparents or aunts. Last year, only
nine of Dorsey's graduates scored above
1,000 on the SAT test, and just 15 were
admitted to a UC campus.

At the Super Eight meeting, Dorsey
Principal Nancy Rene voiced the frustra-
tion that many administrators were feeling.
"Show me the schools where it's working,
where people are really successful at over-
coming the effects of poverty," she said. "I
don't care where it is in the United States,
I'll go."

"To be candid with you," said Bob Col-
lin, assistant superintendent for the Los
Angeles school district, "it has not been
done in this country."
The difficulties in making change on the
high school level have given rise to the
theory that high school is too late to infect
kids with the college bug. Hence, while the
governmental federal government used to channel its
outreach dollars only into high school
Upward Bound programs, GEAR UP begins in middle school. Based on the
same solid hypothesis, other programs are
starting in elementary school.

"They need to know why they have to
learn fraction when they're 14 years old," said Kay Stonebloom, one of the teachers who
started the Kids Around the University
program (KATU). "There's anecdotal evidence that if kids don't get fractions in
third grade, they won't get into algebra. If
you don't get into algebra in eighth grade,
you're already out of that college corridor."

Stonebloom has been taking her
elementary school students on field trips to
UC Santa Cruz for years. In 1995 when she
tried to find a textbook that taught
elementary kids about college, she
discovered that such a book had never been
written. Determined to change that,
she's students set about interviewing stu-
dents, professors and administrators at the
university.

In 1996, around the time Stonebloom's
students were finishing their book, UC
officials were crafting race-neutral policies,
and biologist M.R.C. Greenwood was
coming on board as Santa Cruz' new
chancellor. Greenwood and other admin-
istrators, who didn't share the regents'
aversion to affirmative action, found
themselves cornered by a policy that seem-
ingly asked them to achieve racial diversity
while eliminating their only tried-and-true
tools for achieving it.

Determined to find new tools, Green-
wood was won over by Stonebloom’s stu-
dents who showed up on campus to
interview her for their book. "I thought it
was fascinating because of the way in
which they came to us," Greenwood re-
called. "So frequently these things come
from the university and we tell the school
what they should do. This wasn't top-
down. When we saw what they were
writing, we thought it was wonderful, so we
encouraged the school to do more than just
mimeograph it."

Today, with help from the Kellogg
Foundation and Bank of America, Stone-
bloom is on the Santa Cruz payroll and
Kids Around the University has been pub-
lished by the university in eye-catching
color. At an ice cream party celebrating its
publication, Greenwood gave the students
who had worked on the book "certificates of
early enrollment" contingent on their
completing UC's minimum entrance re-
quirements.

In addition to teaching kids about col-
lege life, the six-week KATU curriculum
tells them, for example, how the number of
math courses they take can influence their
future earnings. A corps of teachers has
been trained to work with the materials.
This year, more than 12,000 children in
some 140 elementary schools around the
Monterey Bay region will be exposed to
KATU. Some students in Merced are using
it to help plan the new UC campus that will
be built near their San Joaquin Valley
community.

The KATU program is part of an out-
reach operation emanating from UC Santa
Cruz' off-campus Educational Partnership
Center that has a multitude of activities
going on in area schools.

On a recent Wednesday, for example,
the same day Cynthia Fernandez was
talking about her trip to UC Santa Cruz,
a group of third-graders at Alianza wrote
paragraphs about their recent visit to Cab-
rillo College. "I like the way they type-
write," said Crystal Diaz about the
students she met in the college's computer
lab. "I want to learn how to typewrite. I
want to work in a business—like being a
lawyer or something like that."

Also that day, over in the library at
nearby Edward A. Hall Middle School,
Santa Cruz graduate Rico Dominguez
entertained a group of seventh and eighth
graders with his animated presentation about
the courses they need to take in high
school in order to attend a UC or Cali-
ifornia State University campus.

Nearly 80 percent of students in California
who perform in the bottom quintile
statewide are underrepresented
minorities.

"In high school, there are honors clas-
es, classes that make you work harder,"
Dominguez told them. "Does everyone
know they're going to college at some
point? I'm not saying you're all going to
UCSC," said Dominguez. "I'm saying I
would choose courses that would help
you to go to Cal State, choose to go to Brown,
choose what you want to do."

Dominguez' program, the Early
Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) is
for students who receive free lunches,
whose parents didn't attend college, and
who have grade point averages between 2.5
and 3.5—students who need some
encouragement to stay on the col-
lege track.

The message seemed to be getting through. "What I want to do
when I grow up is not work in the
fields like my mom and dad," said
Alejandra, an eighth grader, after
the session.

E.A. Hall Principal Ian MacGre-
gor said he can't tell whether EAOP
will help Alejandra escape farm
work. "But boy, the kids sure are
interested in it," he added. "It ex-
poses them to college. It makes them
feel special."

Later that afternoon, MacGregor
and Dominguez went to Watsonville
High School to meet with math and
language arts teachers from the high
school and various feeder schools.
The teachers split into two groups: math
and literacy. Already tired
from the school day, they were fed
pizza and bottled water, and were
paid $42 for attending the two-hour
meetings.

The teachers formed a vertical team,
and together with representatives from UC
Santa Cruz, Cabrillo College and Cal State
Monterey Bay, worked out the nuts
and bolts of how to get more students ready for
college. At this, their second meeting, the
math team members compared notes
about what's happening in their schools.

"Many of these communities have
never had a vertical slice meeting before,
where there's an opportunity to talk with
other teachers teaching your kids two
years ago," said Robinson. "We encourage
that for the first few meetings. Then they
start to take a closer look at the data for
their specific schools and do some prob-
lem-solving about where the system itself is
blocking kids…where kids need extra
support."

The concept, says Kathy Robinson, the
UC Santa Cruz regional coordinator for
partnership schools, is modeled after the
successful collaborative between Univer-
sity of Texas-EI Paso and EI Paso area
schools.

Another Santa Cruz program, still in
embryonic stages, is using the Internet to
bring advanced placement courses to
students whose schools don't offer them.
KATU, EAOP, the AP initiative and other
UC Santa Cruz programs are offered to all
partnership schools.

Housing all these projects together at
the off-campus Educational Partnership
Center involved some rearranging of
campus bureaucracies. But, according to
the center's director Carrol Moran, now for
the first time Santa Cruz outreach workers
are working in a coordinated fashion,
offering partner schools a coherent array
of programs—rather than being intro-
duced to each other by school officials.

As momentum builds at Santa Cruz,
and other advanced placement courses to
their model, administrators are brimming
with enthusiasm. "As we started this I was
less hopeful than I am today," said J. Michael
Thompson, associate vice chancellor and
admissions director at Santa Cruz. "I'm
very optimistic about our ability to meet
the legislature's goal."

Linda Hutcheson, principal of Wash-
ington Elementary School in Richmond,
one of Berkeley's partner schools, is also
optimistic. About two-thirds of Wash-
ton's students are African American, and
another quarter are Latino. Three-quarters
of students are eligible for free or reduced-
price lunches.

In recent years, Break the Cycle, an
after-school mathematics tutorial program,
had helped raise Washington first graders'
math scores from the 31st percentile before
the program started to the 74th percentile
last year. Second graders went from the 15th
percentile to the 69th, and third graders rose
from the 11th percentile to the 78th.

At a fall Break the Cycle graduation
ceremony, the tutors handed out medals
and trophies to dozens of students who
had spent their after-school hours studying
math and taking quizzes. A beamng
Hutcherson praised their hard work,
saying, "You are going to be the future
graduates of UC Berkeley."

UC Chancellor Berdahl would have
been shocked to hear that. "Are we going
to change through outreach substantially
the percentage of underrepresented mi-
nority kids who are going to qualify for
Berkeley or UCLA?" he asked. "We have
to say that's a very long-term and marginal-
gain process."

With affirmative action, Berkeley
boosted greater racial diversity than the
rest of the system: The campus enrolled 23
percent underrepresented minorities, as
opposed to 17 percent systemwide. Today,
Berkeley is down to 13 percent, and with-
out affirmative action, beating the system
average is hardly likely.

The more realistic way to make a dif-
fERENCE, said Berdahl, is to steer more stu-
dents onto the road to college—whether or
not they end up at Berkeley or another
elite school. "I think we probably will have
a significant impact in terms of changing
horizons of opportunity for these young-
sters and fostering a sense of personal
worth that is important," he said.

Pamela Budiman is a former higher
education reporter for the San Francisco
Chronicle.
Indiana's New Community College Plan
A state-mandated partnership between Ivy Tech and Vincennes University is seen by some as a shotgun marriage

By William Trombley

VINCENNES, INDIANA

T THE CENTER of a controversial plan to create Indiana's first community college system stands Vincennes University, which is not, in fact, a "university" but a junior college, the oldest postsecondary institution in the state, with an attractive red brick campus that occupies 100 acres along the banks of the Wabash River, 125 miles southwest of Indianapolis.

This month, as part of a new state-mandated "coordinated partnership," Vincennes began to offer a sprinkling of liberal arts courses at four campuses of Ivy Tech State College, the state system of 23 two-year technical and vocational institutions. More classes will be added next fall, and by July 2002, if the plan is carried out, Vincennes will be responsible for about 60 percent of the general education program on ten Ivy Tech campuses.

At present, Vincennes is the only comprehensive public community college in the state. When other states were building two-year colleges in the 1960s and '70s, Indiana did not. Veteran political observers say this was largely due to opposition from Indiana University and Purdue, the state's two major research universities.

As an alternative, both "IU" and Purdue opened regional campuses around the state, offering two-year associate degrees as well as bachelor's and advanced degrees. Indiana University has five of these, Purdue has two, and the two institutions jointly operate large campuses in Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. Ivy Tech also offers the associate degree, as well as certificates of competency in various technical and vocational fields.

But the state still ranks well below the national average in earned two-year degrees, which supporters of the new plan say are increasingly in demand by employers. At the bachelor's degree level, Indiana is above the national average among traditional college-age students but is 48th nationally in the percentage of adults (ages 22 to 49) who have earned bachelor's degrees.

"We think there are 30,000 to 80,000 adults who could be in higher education but are not," because of the lack of a community college system, said Stan Jones, Indiana commissioner for higher education, and the driving force behind the initiative. "This proposal is 30 years overdue."

"We have a low educational attainment rate in this state and we have to catch up if we want to remain economically viable," said Ken Sauer, deputy commissioner for research and academic affairs.

Efforts to increase the number of transfers from Ivy Tech campuses to Indiana University, Purdue and the state's other four-year public institutions have been unsuccessful, Jones and Sauer said, so it was time for a new approach.

Working quietly with legislators and Democratic Governor Frank O'Bannon's staff, Jones and his aides came up with the Ivy Tech-Vincennes partnership idea. The plan also calls for a tuition freeze for at least two years at Vincennes and Ivy Tech, while fees are expected to rise at public four-year schools.

Jones estimates the partnership will cost about $80 million in its tenth year, a small fraction of what he says will be a $2 billion public higher education budget by that time. But critics say the plan will cost much more than that.

O'Bannon proposed the community college initiative a year ago, after little public discussion, and it was approved by the legislature on the last day of the 1999 session.

The initiative has strong support not only from the governor and the state Commission for Higher Education but also from key leaders in both houses of the legislature. However, it does not have much backing from Ivy Tech or from the state's public universities, especially Indiana University. The presidents and governing boards of these institutions have supported the idea publicly, but privately officials have expressed many misgivings.

Along with several outside experts who have examined the plan, they question the ability of Vincennes University, a small two-year college in a remote part of the state (one that has suffered a dramatic enrollment decline, with resulting faculty layoffs, in recent years), to transform itself into a statewide provider of general education courses for Ivy Tech.

"The objective is correct—Indiana needs community colleges," said one of these experts, who asked not to be identified. "But this is the wrong way to go about it."

Jones said Vincennes was selected because "it is the only accredited two-year college in the state with a solid record of transferring liberal arts students" to four-year institutions.

Skeptics believe the choice was made because several powerful legislators—including John Gregg, speaker of the House of Representatives, and Senate Majority Leader Richard Young—are graduates of the college who want to assure its survival.

"This was not done to help Vincennes financially," Jones replied. "That might be an important benefit but it was not the motive."

Vincennes officials say they did not seek the arrangement but are glad to undertake it as a service to the state.

"It was not our initiative," President Phillip M. Summers said in an interview. "We were asked if we would participate and we agreed."

Summers, a tall, thin man with a deep voice that he lends to a local choir, looked distressed when he was asked if the college might be undertaking this new role because "it was not our initiative" but conceded that "at the academic level we've been working for eight or nine years to get IU to accept our courses financially," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm not sure we'll make any money at all from this arrangement."

Once Governor O'Bannon and the Commission for Higher Education decided that a new community college system was the best way to upgrade Indiana's workforce skills and to increase its production of both two- and four-year degrees, they faced three choices:

One option was to build a new system of two-year colleges, as California, New York and some other states have done, but that was ruled out as too expensive.

A second possibility was to develop some Ivy Tech campuses into comprehensive community colleges, with a full range of academic transfer, as well as technical and vocational, programs. This is the course of action that Ivy Tech would have preferred.

William D. Kramer, vice president for planning and education, pointed out that 44 academic programs are offered at Ivy Tech's 23 sites, 26 of which are accepted for transfer by at least some of the state's 6 year public campuses. About ten percent Ivy Tech graduates do transfer to a 4 year school each year, he added, and n few do well there.

"There's never been an issue about quality and the content of our general education courses," Kramer said. "The quality of Ivy Tech's education has never been in question."

We have everything except the liberal arts degree," said Thomas Cooke, dean instruction at the Ivy Tech Indianapolis campus. "And that could be easily added into our present structure."

Transfer rates would have been higher if Ivy Tech officials argued, if four-year situations, especially Indiana University, had been willing to accept more Ivy credits.

In Richmond, a small city close to Indiana-Oho state line, University East and Ivy Tech share a campus, though "share" might not be quite the word. IU East, with an enrollment of 2 last fall, has four buildings on 204 acres while Ivy Tech's 1,200 students are crammed into a single building on 21 acres plus leas facilities elsewhere in Richmond.

Ivy Tech Chancellor Jim Steck sa has a good relationship with David Ful his counterpart at IU East, on most mat but conceded that "at the academic leve been difficult." Of 17 programs offered, Ivy Tech, the credits of four are accepted for transfer to IU East.

"For instance, we have a very str accounting program here," Steck said. "We've been working for eight or 10 years to get IU to accept our courses credit but we haven't gotten anywhere anywhere."

"Whether the limited number of
Tech transfer students is the result of Ivy Tech's failings or the intransigence of Indiana University and other four-year schools, the pace has been too slow for state planners.

"At this rate, it would be 2030 before Ivy Tech had a complete general education program," Sauer said. "We can't wait that long."

The third option available to Governor O'Bannon and the Commission for Higher

Education was the Ivy Tech-Vincennes partnership.

"I will admit this is a unique strategy," Stan Jones said. "But this is a blend of good educational policy and good politics. I can get this done, and I can't get anything else done."

"I learned a long time ago that you have to have an idea that's going to have political support," said Jones, a political veteran who served in the state legislature and later as a top aide to former Governor Evan Bayh. "You have to have both the idea and the political support. Maybe there's a better idea out there but I don't know of another one I can get done."

Jones acknowledged that the plan was developed behind closed doors, without participation by Indiana University, Purdue and other four-year public institutions.

"If they knew of the talks, they would have organized their forces against the plan," he said. "Indiana University is still powerful. They kept community colleges out of the state 30 years ago, and they still want to keep them out."

Indiana University administrators are in a delicate position. They don't like the Ivy Tech-Vincennes arrangement but don't want to be seen as attempting to thwart a plan that has strong political support and appears to be popular with the state's citizens.

IU officials and, to a lesser extent, their Purdue counterparts, fear the new partnership will cut into lower-division (freshman and sophomore) enrollments at the seven regional campuses and perhaps even at the IU-Purdue joint operations in Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. The Ivy Tech-Vincennes campuses will be cheaper and more accessible.

This year, Ivy Tech charges $66.20 per credit hour. Vincennes $84.67. Tuition and fees at the regional Indiana University campuses average $104.17, and they are $140.41 at the university's flagship campus in Bloomington. That gap will widen, as tuition is frozen at Ivy Tech and Vincennes for at least two years.

"We will become a viable alternative to the IU (and Purdue) regionals," Wesley Teo, vice president for instruction and dean of the faculty at Vincennes, predicted confidently. "That's why they're so scared, and that's why all these forces come into play."

"All of the regional campuses have something to lose," said Alfred J. Guillaume, vice chancellor for academic affairs at IU South Bend.

Since no market studies have been done, Guillaume and other IU officials question Stan Jones' claim that there is a pool of 30,000 to 80,000 adults who are not served by existing postsecondary arrangements.

During his annual "state of the campus" speech last fall, IU South Bend Chancellor Kenneth L. Perrin called the plan "all-conceived" and said of Jones, "I have become increasingly concerned about the increasing power and authority of one individual in our state."

Indiana University President Myles Brand then asked Perrin and the other regional campus chancellors not to criticize the plan publicly, although John Gregg, speaker of the House of Representatives, and other legislators said the university continued to lobby against the bill.

"There was no public attempt to stop it by IU because they thought they could control it in the legislature," said Philip Pierpont, the Vincennes assistant vice president who is coordinating the partnership effort. "But it turned out they were wrong—our friends in the legislature protected us from too many intrusions."

In an interview at his Indianapolis office, Brand denied that the university was seeking to freeze it, as a budget-cutting measure, or as a way to keep them out. "I'm not seeing any, tenure appointments for a transition period of two years, a commitment that does not sit well with the faculty. Tenure has been a sensitive issue for Vincennes."

But Stan Jones said that won't happen. "I have two of each, you don't need both of them," said Jim Irwin, who has taught heating and air conditioning on the Indianapolis campus for 11 years and is now chairman of its faculty senate.

"I went through this in Kentucky," said Todd Murphy, who teaches microbiology and is vice chairman of the faculty senate. "When they moved to comprehensive community colleges, a lot of the vocational and technical people lost their jobs. It looks like the same thing is happening here."

"That won't happen as long as they have the enrollments," said Vincennes' Philip Pierpont. "This semester, all of the "Vincennes" classes are being taught by Ivy Tech instructors. This will be true for some time because the Vincennes faculty has been sharply cut back in the wake of the enrollment decline, and few Vincennes instructors have shown an interest in moving to an Ivy Tech campus.

At some point, however, some Ivy Tech instructors may be absorbed into the Vincennes instruction, and then one question will be how much these newly unified teachers should be paid.

The average Vincennes faculty member earns at least $10,000 more per year than his counterpart at Ivy Tech. This is because most Vincennes faculty members have been there for years, teach full-time, and have tenure, while 75 percent of Ivy Tech's instructors are part-time in a system that has no tenure.

Vincennes has agreed to make few, if any, tenure appointments for a transition period of two years, a commitment that does not sit well with the faculty. Tenure has been a sensitive issue for Vincennes since the Board of Trustees voted to freeze it, as a budget-cutting measure four years ago, then rescinded the policy in the face of faculty protests.

There are other complications. For example, the two systems have different benefits packages and retirement plans. Although Vincennes has agreed to pay the cost of the classes taught at Ivy Tech, it is not clear who will pay for student support services such as counseling and financial aid.

"The real issue is money," said Ivy Tech's William Kramer, who pointed out that large classes in such general education subjects as English and World Civilization help to pay for smaller technical and vocational programs. "The question is, how will Vincennes be compensated for general education that we used to teach," Kramer said. "We need to be held harmless."

Despite the many unanswered questions and the shotgun marriage atmosphere in which the new partnership has been formed, Kramer said, "We'll make this work," a sentiment expressed by many who are scrambling about the plan.

Some believe the political fight is not over and that the legislature might revisit its decision to establish the Ivy Tech-Vincennes joint venture. "If it was created through a political process, you have to assume the political process can undo it," said Carl Lutz, Ivy Tech chancellor in South Bend.

But Stan Jones said that won't happen. "We've already been through the hardest part—getting the plan through the legislature," he said. "Community colleges are very popular with the general public. I think (four-year) institutions are going to be very careful about opposing an idea with this much appeal."

Many are convinced that Ivy Tech and Vincennes eventually will merge into one system, and that the two-year degree programs now offered by Indiana University, Purdue and other state universities will be phased out.

Whatever happens is likely to have a distinctive Indiana touch. "This fits Indiana's way of doing things," said Dave Vollrath, an associate professor of business management at IU South Bend. "We have a rich array of institutions that are very popular with the general public. I think (four-year) institutions are going to be very careful about opposing an idea with this much appeal."

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Stan Jones, Indiana commissioner for higher education, is the chief architect of the new community college plan.
Doing Comparatively Well

Why the public loves higher education and criticizes K–12

The following article is based on several opinion surveys conducted by Public Agenda, a non-profit public opinion survey research group. The author, John Immerwahr, is a senior research fellow at Public Agenda and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Villanova University.

The article is a condensed version of "Doing Comparatively Well," a report published last fall by Public Agenda, the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

By John Immerwahr

A college degree has replaced the high school diploma as a necessary ticket for a good job and a secure middle-class lifestyle. Ninety-six percent of high school students say that it is important to go to college, and 74 percent report that their parents will be very disappointed in them if they don't go to college. In focus groups across the country, people invariably stress the importance of a higher education in today's high-tech, knowledge-intensive economy. In the past, a college education was perceived as something for the elite few, whereas today a postsecondary education is perceived as the normal track for most students.

Since college has become, in effect, an extension of the normal educational path, it might be reasonable to expect that people would begin to think of college education with a mindset similar to what they bring to their thinking about K–12. Our research, however, suggests the exact opposite. The public thinks of the two systems very differently.

Higher education is currently "Teflon-coated" and remarkably immune to many criticisms. By contrast, K–12 is seemingly wrapped in Velcro, so that when criticisms are thrown, they often stick. Specifically, higher education seems to be immune to the criticisms that often are leveled against K–12. The sharp difference in attitudes has important implications for education policy.

Although the public sees the two systems in very different terms, there are other important subgroups—especially the business community—who see the two systems in much more similar terms. While the public has a much more favorable impression of higher education than of K–12, business leaders have similar (and often highly critical) views of both systems.

The Knowledge Gap

In interviews with school superintendents, we frequently heard a variation of this remark: "Since everyone in the community went to school, they all think they are experts on the subject." In the dozens of focus groups we conducted on K–12 education, we found that people know, or at least think they know, a great deal about the schools in their communities. In one of our national studies, we explicitly asked people for the source of their information on public schools. More than half said that they relied primarily on their own experience or conversations with people they know.

The level of knowledge completely changes when the focus switches to higher education. People know very little about what actually goes on in institutions of higher education. Many Americans have not attended college, and many communities do not have a local higher education institution. Even those who have children in college often do not have the time or energy to learn about higher education. If there are problems with a college, the problems are either the fault of the students or, at any rate, an issue within the college itself.

Perceived Quality

Public schools have been in the news a great deal in recent years, and the public has bemoaned stories about how children in other countries are doing better than children in one subject or another. Nationwide, schools get low grades from the public. A recent Phi Delta Kappa survey, only 18 percent of the public gave schools national rank A or B. As is well known, people tend to give schools in their own areas high grades; and, indeed, almost half (46 percent) gave their local schools an A or a B.

Public Agenda studies have shown, however, that when people are probed about specific factors, the scores begin to drop, even for local schools. Our nationwide studies suggest that 45 percent of people who said the same about national rankings were more critical of aspects of the local schools when they thought the local school was doing well, and only 27 percent who said the same about American cars.

As a result, while many people think our K–12 institutions are losers compared to other countries, they see American colleges and universities as the best in the world.

Responsibility

In the public's view, individual motivation is a factor at every level of education. When it comes to K–12 education, the public also believes that schools and classic teachers have a great deal of responsibility for student problems. When people recognize that children bring lots of problems to the schools, they also blame the schools for failure of students. Seventy-five percent of Americans say that almost all kids can learn if they receive proper instruction. When it comes to higher education, the locus of responsibility shifts dramatically. On student reaches college age, people seem to feel that it is up to the students to take responsibility for his or her own life. If a student drops out of college, the assumption is that the student was not sufficiently motivated. With virtual unanimity, 91 percent to 7 percent, people think that the benefit of a college education depends on how much effort the student puts into it as opposed to the quality of the college the student is attending.

Once again, this comparison works to the benefit of higher education. In effect, who comes to college, the public blames the problems on the consumer, rather than on the producer. For example, if a high school has a high dropout rate, people may worry that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. College dropout rates, by contrast, are much more acceptable to the public. In our focus groups, people seemed to regard it normal and appropriate for a large number of students to drop out of college.
between the consumers and the producers (rather than a public problem).

**Safety, Discipline and the Basics**

When people talk about public schools, the areas they are most concerned about are safety, discipline, and teaching the basics. In surveys conducted by Public Agenda and other national survey organizations, these items invariably appear at the top of the public's list of priorities, and the surveys also document dissatisfaction with how the schools are doing in these areas.

In several statewide surveys, we measured the gap between how important something is to the public versus how well the public feels the schools are doing in that area. There were huge gaps between the importance of safety, discipline and the basics on the one hand, and the performance of the schools in delivering on these goals on the other. In focus groups these concerns also dominated the conversation, and indeed, teachers and students themselves identified these as major problems.

Although people give their local schools good marks overall, when they are probed on particular issues, their evaluations change. Nearly half of the public believes that a high school diploma (even from their local high school) does not guarantee that a student has mastered the basics.

Once again, colleges and universities seem to be immune to many of these criticisms. While the metal-detector at the K–12 school door has become the image of education in the '90s, colleges are generally perceived, by focus group participants, as safe and pleasant places to be. Campus drinking does, of course, make the news. But while people may not approve of college drinking, there is also a sense, among many focus group respondents, that college students have been drinking for a long time and that there are thus established drinking cultures at many schools.

People are often shocked by the discipline problems they hear about in the high schools, especially when compared to their memories of their own schools. College drinking, for better or for worse, is a familiar story. Even if this behavior is unacceptable, at least it is nothing new.

Our studies on the attitudes of leaders—business executives, legislators, college administrators and faculty—are particularly striking in this regard. When these leaders were asked about various problems facing higher education, their highest concern (identified by 88 percent of the sample) was that too many new students are not adequately prepared for college work. In addition, approximately eight out of ten professors, and a similar proportion of employers, gave recent high school graduates poor marks in areas such as grammar and spelling.

While people are aware that college graduates may not be meeting appropriate standards, some people are willing to blame the K–12 schools for bad preparation, rather than the colleges themselves. To put it another way, it is less clear to people what it is that students are supposed to learn in college, and, perhaps as a result, they are less outraged when students don't have mastery of those skills.

**Access**

In most of the areas we have discussed so far, higher education seems to shine in comparison with K–12 education. The situation is different when it comes to access.

Whatever else people say about public K–12 education, they never identify access to schooling as a problem. At least in the urban and suburban areas of the country, there never seems to be any question about the availability of K–12 education. Only the quality is in question.

Access is the public's single biggest worry about higher education. People think that college is more important than it ever has been, but what scares them is that it may become priced out of reach for their children or for the children of other people like them. The issue is not the quality of higher education, but the ability of people to afford it.

There is a strong majority of Americans (89 percent) who say that “we should not allow the price of a college education to keep students who are qualified and motivated to go to college from doing so.” At the same time, 49 percent feel that, in their state, most qualified people are able to go to college, while an equal number (45 percent) think that many qualified people don't have the opportunity to attend a college or university.

Interestingly, leaders are much more optimistic about the ability of qualified people in their state to get an education. Three-quarters of the leadership group (75 percent) say that most qualified people can find a way to pay for it. Only a fraction, 19 percent, thinks that many qualified people cannot find a way to pay for college.

In the public's mind, higher education is much like health care. Many Americans are impressed by the miracles of modern medicine; what worries them is that it may be inaccessible to them. Similarly, higher education is increasingly seen as an essential service that may be priced out of reach.

**Alternatives**

The public's concerns about the quality of K–12 education have inspired some reformers to consider alternatives to public schools, such as charter schools or school vouchers. The public has only begun to consider this issue, and so far there is a lot of confusion and conflict in the public's thinking. On the one hand, people clearly are committed to the idea of public schools. At the same time, 57 percent of parents with children currently in the public schools would send their children to private schools if they could afford to do so.

While our focus groups suggest that people don't really understand what the voucher debate is about, the surveys also show a growing interest in the concept of vouchers. The Gallup organization has asked the same question about vouchers in several different years, and the trend seems to be one of growing support. The number of people who say they favor “allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense” has grown from 24 percent in 1993, to 33 percent in 1995, and to 44 percent in 1998.

At the same time, Public Agenda has found virtually no national support for the idea that private companies could effectively take over the public schools, and many of the experiments with privatization have not attracted favorable attention.

Although it may not yet have registered on the public's radar screen, there is a great deal of interest within the leadership community in the effectiveness of for-profit alternatives to traditional higher education systems. The for-profit University of Phoenix is widely discussed as an alternative model that may make deep inroads into the “education market.”

**A World of Difference**

How long can higher education enjoy its current immunity from many of the criticisms leveled against the K–12 schools? Obviously, we cannot make any accurate predictions on this topic. But there are signs of erosion of higher education's relatively stronger position in the public's eyes.

We asked educators, employers, and college professors what a high school diploma from their local school actually means. We found a wide divergence among the three groups, with educators most confident about the ability of the schools, and with professors and employers much more likely to be critical. Similarly, in regional surveys, we find that teachers think schools are doing a good job under difficult circumstances, but the majority of community leaders think that schools use social problems and lack of funding as a smoke screen for poor performance.

On many questions regarding higher education, the views of business leaders are diametrically opposed to those of college professors. In individual interviews with business leaders, we heard the complaint that colleges and universities are inflexible, bureaucratic and unresponsive to change. Rather than seeing higher education as a leader in technology, many of the business executives we talked to considered the teaching approaches of higher education to be obsolescent. For business leaders, the concept of tenure is almost a joke, and a lot of university research is seen as little more than resume padding.

In other words, business executives are just as critical of higher education as they are of K–12 education. Business leaders believe that both sides of the educational divide are hiding from accountability and avoiding the need for more comprehensive restructuring.

This growing skepticism about higher education is probably the most disturbing trend of all. In many respects, the educational system as it is practiced today is unacceptable, at least it is nothing new.

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**Connecting Higher Education and the Public Schools**

One of the most encouraging findings from our leadership studies is a high level of interest in breaking down some of the barriers between higher education and K–12 education. There is a widely shared concern among the leadership community that the K–12 schools are not adequately preparing students for higher education. For their part, K–12 educators often argue that colleges and universities are not doing an adequate job of training teachers.

Instead of continuing the blame game, with each side pointing to the other for an explanation of their own failures, these two educational entities might be interested in the support we've found for their working more closely together.

We asked leaders to tell us what they see as the greatest problem for higher education and also to tell us what changes they think would be most beneficial. Significantly, the most commonly mentioned problem was that too many students need remedial education. Eighty-eight percent of the leaders interviewed (professors, college administrators, government leaders and business executives) listed this as a very or somewhat serious concern.

We presented the same respondents with a list of proposals intended to improve higher education. The one most often selected was to have higher education institutions directly collaborate with local K–12 schools to help prepare students for college. Fully 92 percent thought that this would be a very or somewhat effective way to improve higher education.

These leaders see collaboration as the most viable solution to the biggest problem facing higher education. Public Agenda studies of attitudes toward K–12 education show that the public has an enormous interest in setting clear standards for what teachers should teach and what students should learn. We see a similar interest among our leadership sample for higher standards in colleges and universities.

Our findings show, in other words, that leaders do not conceive of the country's two educational systems as walled off from each other. For leaders (especially business leaders), both systems are problematic, and both will need to work together to solve their common problems.
the system by former Yale University President Benno Schmidt, who was subsequently appointed vice chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees by Giuliani.

On the other hand, the consultants said, the school's faculty and staff had remained entrenched and jaded, hoping for this latest in a series of outside threats to blow over without addressing basic problems. "Too many share the notion that policies come and go, boards change, governors and mayors leave," the consultants said. "And all the while, the fundamental divisions within the university remain to fester."

As with everything in New York, of course, the controversy has been magnified by the city's proud combativeness, which makes public disagreements into a spectator sport. But the battle over remedial education also has been taking place before the backdrop of starry-eyed New York, the place of unbridled opportunity and vast potential, and of visionaries such as Townsend Harris, founder of the Free Academy in 1847; it was later renamed City College. "Open the doors to all—let the children of the rich and poor take seats together and know no distinction save that of industry, good conduct and intellect," Townsend urged.

Unlike other such utopian fantasies, Townsend's was generally realized. City College took successive waves of penniless, hard-working immigrants and turned them into CEOs and Nobel laureates—or at least gave them a boost into the middle and upper classes—by furnishing a first-class education, tuition-free. It was the centerpiece of the 17 two- and four-year schools that eventually would be assembled into CUNY.

At least count, there were 11 Nobel Prize winners among the alumni of what came to be called "the poor man's Harvard." Prominent graduates include Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, Jonas Salk, Intel founder Andrew Grove, General Colin Powell, civil rights leader A. Phillip Randolph, former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, Ira Gershwin, novelist Oscar Hijuelos, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer, writer Walter Moseley, and entertainers Ben Gazzara, Paul Simon, Jerry Seinfeld, and Jimmy Smits. A Standard & Poor's survey found that more top corporate executives had degrees from CUNY than from any other single university. Flagship City College was in Harlem, though, and as the neighborhood changed, the college did not. Tution may have been free, but admission requirements were tough, and students who had attended high schools deep in the inner city often couldn't get in. So, as an experiment, the college began to accept applicants who were disadvantaged economically, and who would otherwise have been rejected. In addition to their normal course of studies, they were offered "stretch," or remedial, classes.

"The assumption was that these defects were essentially correctable, a typically liberal idea, which I happen to agree with," said Bernard Sohmer, chairman of the CUNY faculty senate and a veteran City College math professor who has taught there since 1952. "Many, many faculty at City University, from that small beginning to what eventually became open admission for the entire university in 1970, signed on to the idea that a university's mission was partly social."

But the changes came too slowly for some African American and Hispanic City College students, 200 of whom padlocked the gates and took over 17 buildings for two weeks in 1969 to force an increase in minority enrollment. The resulting open admissions policy was widely misunderstood as having lowered the admission standards for the four-year universities, including City College; in fact, it assured a place for every graduate of the New York City schools, but channeled those who weren't prepared to one of CUNY's community colleges. Meanwhile, standards stayed in place at City College and the other four-year institutions, with exceptions for some minorities.

Still, the damage to the system's reputation had been done, and it began a long process of decline. "It became popular to say City College wasn't what it used to be," Sohmer said. "It was a myth that we had no way of overcoming."

That was not the only problem. After the open admission policy was implemented, enrollment overran the campuses. Then, in 1976, the city's fiscal crisis forced CUNY to begin charging tuition. (Today it costs $3,200 a year to attend a CUNY senior college, $2,500 at the community colleges.) The financial emergency also required that the state begin to help fund CUNY, giving the mayor and the governor control over ten of the 17 seats on the Board of Trustees in exchange.

More non-native English speaking immigrants moved in; today, half of CUNY's students were raised speaking something other than English. And New York's public schools—CUNY's source for two-thirds of its students—were literally falling apart. Standards clearly did fall, and more and more entering freshmen crowded into remedial courses to prepare for college-level work.

It was a pronounced, and precipitous, decline. By 1997, 87 percent of freshmen at community colleges, and 72 percent at universities—more than double and triple the national average among comparable schools, respectively—failed one or more of CUNY's remediation placement tests, which gauge whether students can read, write and understand math at high school levels; 55 percent flunked more than one. More and more full-time faculty found themselves teaching remedial classes.

CUNY education graduates have among the lowest passing rates on state teacher exams. Students were discovered to have received degrees from CUNY's Hostos Community College in the South Bronx without being able to read or write English, a revelation to which trustees responded by making the entrance test part of the graduation requirement at Hostos and other two-year programs. Even when hundreds of students expecting to graduate with associate degrees were held back because they couldn't meet even high school standards.

CUNY had had no permanent chancellor for nearly two years. The top jobs were filled by temporary appointees. The presidencies of eight of the 17 ungraded campuses were open for all or part of that time. Long-range plans stopped. Budget allocations rose at a rate just over inflation. The university was vulnerable to attack, and attack it Guilderland did.

"Central CUNY's historic mission—a commitment to provide broad access but its students' high dropout rates; low graduation rate raise the question: 'Access to what?'" reported Schmidt to Giuliani asked him to investigate the situation. The system was adrift, he says, and in a spiral of decline. Remedial education, Schmidt said, "has been a contributing factor to this failure...and a traction from the main business of university. CUNY was not conceived; it was a second-chance high school."

In their response, "An Institution of Great Merit," a group of faculty, students and other CUNY supporters argued that real problems included a 40 percent cut in state funding and a 90 percent decline in city funding between 1980 and 1997, an increase in the proportion of students taught by part-time instructors from 40 percent to 60 percent.

As CUNY's critics went to work, mediation quickly came into their sights. Leading the charge was Herr Badillo, a former congressman and ex-"future candidate for mayor, and a colleague of Giuliani—and a CUNY graduate..." said the system had been squandering resources on weak students who n graduated. "The fact is that it remade nothing other than high school won Badillo said. "That's what it is." He higher admission standards also went...
“CUNY cannot be a second-chance high school,” says Vice Chancellor Louise Mirrer, who is implementing the university’s new admissions policies.

Sohmer likens detractors of remediation to a business manager at City College who, in the 1960s, had resisted adding services for students attending night school at an hour when most administrative offices were closed. “His argument was, ‘When I went through the evening session, nobody helped me,’” said Sohmer. “That’s sort of Herman’s approach, and the guys who believe that anybody can do anything they want if they really wanted to, and instantly you have no obligation to these people. They were the group that moved into being in charge, and their constituents went right along with it.”

Soon the Quinnipiac Polling Institute was reporting that 72 percent of New Yorkers supported raising admissions standards at CUNY’s senior colleges. In another survey by the Business Council of New York State, 85 percent of respondents said higher standards would produce better-prepared employees.

Even inside CUNY, there was animosity directed toward remediation. Lois Cronholm, former provost and interim president of Baruch College, said remedial courses had a devastating effect on an institution, and claimed to have eliminated them from her school in 1998. The president of Queens College was more crude, reportedly demeaning remedial students in a meeting with members of the city’s bar association. “(Garbage) in, (garbage) out,” President Allen Lee Sohmer was quoted as saying, according to an expurgated record of the comments. “If you take in (garbage) and turn out (garbage) that is slightly more literate, you’re still left with (garbage).” Sohmer says his remarks were taken out of context, but his lawyer, who was present at the interview, admits he “used a somewhat ‘salty’ term as a synonym for ‘academically unprepared.’

Nor were all the faculty enamored of remediation. The English department at City College, for example, originally wouldn’t teach remedial writing, reasoning that they were literature specialists. (They eventually helped create a writing program.) “The easiest person to teach is a well-qualified doctoral student in your field,” said Sohmer. “That’s not even a hard job. It’s interesting, it’s valuable, it’s exciting, but it’s not hard.”

Giuliani made Balilho chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees, then persuaded the board to appoint the like-minded Matthew Goldstein, the former president of Baruch College, to be chancellor. Goldstein is the first CUNY graduate to hold that post. “I do not believe our senior colleges should be in the remediation business,” Goldstein said. “I think the community colleges are most appropriate for showing up students’ deficiencies and giving them the ability to move on to four-year institutions.”

The battle peaked with a proposal by the besieged Board of Trustees to bar from CUNY’s four-year colleges all entering students who failed any one of three skills tests in reading, writing and math. That would have shut out 38 percent of white graduates, 67 percent of African Americans, and about 70 percent of Hispanics and Asians, studies showed; they would have been funnelled into the community colleges, whose students are far less likely to ultimately receive four-year degrees than students who go straight to four-year schools.

Eva Farley, a trustee who voted against this plan, said it would have forced people to “beg and cringe and crawl” to get a higher education. Her colleague, Arnold Gardner, said he would have preferred a discussion about “how to bring people into higher education, rather than how to keep them out.”

But Louise Mirrer, the vice chancellor who was brought in to implement the changes, said: “If all you focus on is bringing people in, you will find, as we have, that some students will not succeed. I don’t think that’s a very effective way of providing access. You have to have the confidence that you bring people in in a way that they have a chance to be successful.”

In the end, trustees narrowly approved a slightly less restrictive measure, with Giuliani in the background threatening to cut off tens of millions of city dollars if they failed to do so (though a judge has since ruled that the mayor’s ultimatum was a violation of state law). CUNY, they decided, would admit students to the four-year campuses based on their high school grades and standardized test scores, but then bar them from enrolling if placement tests show they still need remedial work.

Like most compromises, the new policy is complicated. Every applicant to CUNY’s senior colleges will have to take a national standardized test such as the SAT or ACT to be considered for admission. Those who fail to meet a certain cutoff on those tests—for instance, SAT math and verbal scores of 480 (the national average is 511 and 505, respectively)—will be given the CUNY reading, writing and math exams. Students who fail any one of those will be required to take a one-semester transition course called Prelude to Success at a CUNY community college, but can simultaneously attend a senior college, where they would take a mix of for-credit and remedial courses taught by community college faculty.

After a semester, those who then can pass new special entry tests will be allowed to transfer to the four-year school officially. Under special exemptions to these new rules, about 2,000 students per year would be accepted, including about 1,700 whose poverty and educational backgrounds qualify them for the existing SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) program, plus another 400 who are non-native English speakers.

The state Board of Regents approved the trustees’ policy, but only through the year 2002, when they promised to review it; all four of the African American and Hispanic regents voted against the plan, a symbol of the racial divide between its supporters and opponents. And, in another compromise, the starting date at City, Lehman, York and Medgar Evers colleges, whose overwhelmingly minority populations would be most affected, was delayed until September of 2001. The changes took effect in January at Queens, Brooklyn, Baruch and Hunter colleges, and will be implemented at the College of Staten Island, the New York City Technical Institute and John Jay College next September.

The impact still is hard to gauge. So far, 248 students who had already been admitted to those four colleges for the spring semester got letters saying they would not, in fact, be allowed to attend. They were invited to enroll in free “immersion” classes in English, writing and math on CUNY campuses this semester, then take placement tests to determine whether they were ready for college-level work. They also were given the option of joining the Prelude to Success program at a CUNY community college.

Initially, Sohmer said there were reports that half of all students who applied to senior colleges would be excluded under the new rules. Now that the dust has settled, CUNY says that about 1,400 of the 14,600 freshmen who typically enter the four-year colleges each year are likely to be kept out.

The independent consultants are even more optimistic. They estimate that about 1,750 applicants to the four-year schools will be found to need remediation. Of those, 750 will require only a summer review course to be ready by the fall, 500 more will be eligible for Prelude to Success, and another 280 will be candidates for a year-round immersion program to bring them up to speed. That means about 230 students who once would have been accepted into a bachelor’s degree program will be detoured to a community college.

And, in spite of earlier predictions that the community colleges could not absorb an influx of such students, CUNY says there is room for as many as 5,000 in the community colleges, far more than are expected to attend.

Critics, on the other hand, predict that countless others will be discouraged from continuing their education.
even trying to get into CUNY. They also allege that SAT scores are skewed by income level, meaning disadvantaged students will be unfairly singled out. And they are dubious of promises that the tougher standards will force improvement in the city's public schools, the weakest link in this chain. “Almost no one expects the city’s public high schools to meet this challenge,” the independent consultants said.

“It’s a big challenge, but I think most of them say very strongly that their students should be prepared for college or to work right out of high school,” Mirrér said in her office, minutes after meeting with a group of public school superintendents. “We see ourselves in some respects as driving the school system, but in other respects we’re driven by them. CUNY cannot be a second-choice high school.”

In fact, according to Mirrér, CUNY’s reputation as an academic institution is bound to improve as the public sees it cracking down. “As the image of the university improves, the range of students we attract will expand,” Mirrér said. “For some students, we have not been the school of first choice. We’re hoping we will become that.” And, because they won’t be bogged down in remedial courses, she added, students will graduate more quickly. “We do want them to graduate, and we want them to graduate quickly,” she said. “That’s why we’re here. That’s why they’re here.”

(That CUNY is better than people seem to think is evident in a small exhibit in the lobby of the main administration building, which displays not only photographs of prominent alumni, but also books by faculty authors including Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Beatrice Frye, Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, whose book Gotham won last year’s Pulitzer Prize for History; Eleanor Roosevelt biography; and Kenneth Jackson, editor of The Encyclopedia of New York City. “We’ve been sort of a jewel in a dusty showcase, and nobody cares,” Sohmer sighed.)

As for the political realities, Mirrér said, “We’re a public institution. We have to be responsive to our public. The legislature, the mayor, the voters, they all have a right to know how our money is being spent. This is not a matter of curricular control. This is a matter of financial accountability.” Public officials and business leaders, among others, have a right to be concerned about workforce development and economic ramifications of university policies, she said.

And they are concerned, increasingly, all over the United States. The California State University system wants to reduce the need for remediation to no more than ten percent of regularly admitted freshmen by the fall of 2007. In Massachusetts, remedial instruction has been limited to five percent of freshmen at public four-year universities. Increasingly, underprepared students are being steered to community colleges. Mirrér has fielded inquiries about the CUNY plan from schools in Texas, California, Massachusetts and Georgia. “Everybody’s interested in us,” she said.

But there is also a counter-movement suggesting that remediation may be the wrong target. A Ford Foundation study, prepared by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, concluded that remedial courses are “a core function of higher education” and a good investment for society at a modest cost. National estimates have placed the cost of remedial work at about $1 billion a year out of a higher education budget of $115 billion. (By comparison, CUNY spent five percent of its annual budget on remediation.) Eighty-one percent of the nation’s public four-year colleges offer remedial courses to enrolled students, and no evidence of a significant increase in the demand for remedial education, and U.S. universities have the world’s second-highest graduation rate. In many states, the perceived need for remedial education at the university and college level has been used to bash public primary and secondary education. The culprits interests who favor such alternatives as charter schools and government vouchers for private school tuition, said David Berman, dean of the CUNY School of Education at the University of Virginia, who has studied the trend.

“I see the remediation issue at the higher ed level as kind of the extension of some of this critical effort at K-12,” Bremen said. “There are some very powerful forces out there that are doing everything they can to undermine support for public schools to gain support for everything from charter schools to profit-making schools, you name it. To some degree, those same forces now are trying to operate on higher education, and they’re using remedial education as the wedge. You can certainly see that in the CUNY situation.”

The open secret is that remediation continues under other names when the spotlight shifts, and this is also true at CUNY. Even after its tough-talking provost said she had eliminated remedial courses, Baruch College continued to provide about 85,000 hours annually of remediation; about 20 percent of its students were admitted even after failing at least one of three entrance exams. Sohmer, whose daughter was a teaching assistant while a graduate student at Harvard, said, “Most kids there needed remedial writing. And if it’s true at Harvard, I’m sure it’s going to be true at CUNY. So we’ll call it something else, but we’ll still be doing some kind of remediation. We’ll have to.”

He’s right. CUNY has asked for $9 million to double “academic support” offered to its students: writing labs, tutoring, workshops and other services. “I would be very surprised to find a student who couldn’t benefit from academic support,” said Vice Chancellor Mirrér.

CUNY also hopes to expand several other such initiative programs. It has asked for more than quadruple, to $5 million, the annual allocation College Now, which provi early morning, for-credit college preparation courses to high school students. Funding for language immersion programs would increase from $4 milk year to $5 million a year, year-round and summer programs also would."