



RESEARCH PRACTICE

Bridging cutting-edge higher education governance research
with effective board practice

SCHOLAR: PAUL G. RUBIN, PH.D.

BEYOND STRUCTURE:

Aligning State Higher Education Policy with Board Function and Oversight



RESEARCH TO PRACTICE:

With growing political pressure from both sides of the aisle and increased attention to accountability, a clearer understanding of how a state's governing board operates will allow for states to spend less time chasing solutions that may not ultimately be possible given limitations to their agency's capabilities as an organization. On the other hand, spending more time on the front-end considering how/why some states may be able to introduce innovative solutions and interventions and/or where their board maintains power, may allow for better allocation and use of resources to focus on solutions that are attainable.

✓ BOARD INSIGHTS:



Although state governing boards are often distinguished by structure alone, the actual roles of these organizations vary significantly. Even when considering a basic function, such as supporting postsecondary degree attainment, all state governing boards do not operate the same. Accordingly, when addressing key challenges in the sector, board members and other stakeholders should consider how boards with similar function areas, not just structure, are developing and implementing policies and solutions.

✓ BOARD ACTION:



1

Pinpoint Oversight

Better acquaint all board members, agency leadership, and other state officials with an understanding of where the board maintains oversight and, equally important, where they do not.

2

Recognize Difference

Ensure that state officials and other stakeholders recognize that every state's higher education agency and governing board maintains different functions and oversight, regardless of whether they are structurally similar.

3

Consider Policies

When considering potential policies and interventions for long-standing issues in the higher education sector, state governing boards should consider what states with similarly functioning governing boards are doing and not just traditional peer and neighboring states.

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▼ BOARD QUESTIONS:

- Who are our peer states when considering adoptable higher education policy solutions?
- What are the current strengths and weaknesses to our state's governing body regarding areas of oversight around higher education?
- Are there areas that the state's governing body do not maintain oversight but a different statewide agency does?



▼ BOARD RESOURCES:

- A key resource is an ongoing understanding of how innovative states (e.g., Tennessee) operate differently.



▼ PAPER SUMMARY:



State higher education boards are often discussed based on their structural centralization, autonomy, and historical oversight roles. However, much of this conversation overlooks the truly distinct nature of these boards and may contribute to disparate outcomes to similar policies and programs between states. Accordingly, state board members would benefit from better orienting themselves with the unique roles and responsibilities of their agency to support the higher education stakeholders within their state.

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▼ STAKEHOLDERS:

- External stakeholders (legislators, donors, etc.)
- State-level Boards



▼ KEY WORDS:

- Board composition and diversity
- Stakeholder engagement
- Governance structures and processes



PAUL G. RUBIN, PH.D.

Assistant Professor,
University of Utah

Paul Rubin is an assistant professor in the University of Utah's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy. His research examines the intersections of higher education governance and policy. Dr. Rubin's work considers how state and institutional contexts influence policy approaches and outcomes supporting postsecondary degree attainment for historically underserved populations.



paul.rubin@utah.edu