

October 16, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents  
FROM: William A. Sederburg  
SUBJECT: The Current Configuration of the Utah System of Higher Education

Issue

To clarify the current philosophy and approach of the Board of Regents in overseeing the institutional configuration of the USHE.

Background

In the August 28, 2009 Board of Regents meeting, the "Configuration of the Utah System of Higher Education" statement was shared for feedback and reaction by the Regents, Presidents, and a broader audience with the commitment that a final copy would be shared for Board action in the October 16, 2009 meeting. The attached statement has been vetted by the Regents, the Commissioner, the Presidents and a broader audience, including institutional Boards of Trustees, political and business leaders. The result was a concurrence on the accuracy of this document summarizing the current configuration of the USHE.

There are two primary purposes of this statement: 1) to reflect a consensus about the overall configuration or architecture of the USHE, and 2) to fill a gap in the strategic thinking and planning of the State Board of Regents (SBR)—to clarify the direction and coordination of institutions within the USHE in fulfillment of the statutory obligation of the SBR, which is to "afford the people of the State of Utah a more efficient and more economical system of high quality public higher education through centralized direction and master planning providing for avoidance of unnecessary duplication within the system, for the systematic and orderly development of facilities and quality programs, for coordination and consolidation, and for systematic development of the role or roles of each institution within the system of higher education consistent with the historical heritage and tradition of each institution" (Higher Education Act of 1969, p. 2-3).

The timing of this statement is critical for three specific reasons. First, in its July 2009 meeting, the SBR voted to merge the College of Eastern Utah (CEU) with Utah State University (USU) in a strategic move to better meet the educational needs and opportunities of eastern Utah and the USHE. This statement will provide the necessary clarity and platform for the Commissioner and the SBR to encourage the Legislature

to pass the bill that will solidify the CEU/USU merger. Second, this statement reaffirms the SBR's commitment to the community college function and of its support of the Utah Community College Task Force to enhance the community college function within the USHE. And, third, this statement will help guide the SBR in its role to support institutions within the USHE to fulfill their missions and meet the educational needs and opportunities of their service regions.

This statement was reviewed by the Council of Presidents (COP) and their feedback was considered and captured in this statement in preparation for the Regents' Strategic Planning, Programs, and Finance and Facilities Committees to review it as part of this agenda for SBR action.

#### Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends that the Board approve the Current Configuration of the USHE statement to clarify the current direction and coordination of institutions within the USHE in fulfilling the Board's statutory obligation as well as to support the USHE institutions in fulfilling their institutional missions. (NOTE: This statement will be updated pursuant to the Utah Community College Task Force process and recommendations.)

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William A. Sederburg  
Commissioner of Higher Education

WAS/JC/CM  
Attachment

# CURRENT CONFIGURATION OF THE UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION (10/6/09 DRAFT)

## PURPOSE OF STATEMENT ON CONFIGURATION OF USHE

This statement reflects current Regent policy and thinking on institutional missions and the roles the different types of institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) play in a changing and global environment. It is intended to communicate as clearly as possible the importance of different institutional roles and how the USHE as a network of institutions will meet the higher education needs of the State of Utah. This statement does not directly address the continued commitment of the USHE and its institutions to provide high quality educational programs; rather, it addresses the architecture upon which these educational programs sit as part of a network of different institutions.

## TWO KEY PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING CONFIGURATION OF THE USHE

The first principle and primary purpose of defining institutional missions within a system context is to clarify how the ***strategic goals of the higher education*** can be met. The three current strategic goals of higher education in Utah, as defined by the Regents, are: (1) to increase the higher education participation rates for all Utahns; (2) to increase the completion rate of students enrolled in their chosen post-secondary education programs; and (3) to substantially enhance and sustain Utah's colleges and universities as engines of economic development. These goals can only be achieved if the education provided is of high quality—otherwise, participation and completion will be meaningless and higher education will not add to the competitiveness of Utah's economy. The essential function and importance of education is undisputed in teaching people critical thinking skills and in sustaining a strong economy, which sustains communities and enhances quality of life.

The second driving principle behind the current USHE configuration is to ***array its institutions and their resources in cost-effective ways*** so that the limited public funds of the state are maximized. Ideally, every Utah citizen would have convenient access to a full range of academic and vocational programs. But no state or nation can provide that without regard to the cost. Hence, every state limits the scope of institutional programs, which to varying degrees places a burden of travel on students, to maximize the quality of programs offered with limited state resources. Thus, the most cost-effective way to achieve the Regents' three strategic goals is to ***define and preserve a diversity of institutional missions and roles***.

## COMPONENTS OF THE USHE

The reason for having a statewide governing board such as the Utah State Board of Regents is to configure an array of institutional resources in ways that might not occur without state-level design and monitoring. Prudent configuration of a system should yield a well-functioning network of institutions that provide access and smooth articulation for students, result in a quality and array of educational opportunities within the system that is

greater than the efforts of individual institutions acting separately, and that sustains as well as accelerates the state's economy within their missions. Additionally, a statewide governing board can assist in defining a mission-based funding model to help institutions fulfill their mission.

**Community Colleges.** Community colleges form a critical base of any state higher education system by providing open and low-cost access to all those who aspire to postsecondary training, whether for purposes of transfer to a four-year institution, terminal associate or certificate programs, or short-term training. Community colleges fill a wide range of community needs and play a vital role in local and state economic development.

The functionality of community colleges can be fulfilled or viewed as an "institution" or as a "concept." The USHE has seen an erosion of "pure" community colleges as separate institutions as this important base function has been incorporated into "hybrid" institutions known as "regional universities" which function both as a university and a community college. Salt Lake Community College is Utah's only remaining urban community college. Snow College and the College of Eastern Utah, as well as the satellite campuses of Utah State University, represent community colleges that provide critical access and a range of programs to rural Utah.

An architectural question to be resolved is the degree to which these institutions that are or have the responsibility to fulfill the community college role and be joined in a more formal state-wide network to share best practices and curricular materials. A Community College Task Force has been established to address this issue as well as to recommend ways Utah can strengthen and bolster the community college role and function within the USHE. This section will be adjusted according to the outcomes of the task force process.

**Regional Universities.** Embedded within the state's current regional universities—particularly Weber State University and Utah Valley University—and regional state colleges—Dixie State College—is a strong community college function. Each of these institutions continues to grant associate's degrees and provide career and technical training (CTE). WSU has a long history of such commitment and serves as a model of the hybrid institution. While this model is fairly unique to Utah, it is an effective and efficient one that provides a full range of educational opportunities as well as a single administrative structure under "one roof."

Some may believe that Utah would be better served by separating the community college function from the regional universities into an independent institution; however, the reality of such a move is cost prohibitive in the foreseeable future. Issues of affordability (access) and institutional focus (academic quality) can be resolved in a variety of ways to best meet the educational needs of students and the state. WSU has shown that this model can work.

It is critical that UVU, with its recent transition to university status, maintain a similar commitment to the hybrid model so that Utah's concentration of population along the Wasatch Front can continue to have access to the full range of community college programs and opportunities. Similarly, it is essential that DSC continue to fulfill and build

its community college function as it continues to build its role as a comprehensive regional college.

In addition to this important community college role, regional universities provide access to high demand baccalaureate programs and selected master's degrees. These regional universities are teaching universities that are fully committed to community engagement in student learning and in economic development.

Southern Utah University, while a regional university, is touted as the state's designate public liberal arts and science university. It plays less of a community college role as its focus is geared toward providing a comprehensive liberal arts educational experience. SUU is principally an undergraduate, residential institution whose outreach and selected master's programs serve important regional functions, but also draw upon a student population from throughout the state and beyond. Most states have an institution(s) like SUU that fill the role of a comprehensive liberal arts university, and which provide an important component of a diverse system of higher education.

Both SUU and DSC service the southern region of the state, which has experienced significant growth in recent years. The institutional missions of SUU and DSC are non-competing and provide southern Utah with a wide array of educational opportunities and access points. However, with the current and projected population growth of Washington County and its impact on DSC, two possible options have been discussed by Regents and citizens about how DSC can and should best meet the educational needs and opportunities of its service region. One is to align DSC with another USHE institution (e.g., the University of Utah) and the other is to enable DSC to eventually become more like WSU or UVU in its size, function, and programmatic offerings as a regional university. It is important to define clearly what benchmarks DSC needs to achieve in pursuing either of these options as well as to ensure a non-competing relationship with SUU.

***Land-Grant University.*** As with all land-grant institutions, Utah State University serves as a research university with an emphasis in applied fields such as agriculture, engineering and business, with an extensive outreach system of extension operations. It has also developed an important role in delivering a range of educational programs to rural areas of the state not served by other institutions—its campuses in Roosevelt and Vernal exemplify this role. The proposed regional college affiliation with the College of Eastern Utah takes this role one step further by incorporating a full range of community college programs into USU's mature satellite campus system.

***Flagship University.*** The University of Utah serves as Utah's flagship public research university offering a broad range of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs including law, medicine, health care professions (such as Pharmacy and Physical Therapy) and a full-service health care system. It has a special mission to emphasize advanced graduate work and research and in fulfilling this role creates ideas and technologies that stimulate Utah's economy and broader cultural diversity.

## THE FUTURE OF THE USHE

***Cooperation with Public Education and the Applied Technology Colleges.*** The Regents reaffirm the importance of working cooperatively with public education and the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT) in providing ease of transfer through well-designed career pathways so that students can proceed with their educational aspirations free of artificial barriers. The Regents affirm their high priority to work cooperatively with public education through the K-16 Alliance in facilitating sound college preparation for all students in order to increase college participation and completion. The Regents also affirm their commitment to work cooperatively with UCAT to sustain a clear relationship between credit and non-credit programs and training opportunities in response to business needs and student demand.

***Changing Technologies in Delivering Education.*** The Regents recognize that continuing improvements in instructional technologies have important implications for access, cost and changing roles for all USHE institutions. As these technologies continue to unfold, they will undoubtedly influence roles discussed in this statement, and the Regents are prepared to respond accordingly. Programs and courses delivered through instructional technologies should continue to be assessed in terms of the institution's capacity to offer such programs and courses, their demonstrated capabilities to deliver quality education through distance education, and duplication of such efforts within the USHE (since state subsidies are involved).