AN EXCERPT FROM:
REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE
ON THE MASTER PLAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

California Legislature

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Multicampus Systems

A major but largely unrecognized trend of the last decade has been the concentration of large numbers of campuses under central administrative offices. In California, under the Master Plan, the two statewide four-year systems have grown enormously.

The multicampus systems have contributed to the orderly growth of public higher education--particularly in the areas of planning, resource allocation and achieving economies of scale. However, they have also added considerable bureaucratic apparatus to higher education. Despite significant efforts to decentralize, there is still a preponderance of administrative centralization.

There is currently no evidence available on the optimum size of multicampus systems. Unfortunately, neither statewide segment has addressed this subject in an analytical way. The Joint Committee recognizes this as an extremely complex problem with many variables. Policy-makers in higher education and state government must learn about the impact of size in order to make rational decisions about such issues as governance, administration and structure. We can no longer afford an uncritical attitude towards growth, expansion and size of campuses and systems. We urge the appropriate agencies to make such an analysis.

Decentralization of Governance

We believe the University of California, the California State University and Colleges and the large multicampus community college districts should undertake controlled experiments in decentralization of governance.

One approach, suggested in our Draft Report, would be the creation of local boards with final authority over such matters as campus architecture (design only), buildings and grounds and personnel. The local board’s concurrence might also be required in the appointment of a campus chief executive. In addition, the local board could serve as a liaison between campus and community and as guardian of the unique character of each campus. It would be important that
local boards’ authority be delegated by the governing boards and not taken from administrative powers now held by campus chief executives.

We are dismayed by the reaction of the segments to this suggestion. They have indicated an unwillingness to even experiment with decentralization. We are reluctant at this time to mandate decentralization. However, this may be the only alternative in the future.

The University of California expressed some degree of willingness to experiment with local advisory boards. Similar boards already exist at the California State University and Colleges. However, boards which are only advisory cannot effectively serve as more than public relations and fund-raising bodies. Such boards have sometimes been effective in accomplishing limited objectives, but they have not served to place important decisions closer to the persons affected by them.

There are many ways local boards could be selected. However, we believe they should combine representation from the campus, the local community, and the state at large (for campuses which serve the entire state).

In summary, local boards could free the energies of segmental boards from parochial matters and enable them to focus more intensively on issues of systemwide policy. Boards with enormous responsibilities too frequently bog down with matters better decided locally.