Class Exercise
for
EDHI 9050

Decentralizing Postsecondary Governance

This exercise asks you to consider the dilemmas of governance in state-supported colleges and universities. Specifically, this exercise deals with the relations between a state and its major public higher-education institutions in a state that has been operating under a strong central governing board. The class will be divided into two roughly equal teams.

One team will argue on behalf of the state's two flagship research universities that they should have authority to set tuition, initiate and close programs, determine admissions policies, allocate student aid, make purchasing and investment decisions, manage their physical plants and benefits systems, and control employee contracts without direct oversight from the consolidated board. After all, less than 20 percent of the flagship universities' revenues currently are provided by the state. This group argues that continuing these state subsidies is necessary, but should not be a rationale for full governing control of these institutions. In return for the ongoing state support, the institutions will report regularly to state officials on their strategic directions and performance.

The other team will take on the role of the state governor, some state legislators allied with her, and the leaders of the state's consolidated governing board. This group opposes efforts to decentralize authority over tuition and other factors.

These two teams will each prepare a 5-10 minute presentation to the class arguing their case. Then, they will question each other's cases, with other class members representing critical stakeholders (media, students, families, etc.) and asking tough questions when appropriate.

We will end the exercise with a discussion of what is most important in effective governance. For the exercise to work, teams need to get detailed in their role-playing. Go online to study developments in Virginia, Colorado, and other states undertaking such reforms, and be prepared to answer counter-arguments "in character."