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## A case study of governance of higher education in Belize: Implications for finance and curricula in higher education

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A Case Study of Governance of Higher Education in Belize: Implications for Finance  
and Curricula in Higher Education

by

Olda R. Hoare

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Adult, Career and Higher Education  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

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dependency

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## Dedication

I am blessed to have a loving, caring, and supporting family without whom I would never have successfully completed this dissertation. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Ismael, who offered encouragement and support especially on those dark days when I felt like there was no reason to continue; my children, Alyssa, Ismael, and Kieran who provided the light on those days and gave me the reason to continue; my parents, Valdemar and Froila Zetina who instilled in me the ambition to broaden my mind to endless limits; my eight brothers and sisters who have always embraced my academic pursuits with unwavering love and support. I dedicate this work to my friends in Tampa, Michael Brennan and Giovanna Brennan, Clare Guild and Jason Guild, and Angela Rojas who shared their homes, time, and friendship with us. I also dedicate this dissertation to the faculty at Sacred Heart Junior College with the hope that they will become inspired to pursue doctoral studies.

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Olda R. Hoare

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to understand governance of higher education in the developing country of Belize by examining how governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize. The study also examined the role of the market in higher education and its effects on curricular and financial decision-making in higher education. Data were collected from higher education administrators and Ministry of Education officials through semi-structured interviews, and from review of institutional and public documents related to higher education.

A major finding of this study is that although the Ministry of Education through the Tertiary and Post Secondary Services Unit is responsible for the supervision and development of the higher education system, there is a lack of expertise in this “Unit”. The lack of expertise means that there is no one who can advise the Ministry of Education in respect to the direction or development of higher education.

The study also revealed that there is a lack of an adequate funding formula to support the University of Belize and the junior colleges. While the junior colleges receive only salary grants, UB receives a yearly subvention for capital and recurring

expenditures. The lack of a funding formula to include capital projects stifles the infrastructural development of the institution and affects the quality of education offered.

The study also revealed that there is a lack of a national development plan to assist institutions in identifying academic programs that meet national development needs. As a result, academic programs are often identified based on market needs, perceived community needs, and social and religious needs depending on the religious affiliation of the institution.

Another finding of the study is the role of the market in higher education in Belize. The market plays or should play a role in guiding higher education in Belize, but there is a need for policies and measures to be instituted to lessen the effects of the market. Also, while competition among institutions is necessary because of the small size of the higher education system, collaboration is even more crucial.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Challenges Facing Higher Education*

Countries around the world have and continue to face major challenges from globalization, the information and communication revolutions, and the increasing importance of knowledge to the economic growth of a country (Altbach, 2001; Holm-Nielson, 2001; Salmi, 2002). Higher education systems continue to grapple with the pressures from the rapid rise and impact of technology, the ever-increasing number of traditional and diverse students accessing higher education, the demands for more accountability from governments, and the increasing competition from for-profit institutions. These pressures are occurring in a context in which national governments globally are less able and willing to provide adequate funding to satisfy such growing demands (Altbach & Davis, 1999; Austin & Chapman, 2002; Salmi & Hauptman, 2006) so that increasingly, students are required to share in the cost of higher education.

Nowhere, however, are the pressures on higher education more pronounced and formidable than in the developing world, where higher education is plagued by massive increases in enrollments, controversy over its status as a public or private good, extremely inadequate funding, corruption, outdated curricula, and inadequate and rigid governance structures (Holm-Nielson, 2001; Task Force on Higher Education and Society [TFHES], 2000). Whereas many developed countries have made changes in their higher education systems to deal with the global challenges, those in the developing world continue to lag behind (Tilak, 2003) so that “in a world divided into centers and

peripheries, the centers grow stronger and more dominant and the peripheries become increasingly marginalized”(Altbach, 2004, p. 1). In many developing countries, rigid governance models and management practices are stifling higher education from effecting necessary and innovative changes (Bloom, 2003; Holm-Nielson, 2001; TFHES, 2000; van Vught, 1993). There is a need for governments to examine their relationship with higher education in order to empower higher education to effectively deal with these challenges (Bloom, 2003; TFHES, 2000). The aim of this study, therefore, was to address this concern by examining governance in the developing country of Belize, where higher education, in like other developing countries, continues to be challenged by inadequate funding, inadequate resources, outdated and institutionalized curricula, among other concerns.

### *Higher Education Inequality*

Altbach (2004) notes that higher education systems around the world are affected and respond differently to global trends. Whereas many higher education systems in the developed world have made significant progress in transforming and reinventing themselves, this transformation in the developing world is slow, uneven, and often even non-existent. The world of globalized higher education is characterized by an obvious inequality, where powerful universities and systems in industrialized nations continue to dominate the production and distribution of knowledge while other smaller and less developed systems in developing countries face new barriers and old challenges (Altbach, 2004). The old challenges include issues such as equity, quality, access to higher education, massification, financing, and governance which have traditionally plagued higher education systems (Holm-Nielson, 2001). Most developed countries have been

able to successfully deal with these challenges, albeit with differing successes (World Bank, 2002). The new challenges include those arising from globalization, rapid technological advancements, and the increasing importance of knowledge as a growth factor. For example, developed countries spend far more on research and development (R&D) than developing countries. In fact, many developing countries have yet to make the connection between knowledge production and economic growth; consequently, they have made no progress in building up their capacity to conduct R&D Activities (Bloom, 2003; Holm-Nielson, 2001). Many developing countries lack the capacity to conduct research and are dependent on others for new knowledge (Altbach, 2004). But research in universities plays a crucial role in setting the foundation to develop programs, policies, and education for human resources (Jacques, 1996). The major concern is whether developing countries can transform their higher education systems to cope with and successfully overcome both old and new challenges (Altbach, 2001; Holm-Nielson, 2001).

### *The Higher Education Enrollment Explosion*

The United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] Institute for Statistics (2005) provides tertiary (higher education) enrollment figures for the years 1990-91 and 2001-02 for 203 countries which are divided into six regions (Global University Network for Innovation [GUNI]), 2006). The data show that all regions of the world have experienced some expansion in higher education. The extent of this expansion, however, varies by region, with the Arab region showing an overall average increase of 130% compared to Africa with a 79% increase and Latin America and the Caribbean with a 74% increase (Lopez-Segrera, Sanyal, & Tres, 2006). A recent

study of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean (Inter-Development Bank, 1999) found that there is a rapid increase of higher education enrollment while government funding has either remained stable or greatly diminished. Examining the Caribbean region further for the percentage of the 20-24 year age group in the population enrolled in tertiary education shows that, in 1990, the overall average enrollment was 6.1 percent with the highest being in Barbados (21%) and the lowest in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2.9 percent). Belize had a 6.4 percent enrollment (World Bank, 1993). In 1995, Barbados had a gross enrollment ratio of 29 percent compared to Haiti and Belize which both had one percent (TFHES, 2000). The net enrollment for Belize in 1995 was 2.5 percent. By 2002, this figure had increased to 5.8 percent (Caribbean Development Bank, 2005). Despite the disparity in enrollment figures for the different regions of the world, it is clear that enrollment in many countries has increased over the last decade. Most countries have sought to make their higher education systems more inclusive especially for the needy and underprivileged groups, recognizing that there are both public and private benefits of higher education.

#### *The Public vs. Private Good of Higher Education*

The question of the role of higher education in the development of a country or nation is more pertinent today than ever, and the question of who should pay for it remains controversial. Traditionally, in countries like the United States, higher education has been defined as a “public good” where the benefits accrue to society (Altbach & Davis, 1999; Tierney, 2004). In the United States, for example, policies such as the Morrill Land Grant Act, The GI Bill, and Title IV emphasized the public benefits of higher education (Tierney, 2004). Such benefits include greater productivity, national

development, democratic participation, less dependency on state support services, and higher potential to move towards a knowledge-based economy (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). Today, however, “the public good has been privatized” (Tierney, 2004, p.11) and the emphasis is on the individual benefits derived from a higher education. But higher education’s responsibility for the development of society is critical especially in developing countries (Jacques, 1996). In developing countries, however, where the state traditionally shouldered the burden of higher education, the tendency now is to consider higher education more as a private good. Increasingly, then, in both developed and developing countries, students are required to pay for services or share the cost.

#### *Market Forces and Higher Education*

Traditionally, government’s role in higher education was widely recognized as necessary based on the premise that higher education was important for the social, economic, and individual benefits accrued from it (Tilak, 2004). With the advent of globalization in the 1980s and 1990s, the role of the government in subsidizing higher education has been affected (Mok, 2005; Steir, 2003). The pressures to compete in a global market forced many countries to redefine their relationship with higher education by adopting a market philosophy which stressed the individual benefit of higher education, and the need for institutions to adopt market-like practices (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004 ) and become more competitive and enterprising (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). The introduction of this philosophy has forced higher education to become more efficient, decrease the dependency on public subsidy, seek alternative sources of revenue

through relationships with industry, and restructure for competitive advantage (Marginson and Consodine, 2000).

Market pressures both in their local and global aspects have influenced changes in higher education especially in developed countries and more recently in developing countries (Jonathan, 2006; Tilak, 2004). Howe and Cassell (2004) writing about higher education in the Eastern Caribbean note that "... education at all levels, but especially at the higher level must seek as a primary objective to the main vehicle of achieving and sustaining economic productivity in the new globalized environment"(p. 7). Currie (2003) suggests that "intellectual traditions are being forcibly displaced by market directives" (p. 499). Strong market orientation has forced higher education institutions to be more sensitive to market needs (Mok, 1999). Jonathan (2006) suggests that the introduction of market pressures in developing countries was simply to decrease public subsidies of higher education. She notes, however, that in societies with high poverty and obvious inequalities in higher learning opportunities, relegating the responsibility of higher education to the 'market', has resulted in further inequalities and loss of human talents and potential. Additionally, in competition among institutions, the market favors those institutions that are "better placed by talent, disposition, and the chances of circumstance, much of which is necessarily inherited" (Jonathan, 2006, p. 45).

In many developing countries, there is a rapid growth of private institutions. The reason often cited for this rapid expansion is that there is a lack of government resources for higher education (Tilak, 2003). Also, private higher education is hailed as an efficient system that can improve quality while expanding access (Tilak, 2003). While this expansion in the private sector allows for greater diversity for students and forces public

institutions to improve their quality, there is a caution that if such competition is not regulated, the consequences can be adverse (Steir, 2003).

### *Financing Higher Education*

Traditionally, the bulk of public higher education financing has come from the central governments while tuition fees are often minimal and any attempt to rectify this situation is often met with great resistance (TFHES, 2000). Faced with the rapid and dramatic expansion in higher education systems, and the pressing demands from other social needs such as poverty reduction, the rise in HIV/AIDS, and other health threats, governments are often rendered incapable of financing this growth (Lewis & Dunder, 2002; Steir, 2003; Ziderman, 1994). The massive increase in enrollment is attributed to the policies of the 1980s, encouraged by agencies such as the World Bank and other regional development banks which emphasized “basic” education and relegated higher education to a secondary position (Chapman & Austin, 2002; Tilak, 2003). The consequence of this policy today is that a substantial number of high school graduates are now accessing higher education even while higher education systems are grossly under prepared to deal with such influx (Bloom, 2003; TFHES, 2000). It is estimated that in the last 20 years, the number of students accessing higher education in developing countries has more than tripled (TFHES, 2000). Data on public expenditure on education as a percentage of the gross national product (GNP) for developing countries in Africa show that between the periods 1990-2002, 18 of 34 of the developing countries increased their funding for education while the other 16 decreased it (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2005). In Latin America and the Caribbean, out of 26 countries in the sample, 20 increased their share of public expenditure in education and only 6 decreased it

(UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005). The caveat, however, is that even though many of the countries increased their overall funding for education, the actual funding for higher education decreased as a percentage of total educational expenditure (Tilak, 2003). For example, in the African region, the majority of the countries in the sample (N= 24) had a decrease in their allocation for higher education as a percentage of total public educational expenditure (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2005). Nowhere is this reality more pronounced than in Latin America and the Caribbean where of the 23 countries sampled, 15 had suffered a reduction in their allocation for higher education as a percentage of total educational expenditure (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2005). Even with the increase of expenditure for higher education in many countries, financing higher education remains problematic since the increase is not proportionate to the significant increase in higher education enrollment (Lopez-Segrera, Sanyal, & Tres, 2006). And even with a sharp rise in enrollment in the last two decades, the disparity in higher education enrollment between developing and developed countries remains very large (Holm-Nielson, 2001; TFHES, 2000; Tilak, 2003) with the United States boasting an 81% enrollment rate as opposed to 9% for developing countries as a whole (Holm-Nielson, 2001).

Compounding the problem for national governments in developing countries, for example many in Latin America and the Caribbean, are the burdens of debt repayment, the changes in market prices for exports, and the restrictive policies of international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, which have forced developing countries to reduce public expenditures (Nettleford, 2000). The economic reform policies which most developing countries have had to adopt required a decrease of public

expenditures, including higher education (Tilak, 2003). This trend of diminishing state financial support has had major consequences for the quality of teaching and learning by increasing the impacts of unqualified teachers, poorly prepared high school graduates, inadequate and inappropriate infrastructure, poor library resources, and outdated curricula (Holm-Nielson, 2001).

Another major challenge to higher education in many developing countries is a lack of diversity in funding streams. As is mentioned elsewhere, public higher education in the developing world has relied almost totally on government subventions and only minimally on the private sector, student fees and tuitions, and international donors (TFHES, 2000). It must also be noted that it is only in the last decade or so that governments are instituting policies that require students share in the cost of their educations. In the 1970s, several governments in the Caribbean instituted policies that provided free tuition and loan assistance to their citizens to attend tertiary education (Miller, 2000). In the 1990s however, several governments rescinded this policy and instead introduced cost-sharing mechanisms which varied by institutions and academic programs (Miller, 2000).

In Belize, the government of the United Democratic Party introduced free tuition in 1993 for students at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. However, college students would only receive the free tuition in their second year of college. Today, that policy is still in effect. Since the free tuition policy, education has become a lot more expensive and enrollment as a percentage of the total number of college age students has remained almost constant. Empirical evidence to support or refute these claims does not exist at this time. Even in countries that have cost-sharing mechanisms in place, the fees

which students pay in relation to the true cost of education remains negligible. At the University of Belize [UB], only recently, the fee and tuition structures were adjusted to reflect a more realistic cost of higher education. However, strong protests from students and a commitment from the government to make up the deficit discouraged the University from implementing the new fees (<http://www.7newsbelize.com/archive>). In writing about higher education financing in the Caribbean, Lopez-Segrera (2006) notes:

citizens in the English speaking Caribbean must acknowledge the fact that governments of the region are severely constrained and cannot provide the levels of funding needed...the funding of higher education must be a responsibility shared among students and their families, the private sector, and all relevant stakeholders. (p. 270)

Teferra (2006) makes similar suggestions in his perspectives of African higher education:

Tertiary education institutions in most African countries are in a severe and worsening financial condition and governmental revenues will not be able to generate enough additional revenue to provide the quality and the level of participation that the countries of Africa demand and deserve. Revenue supplementation from some non-government/non-taxpayer source(s) is thus essential. Parents (via tuition fees) and students (mainly via loans) are sources that cannot be ignored. (p.162)

But governments must concede that higher education will never be in a position to completely subsidize itself while at the same time providing access to the increasing

numbers of students clamoring for it (Mohamedbhai, 2003) and contributing to national development.

### *Curricula in Higher Education*

There is no doubt that higher education is essential to promoting economic growth and human development. This dual mission of higher education is particularly important in today's globalized world where knowledge is linked to the global economy and life-long learning is necessary for human development (Salmi, 2002). But higher education in developing countries is woefully unsuited to meet this dual demand (Bloom, 2003; THFES, 2000). One major reason for higher education's deficiency is related to curricula. The failure of curricula to encompass the knowledge, skills, and perspectives critical for these global times is recognized as a crucial problem for higher education in the developing world (Bloom, 2003). Curricula often tend to highlight rote learning as opposed to creativity and curiosity (Bloom, 2003). Additionally, curricula often tend to emphasize factual knowledge and neglect the learning process (TFHES, 2000). There is a growing importance for the learning process to highlight the abilities to find, access, and apply knowledge to problem solving (Salmi, 2003; THFES, 2000; International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 1996) especially in developing countries where higher education can assist in solving national problems (Bloom, 2003).

In many developing countries, educators try to link academic programs to national development but are often unclear on what exactly is "national development" (Woolman, 2001). Increasingly, national development is being defined primarily in the context of economic development (Woolman, 2001), but the absence of a sustainable national policy for economic growth further compounds the problem for academic programs to

meet national development. Also, the controversy over the public and private good of education and the disagreement over the missions of institutions affect curriculum development in higher education. For example, in some developing countries more emphasis is placed on higher education's role to meet job markets needs than on human development. Curricula are often designed solely to meet the needs of the job market; therefore, there is a great emphasis on specialized education (TFHES, 2000). While specialization is necessary, especially in areas of science and technology, it often comes at a cost to general education which promotes the values of life-long learning, good citizenship, and sets the foundation for future specialization (TFHES, 2000). General education is important in developing countries because it is that part of the curriculum through which national values, morals, and culture can be transmitted. General education should not be an additive to the broader curriculum structure but must be conceptualized as co-existing with specialized knowledge; it is the method by which specialized knowledge may be applied to make sense of the world (Bell, 1966).

More recent curricula reform in some developing countries, for example, South Africa, promote national development but also focus on individual careers, life-long learning opportunities, and knowledge application (Austin, 2002). Other countries, however, continue to neglect curricular reform, or when there is reform, it is done in a top-down approach, often excluding those who are ultimately responsible for curriculum delivery (Bloom, 2003). A good example of this top down approach is the case of the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) in Belize. Decisions concerning the curriculum for this exam were made by high level policy makers in the government and communicated to institutions. Many educators question this exam's relevance to

Belize's needs and its inability to measure quality. They also criticize the focus on the exam rather than on preparing student for life-long learning, and the transferability of the credits to the University of Belize and other international colleges and universities (District Consultations conducted in preparation for higher education conference, 2006). Other related criticisms reflect the neglect of crucial programs in favor of this regional exam and the institutionalization of certain academic programs. Programs such as Business Administration and Tourism Management are becoming institutionalized regardless of their utility to local communities while programs that reflect Belize's linguistic diversity, its natural resources, rich history and art, and its place in regional integration are non-existent (Aird, 2006).

#### *The 'glonacal agency' Heuristic*

The answers to the challenges and responses to the pressures facing higher education systems depend largely on the global, regional, and national contexts within which each higher education system exists (Lee, 2004; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Marginson and Rhoades (2002) refer to the 'glonacal agency heuristic' which considers not only the global trends but also the regional, national and local structures which "lead to varying patterns of national and local adaptation and resistance" (p. 299). This heuristic also considers the role of international agencies that impact higher education policies such as the World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union. Thus, even while higher education systems in different countries and regions are impacted by similar forces, their responses to these challenges and the extent to which they are successful in coping may differ tremendously.

Lee (2004) examined how global trends influenced the development of higher education in Malaysia and the national and institutional responses to them. Even while the Malaysian higher education system was impacted by global trends such as the call for a reduction of the welfare state, it was undergoing significant transformation under the aegis of a strong interventionist state (Lee, 2004). This led Lee to conclude, “the Malaysian state goes against the global trend by expanding its role in higher education by being the provider and regulator as well as the protector of higher education” (Lee 2004, p. 45).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The critical question in examining governance is to determine whether the state control or state supervisory model is appropriate to developing countries depending on their context (van Vught, 1993). Some argue that the state supervisory model of governance along with market coordination is more suitable in times of crisis in higher education (van Vught, 1993; TFHES, 2000; Bloom, 2003) especially in developing countries. Others suggest that the state-supervisory model is not automatically relevant to developing countries faced with social exclusion and financial constraints (Hall, Symes and Luescher, 2002) but concede that strict governmental controls are disadvantageous to higher education in developing countries. They uphold the notion that a different and less direct state control is necessary in developing countries, but not one premised on quasi-market controls like those in some developed nations. Neave and Van vught (1994) suggest that “government regulation may be analyzed by asking what pattern of decision-making is appropriate in light of the specific characteristics of the context in which it will be used ”(p. 36).

Good governance, nonetheless, is an important and perhaps the key issue for achieving quality in higher education in developing countries (Steir, 2003; TFHES, 2000). Good governance is created when there is a balance between institutional autonomy and institutional accountability (Hall and Symes, 2005; van Vught, 1993). However, many countries continue to impose strict controls on their higher education systems severely limiting institutional autonomy. van Vught (1993) suggests that “the relationship between higher education institutions and system-wide authority structures clearly influences processes of change and innovation in higher education” (van Vught, 1993, p.21). Roberts (1999) also observes that governance structures in developing countries generally impact institutional autonomy in respect to academic program development, promotions, academic orientation, and mission.

Considering the increasing importance of higher education in the process of globalization and its vitality in the development of a country (Bloom, 2003), it is paramount that governments in developing countries examine their relationship with higher education. Many involved in higher education in the developing world believe that governance is the main problem responsible for the ineffectiveness, inefficiency and non-performance of higher education (Bloom, 2003). It is important therefore, to understand fully how governance affects key processes in higher education such as curriculum and finances.

### *Country Background*

The country of Belize lies on the Caribbean coast of Central American bordered on the north by Mexico and the west and south by Guatemala. Belize, a former British colony is the only English-speaking country in Central America. The population of

Belize is 309,760 with an almost equal percentage of males and females (Central Statistical Office [CSO], 2007). Forty five percent of the population is under the age of 18 (CSO, 2007). Twenty five percent of households in Belize are considered poor and nine and a half percent are considered indigent. Thirty three percent of individuals are considered poor and 13% considered indigent (Poverty Assessment Report- Belize, 2002). Poverty is mostly concentrated in the rural areas especially in the southernmost part of the country (Poverty Assessment Report- Belize, 2002). The main ethnic groups in Belize are the Mestizo, Creole, Garifuna, East Indian and Ketchi, Yucatec and Mopan Mayas. Other ethnic groups include German and Dutch Mennonites, Chinese, Arabs and Africans. English is the official language of Belize although English Creole and Spanish are widely spoken especially in everyday conversations.

The economy of Belize depends primarily on tourism and exports such as sugar, bananas, citrus, and seafood (U.S. Department of State, July 2007). Over the last five years, tourism has become the premier contributor to employment and economic activities (CDB, 2006). In 2005, the total contribution of the tourism industry was more than 10% of GDP. Because exports depend largely on preferential trading agreements primarily with the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries and are susceptible to fluctuating market prices, the economic performance of Belize is vulnerable. Belize's outstanding debt at the end of 2006 was 1.10 billion U.S. dollars, a figure that is equivalent to 100% GDP (U.S. Department of State, July 2007). The government has embarked on an economic adjustment program with the intention of (a) increasing revenues (b) decreasing public sector expenditures and (c) narrowing the fiscal deficit to 1 percent of GDP (U.S State Department, July 2007, p. 3). To increase

revenues, the government instituted a General Sales Tax of 9% on most goods and services. In 2006, the consumer price index (CPI) increased dramatically mainly because of the impact of the new taxes and increases in prices of petroleum products (CDB, 2006). In order to decrease public sector expenditures, capital project expenditures were largely curtailed. This decision in turn, has constrained the economic development of Belize since suitable roads, port facilities, and other infrastructure are necessary for economic development.

In 2005, oil was found in the western region of the country and the reserves estimated to be approximately 10 million barrels. In 2006, oil was being extracted at about 2,700 barrels per day. More than 80% of the 480,000 barrels by mid 2006 was exported to the US. By the end of 2006, six other oil companies had been issued license to explore for oil. But the discovery of oil is not without controversy and attention has to be paid to the effects of this industry on other industries (CDB, 2006).

In order to strengthen its potential for economic development, Belize has established close ties with Central America through the Central American Integration System (SICA) and continues to be an active member of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM]. In January 2006, the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) was formally operationalized. The CSME is a continuation of the regional economic integration which began in 1968 and the Caribbean Community and Common Market in 1974 (Government of Belize Press Office, 2005). The CSME has three main features. First, it is meant to (a) deepen economic integration by advancing beyond a common market towards a Single Market and Economy, (b) widen the membership and thereby expand the economic mass of CARICOM, and (c) progress in the insertion of the region

into the global trading and economic system by strengthening trading links with non-traditional partner (CARICOM Single Market and Economy, p. 1). The CSME initiative has a variety of components such as the establishment of a Caribbean Court of Justice, trade in goods, harmonization of standards, free movement of skilled persons, and regional accreditation of qualifications and standards for professionals. In respect to trade, the CSME is an important strategy to establish linkages with the global community since individual member states “represent an insignificant share of global trade, have small and fragmented markets, and have open economies often reliant on imports.” (CARICOM Single Market and Economy, 2005 p. 5). The CSME, it is expected, will enhance the region’s capacity to recruit skilled workers and achieve greater economies of scale in order to improve its competitiveness in the global market (CARICOM Single Market and Economy, 2005). Belize as a signatory to this initiative is expected to greatly benefit especially in areas of trade and education.

The country of Belize upholds a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster system. A Prime Minister and a cabinet make up the Executive Branch and a 29-member elected House of Representatives and a nine member appointed senate make up the Legislative Branch. Elections are held every five years and the party with the majority seats forms the new government. The Prime Minister appoints a cabinet from the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Cabinet formulates policies that are then executed by respective ministries of government. The Ministry of Education [MOE] for example, is responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies for all levels of education in the country. Education in Belize starts at the pre-school and extends to tertiary or higher education level.

### *Higher Education in Belize*

Higher education or Tertiary education in Belize is comprised of ten public junior colleges, one public university, one private university, UWI School of Continuing Studies, and two off-shore medical schools. The bulk of the students attend public institutions concentrated in the two year colleges because the private institutions cater to mostly foreign students, even though a small number of local students may still attend. In comparison to the net enrollment in the Caribbean region, Belize's net tertiary enrollment percentage of 5.8% is exceedingly low (Caribbean Development Bank [CDB], 2005). Although there have been some improvements in access, higher education in Belize is still largely restricted for the poor. In 2000, for example, only .4 percent of the poorest students compared to 13% of the richest accessed a higher education (CDB, 2005). Even while higher education is considered elitist because of the small percentage of students who access it (UNESCO, 2004), it has dramatically expanded to provide opportunities for students in areas that were previously not being served. In the 1950s and extending to the latter half of the 1980s, tertiary schools existed only in Belize City. Today, however, every district in Belize has at least one higher education institution that serves the urban and rural areas of that geographic region. The University of Belize [UB], the only public university, is situated in Belmopan, the capital of Belize. The net enrollment or proportion of the relevant age group enrolled in higher education increased from 2.5% in 1995 to 5.8% in 2002 (CDB, 2005).

Higher education in Belize is characterized by a 2+2 system with students pursuing their first two years of study at the junior colleges and transferring to UB or

other four year local, regional, or international universities to pursue the final two years. UB, however, does offer some 4-year programs, for example in Nursing, Teacher Education, Natural Resource Management, and a few other fields. The junior colleges offer associate degrees in major fields such as Science, Business, Computer Science, Tourism, and Teacher Education. Of the ten junior colleges, four maintain joint status as public and religious institutions and are referred to as “grant-aided” institutions. In these cases, the respective churches maintain control of the principles and set the mission of the institutions according to their doctrines. In some cases, the Church may exert influence on certain aspects of the curricula. For example, at the Catholic institutions, certain religious courses such as theology must be included in the General Education Curricula and other religious activities such as spiritual retreats and liturgies are strongly encouraged. In respect to appointment of administrators, the Church also plays a major role through its local representative on the Boards of Management of the institutions. Typically, the administrator of the institution must be a practicing Catholic. The other four junior colleges and UB are fully public institutions. At these institutions, there is a general sentiment that administrators are appointed by their respective management boards but not without the consent of the government. In fact, the President of UB is appointed by the Prime Minister.

In respect to curriculum, the Ministry of Education exerts some control. For example, more recently, the MOE has vigorously promoted the adoption of the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE) in order to standardize tertiary education in Belize and to gain regional and international accreditation. In fact, in February 2004, the Cabinet ratified a bill to adopt CAPE as the official exam and develop mechanisms to provide

remuneration for government employees who pass the exam (Chan, 2005). This new policy encourages two-year colleges to adopt CAPE curricula in order for their students to be able to compete for the official Belize Open Scholarship and for their graduates who work in the public service sector to receive remuneration accordingly. As of 2006, all the junior colleges have revised or aligned their associate degree programs with the CAPE Program.

The government of Belize provides financial subventions to all public junior colleges and the University of Belize. The University of Belize receives a yearly grant from the Government of Belize. Junior colleges receive salary grants totaling 70 percent of their salary bills each month. In addition, the government provides merit scholarships for high school graduates who obtain six or more Caribbean Examinations Council passes. The government also provides free tuition for all second-year students pursuing associate degrees.

#### *Rationale for the Study*

In order to develop a higher education system that prepares students for a global economy, it will be necessary for the government of Belize to address the constraints in higher education such as access, education costs, poor and inadequate infrastructure, and outdated curricula. Also, critical to addressing the future of higher education in Belize is a discussion of the importance of the market in higher education, the importance of buffer organizations, the importance of institutional autonomy, and the need to revise and professionalize the management processes, such as financing and curricula development in higher education systems (Richardson, Bracco, Callahan & Finny, 1999; van Vught, 1993). A study examining these governance issues in Belize is particularly relevant and

timely since any modernization of governance structures in Belize must take into account these variables.

Although much research has been carried out on governance structures and their effects on higher education in developed countries, primarily the United States (Bowen, 1997; Knott and Payne, 2004; Richardson et al, 1999; Toma, 1990; Wellman, 2002), very few studies have been carried out specifically on governance in developing countries. Even fewer studies have been conducted which examine how governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in developing countries. In Belize, research literature on governance in higher education does not exist.

The purpose of this case study, then, was to understand governance of higher education in the developing country of Belize by examining how governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize. This study was intended to assist both national and institutional policy makers in understanding how the governance structure affects the management processes that are essential to higher education development in Belize. The study addressed the following main questions:

1. What is the structure and the governance system of higher education in Belize?
2. How does the system of governance affect financial decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
3. How does the system of governance affect curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
4. How do market factors affect financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize?

### *Overview of Study Methods*

This study used a case study design to study governance in higher education in Belize. The case study design is used when the researcher's purpose is to examine a single entity, phenomenon or case for which there is very little perspective, and therefore requires investigating (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988). This case was selected because it is an issue of concern and the purpose was to study or uncover the character of the class (developing countries' higher education governance systems) to which the case belongs (Merriam, 1988). Concentrating on a single entity allows the researcher to understand the interaction of important factors inherent in the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). The single entity was Belize's higher education governance structure and the focus was intrinsic since governance in Belize is an issue that has not been explored before and reflects my interest as a former assistant academic dean at an academic institution in the country.

A purposeful homogeneous sampling strategy was used to select the participants for the study because this technique involves selecting individuals who share particular characteristics or who share membership in a subgroup (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The participants in this study share the experiences of working in the higher education system in Belize and belonging to or working with the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize [ATLIB]. The participants were the deans of six junior colleges, current and former administrators at the University of Belize; officials in the Ministry of Education and the Chair of ATLIB. Data were collected from one interview with each participant. In some cases, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted. Interviews were semi-structured and took place at the participants' work places. Most interviews lasted between one hour and one hour and a half. The questions included administrators' perceptions

about governance in higher education, the financing of their institutions, curriculum development at their institutions, innovative ideas in respect to financing and curriculum at their institutions, how globalization is currently changing the face of higher education in Belize, and their perceptions on the role of the market in higher education in Belize. Questions for state policy makers included their definition of governance in higher education, the broad goals for higher education in Belize, how the current global climate affects policy decisions in higher education, and how the current system of governance affects the financing, curricula, and innovation in higher education.

Data were also collected from document reviews of policy documents on higher education. These included government documents such as The University of Belize Act (2000), The National Accreditation Council Act (2004), the Draft Tertiary Revised Education Rules (2006), The Joint Education Staff Relations Council (2006), Position paper on CAPE by the CXC Committee, MOE Digest (2004-2005), Ministry of Education Action Plan (2005), and government directives via memoranda to higher education institutions. Minutes of recent ATLIB meetings and ATLIB correspondences to the MOE in reference to government directives; the Belize Higher Education Conference Report, and the Minister of Education's address to the Consortium of Belizean Educational Cooperation [COBEC] were also reviewed. Institutional data collected included college catalogue, enrollment figures, and faculty qualifications.

### *Significance of the Study*

A study of governance in higher education in Belize examining how the governance structure affects the financial and curricular decision-making in higher education institutions was important for several reasons. First, the study provides much

needed information on governance of higher education in Belize. Second, the study provides an understanding of how the system of governance affects financial and curricular decision-making. Third, the findings add to the limited body of literature on governance in higher education in developing countries. Finally, the study serves as a model for future studies on governance in higher education in other developing countries.

#### *Delimitations*

A delimitation of a study addresses the scope of the study: the problem, the participants, and the setting (Creswell, 1994). This study is confined to governance in higher education in Belize. It provides the perceptions of Belizean administrators and state policy makers on the current governance structure in higher education as well as data from public and institutional documents. The results of this study are only generalizable to higher education in Belize.

#### *Limitations*

Limitations describe methodological weakness or factors that potentially weaken the interpretation of the study's results (Hepner & Hepner, 2004). This study is limited in that there is the potential for researcher bias. Researcher bias occurs when the researcher has personal biases and a priori assumptions which may affect the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the study (Onwuegbuzie, 2002). I am a former assistant dean at one of the junior colleges and as such, I have had a working relationship with all of the junior college deans who formed part of the sample for the study. Therefore, there was the potential that this past acquaintance with the study participants would affect their responses. For example, the participants could have neglected to sufficiently elaborate on a certain issue because of their perceptions that I was familiar with the issue; or they may

have been unwilling to share information that they consider risky or too private to a former colleague in the same system. From this author's perspective, there is in Belize a tendency to involve partisan politics in education and to equate higher education's performance with a reflection of the strength or weakness of the party in government; therefore, participants may have felt the need to censor their responses to questions they deem to be too "political." In addition to knowing the participants, I also have intimate knowledge of the system of higher education in Belize and am familiar with the issues relating to governance, financing, and curricula. Therefore, there was the potential for me to ask questions that would have lead to anticipated responses.

To reduce researcher bias and increase the internal validity of the study, I employed a number of strategies which social scientist researchers have recommended (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). First, because I am sensitive to the tendency of "politics" in Belize, the participants were reassured that their information would be kept confidential and that no names would be used to protect their identities and those of their institutions. Second, the interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. This practice will allow for the preservation of verbatim data for future data analysis (Merriam, 1988). I also used institutional data from document review to further corroborate participants' perceptions of how governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in their institutions. Unfortunately, I was not able to use financial documents as these are strictly confidential at each institution. Finally, conducting interviews with MOE personnel allowed me to find out to what extent the administrators were simply repeating the positions of the government representatives.

### *Organization of Study*

This chapter presents an introduction to the study by providing an overview of challenges facing higher education systems in developing countries. There is a reference to the problem of governance in developing countries and the need to understand how government/higher education relationship affects crucial management decisions in higher education. The rationale, purpose, and significance of the study are presented. An overview of the study methods is also provided. The delimitations and limitations of the study are addressed in this chapter.

Chapter two of the study provides an extensive review of the literature on governance in developing countries. The state control and supervisory models of governance are discussed since either of these models is common in developing countries. The assumptions underlying these models are addressed and studies in higher education governance are used to further clarify the assumptions of this model. Financial and curricular decision-making in higher education will be examined from the perspectives of resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and institutional isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). Chapter three presents the research questions, the sample to be used in the study, the interview guide, the data collection and analysis procedures, and verification procedures for enhancing the credibility of the study. Chapter four presents the findings from both interviews and document analyses. Chapter five presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and implications for theory, practice, and research.

## Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this case study was to understand governance of higher education in the developing country of Belize and to determine how that system of governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize. The research questions are grounded in the literature of higher education governance in developing countries in relation to the models of governance, and the effects of the governance model on financial and curricular decision-making, the establishment of “buffer” organizations, and the role of the market. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. What is the structure and the system of governance of higher education in Belize?
2. How does the system of governance affect financial decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
3. How does the system of governance affect curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
4. How do market factors affect financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize?

The theoretical frameworks that are used to guide this study are the state control/state supervisory model of governance developed by Neave and van Vught (1994); resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978); and institutional isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). The state control model of governance is prevalent in developing countries with a few countries in recent years adopting a more state-supervisory model.

Resource dependency and institutional isomorphism theories are used to explain how and why the state has been able to control higher education, and how individual institutions respond to these external pressures.

This chapter is divided into main sections and subsections. The first section introduces the concept of governance of higher education. The second section introduces the concepts of institutional autonomy and the role of buffer organizations. The next section examines market factors and their effects on higher education. The final section examines the theories of Resource Dependency and Institutional Isomorphism

### *Governance of Higher Education*

Governance of higher education has been defined in several ways. The Task Force in Higher Education and Society (2000) defines governance as “the formal and informal arrangements that allow higher education to make decisions and take action. It refers to the relations between individual institutions and their supervisors” (p.59). Sporn (1999) defines governance as “the structure and processes of decision-making” (p. 123). Marginson and Considine (2000) consider governance as “internal relationships, external relationships, and the intersection between them” (p. 15). They stress the need to understand where policy is formulated and where accountability lies. A report on South African higher education suggests that “governance arrangements reflect values about the distribution and exercise of authority, responsibility and accountability” (Department of Education, 1997). For the purpose of this study, governance is defined as the relationship between a higher education system and its national government, and the effects of this relationship on the actions and behaviors of higher education systems and institutions.

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society [THFES] (2000) notes that effective systems of higher education have several prominent characteristics. One of these main features is adequate and stable long-term funding with a corresponding need for accountability. Governments play a major role in providing long-term funding which should not be subjected to the vagaries of budget decreases. Other essential characteristics of an effective system are flexibility to the changing external environment, well-defined standards, immunity from political manipulation, well-defined links to other sources, and supportive legal and regulatory environment which “encourages innovation and achievement, while discouraging corruption, duplication of effort, and exploitation of poorly informed consumers” (THFES, 2000, p. 52).

An effective system of higher education relies heavily on the oversight provided by the government. But this oversight must not be confused with interference since governments must be “economical in its interventions” (THFES, 2000, p. 53) in higher education. The role of the government in higher education is to ensure that higher education serves the public interest, lessen the effects of the market, and support research that are relevant to the country’s needs (THFES, 2000). THFES (2000) cautions that “poorly-thought-through government action is likely to weaken already inadequate higher education systems. Policymakers must also ensure that there is a clear vision of the goals and structure of a higher education system and that vision is shared by all stakeholders (THFES, 2000).

### *The State Control/Supervisory Model of Governance*

The relationship between higher education and its supervisor can be classified as one in which the state acts a supervisor and “sets the broad parameters in which higher education operates” (van Vught, 1993, p. 27), while relying on market mechanisms to provide some level of coordination of the higher education system, or as a regulator of the higher education system (Van Vught, 1993). In defining regulation, Neave and van Vught (1994) refer to the efforts of “government to steer the decisions and actions of specific societal actors according to the objectives the government has set and by using instruments the government has at its disposal” (p. 4).

In many developing countries, the relationship between higher education and government is characterized by mechanisms through which government controls the higher education system and firmly regulates its functions. Governments often tend to use extensive control mechanisms and strict rules to regulate higher education (Neave & van Vught, 1994). The strategy of government control is referred to as the state control model of governance and is prevalent in developing countries.

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society [TFHES (2000) notes that “the state control has tended to undermine many major principles of good governance. The direct involvement of politicians has generally politicized higher education widening the possibilities for corruption, nepotism, and political opportunism.” (p. 53) and lessening the autonomy of institutions. The tendency for massive state control in many developing countries results from governments’ beliefs that control is a corollary of funding (TFHES, 2000) and higher education is an instrument of national development; therefore, higher education must adapt to meet national needs and suit local circumstances (van

Vught, 1993). This view is epitomized by the words of a former Minister of Education in Belize when he said:

the Government representing the nation of Belize has the responsibility to clearly articulate its developmental goals and policies, and through the University's Board of Trustees, we intend to communicate where we would like the University to channel its energies. (UB: Report on Faculty and Staff Consultation cited in Tun, 2004)

It must be noted that higher education systems in many developing countries are transplantations of primarily European models of higher education. During the post-colonial periods, governments reacted against the impositions of these external models, which they found unsuitable to the social and cultural realities of their new nations. In situations where higher education enjoyed a high degree of institutional autonomy, for example in the British system, governments became authoritative, often exhibiting high forms of state control (van Vught, 1993). In this extreme case of governmental regulation, the assumption is that government employs a rationalist approach to decision making, in which it assumes to have comprehensive knowledge of all alternatives and is able to evaluate all conceivable consequences (Neave & van Vught, 1994). This assumption of rational planning has been criticized as being unrealistic. Bolman & Deal (2003) argue that managers are often depicted as rational and in control of their activities but, in reality, the opposite is true. "Managers muddle and catch-up. They want to solve problems and make decisions. But problems are ill defined and options murky." (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 305). Lindblom (1976) also argues that this rationalist approach to decision-making is unrealistic as it assumes that the actors can evaluate all possible

alternatives and measure all policy outcomes; the reality is that it is often difficult to measure the outcomes affected by a given policy especially since changes are often marginal, incremental, and long-term. In a report on governance in South Africa (Hall and Symes, 2003), the writers also criticize the rational planning approach saying that:

a top-down, rational planning approach would require a large Department of Education with the capacity to analyze a continual flow of data from all public higher education institutions, and induce from this data a series of scenarios that could be accurately rated for their probability of such success. Such an approach would also require that information provided by institutions be comprehensive and accurate ... this is an almost impossible requirement. (p. 94)

In practice, the rationalist planning model allows governments to centralize the decision-making process and control the implementation of policies (Neave & van Vught, 1994). In this model of state governance control, governments often make decisions about such elements as access, academic programs, research, examinations, staffing, and funding (Sawyer, 1994). It must be noted, however, that due to the differing contexts within which governments and higher education systems operate, these elements may not be the same in all countries or within higher education systems. For example, rigid government controls in other non-university status institutions (technical and two-year colleges) may not be the same as those in universities. For example, the University of Belize operates under the UB Act (2000) while junior colleges are currently operating under a set of draft policies which also apply to primary and secondary schools. It is also important to note that the state control model and the state supervisory model exist on a

continuum and the extent to which governments exercise controls over the above functions determines the government/higher education relationship of state control or state supervision.

Richardson and Fielden (1997) conducted a study to assess how much control governments in Commonwealth countries were exercising over their higher education institutions. The study used the conceptual framework of state control and state supervisory governance models (Neave & van Vught, 1994) to test the assumption that states were imposing strict controls on universities. The study collected data from a review of relevant literature on the subject of government/university relationship, a review of the acts and statutes that control the universities, and a questionnaire to university vice-chancellors for their perceptions on government control. The findings of the study show that in the United Kingdom, government controls are through buffer bodies that are charged with planning, financial controls and other functions. In relation to other Commonwealth countries as a whole, the United Kingdom experiences lower state interference in academic freedom and institutional autonomy. In looking at the developing countries in the Commonwealth in, for example, Africa, the findings show that governments in those countries are heavily involved and frequently intervene in the management of universities. The questionnaire responses from vice-chancellors in these countries seemed to suggest that the state promotes a more supervisory role, although the findings from document analyses suggested that the state-control governance model is quite dominant.

The findings of the Richardson and Fielden (1997) study, however, must be recognized in the context of the cultures of the countries and the institutions themselves

that participated. First, the participating universities may be those which were less controlled and so felt that they could safely participate; thus, their perceptions would be different from those who felt it too risky to participate given the heavy control by the state. Second, the culture of the country needs to be considered. In some countries where the state control is dominant, interference by the state may be seen as acceptable.

### *Governance of Higher Education in Developing Countries*

Many higher education systems in the developing countries of Africa are controlled by their respective states. In fact, throughout much of Africa the head of the country is the university chancellor, who has the ultimate authority to appoint key university administrators such as the Vice-Chancellor (Bjarason & Lund, 1999; Kirby-Harris, 2003; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). This model creates tension between the government's commitment to regulate public funds and the university's desire to be autonomous (Bjarason & Lund, 1999). There have also been instances in which the minister of education has appointed the vice-chancellor without the approval of Parliament or even the chancellor. The norm, however, is for the chancellor to appoint the vice-chancellor on the advice of a minister of education. The board of directors is composed mainly of government-appointed members who serve at the discretion of the minister of education.

In the report, *Governance in South African Higher Education* (Hall and Symes, 2003), the writers describe the South African system of governance as "a combination of direct state control and pronounced institutional autonomy" (p.92). The writers suggest that a high degree of institutional autonomy and indirect state steering is essential for higher education in developing countries, although they are quick to suggest that

regulation must not be solely left to the market. They further note that the direct state control of higher education in developing countries, given these countries peculiar challenges, can have deleterious effects on the abilities of higher education to assist in the promotion of national development and social justice. They make a case for a co-operative system of governance in which governments steer higher education through a “buffer” organization, which acts as an intermediary between higher education and the state government. The suggestion of “co-operative system of governance” in South Africa initiated the development of the White Paper and Higher Education Act [HEA] of 1997 that formalized the Council of Higher Education [CHE] in South Africa.

In a similar report, *Promoting Good Governance in South African Higher Education* (Hall and Symes & Luescher, 2002), the writers believe that there is justification for a system of governance in which institutions enjoy a high level of autonomy and the state plays a major role in steering the higher education system in the interest of the nation. The report continues that the government, through the MOE, has both the responsibilities to steer the system and to respect the autonomy of institutions; in other words, they make a case for cooperative governance. However, they note that the ideals of cooperative governance that created the Council of Higher Education, a body that was appointed to oversee the development of higher education, could have been eroded with modifications to the Higher Education Act which allowed the minister more control to determine the “seat” (p.42), policy, and funding formula for institutions. This power allowed the minister of education to use funding to determine institutional policy in South African higher education.

Other case studies conducted on government/university relationships in higher education in African countries show that government controls adversely affect higher education's ability to develop (Bjarason & Lund, 1999). Kotecha (1999) notes in his case study of the relationship between University of Botswana and the government that the government of Botswana defines its role as "providing overall planning direction, supervision, and general guidance through curriculum development, certification and regulation of all educational activity" (p.17). The strong control exercised over higher education gives the government the power to determine the overall structure, the curricula, staff and student enrollment of the university. In fact, the university implementation of the above functions must be compatible with the developmental plans presented by the state (Kotecha, 1999). Moreover, the government provides direct funding to all institutions under the MOE (Kotecha, 1999). The financial aspects of the university are controlled and managed by a university finance committee, which includes representation from both the Ministries of Education and Finance and Development Planning. This particular committee sets the policies and procedures for financial control, receives annual budget estimates, and makes recommendations on funding. It is noted that government funding has been made available by monthly disbursements instead of yearly allocations (Bjarnasan & Lund, 1999).

In Uganda, the government also controls higher education. Prior to 2001, higher education institutions were governed by individual statutes to cater to their specific needs (Xiaoyang, 2004). In 2001, a higher education act was passed to govern all universities and other tertiary institutions. However, serious gaps in financing strategies, allocations of funds, and accountability have been noted (Xiaoyang, 2004). In addition, the act gives

the control of higher education to the Ministry of Education and Sports. Even with the establishment of the National Council on Higher Education, the MOE continues to control higher education's policies and procedures in respect to curricula, funding, staff appointments, and other functions (Xiaoyang, 2004). Even while some institutions such as the University of Uganda enjoy some degree of autonomy, other non-university institutions are severely micro-managed by the government. For example, in the appointments of academic staff, the universities have more freedom in making appointments and promotions, albeit with the approval of the Ministry of Public Service. For other institutions, the Education Service Commission (an arm of the MOE) controls the appointments of staff. In both sectors, however, financial autonomy is limited. Subventions to public institutions are made in block grants calculated on the number of government students and the "unit cost" as determined by the ministry for a respective institution. Obviously, then, some institutions will be "more equal than others." Academic and non-academic personnel are paid from these block grants. Institutions also receive "development" budgets but these fluctuate from year to year, in many cases are non-existent, and when they are available, tend to favor primarily the flagship University of Makerere. Funding for all public institutions is based on the previous year's budget and the allocations are apparently disbursed randomly without any consideration to the national interests, for there is no mechanism which helps to steer funding in accordance with public priorities or institutional needs (Xiaoyang, 2004). This oversight allows some institutions to receive grants regardless of their needs and makes planning and operation problematic for all. In addition, this arbitrary funding system provides little incentives for fiscal efficiency and limits institutions' abilities to respond to change (Xiaoyang, 2004).

It is apparent from this case that governmental control of funding has implications for higher education.

Strict governmental controls also constrain higher education's ability to revise and improve outdated curricula. Roberts (1999) suggests that institutions that operate under strict ministerial controls perceive disadvantages in academic programming. In Botswana, for example, where the government exercises strong control over higher education, fields of study and their corresponding curricula are determined by the government (Kotecha, 1999). Diversification of disciplines has been driven by a national perspective to satisfy job market needs and funding to both institutions and students are predicated on the fulfilment of government directives. This situation creates tensions between the institutions, maintaining that their missions must transcend education that simply satisfies human power needs, and the national government (Kotecha, 1999). These contradictory convictions on academic programming are captured in the government's National Development Plan 7 (in Kotecha, 1999) which categorically states that "Botswana cannot afford to waste resources on advanced education or training that does not meet the demands of the economy" (p.18) and the view of the National Council of Higher Education that "the country must have its own pool of intellectuals, scholars, researchers and knowledge managers and knowledge creators" (p. 18).

As in the previous case, curriculum restructuring in South Africa was not without anxiety and turmoil. Ensor (2004) discusses two contesting discourses in higher education curriculum restructuring in South Africa. These two contradictory discourses originated from the dichotomy of local and global pressures that often characterize curriculum in higher education (Zembylas, 2002). The "credit exchange" discourse would

allow for a more interdisciplinary curriculum and would accommodate students' interests and choices while the "disciplinary discourse" aimed to organize courses into disciplines reflecting the structure of the discipline approach (Posner, 1985). Ensor (2004) conducted case studies of three institutions to examine the interplay of these two dominating discourses and the subsequent restructuring of the curriculum. Although the National Council of Higher Education advocated for a coherent and integrated sequence of courses (the disciplinary discourse), the South African Government White Paper opted for the "credit exchange." However, pressure from the higher education sector forced the government to make concessions to incorporate both discourses (Ensor, 2004). In Uganda, where the government controls higher education, higher education curriculum has been deemed as outdated, irrelevant and unresponsive to the needs of the country. The development of higher education curriculum which responds to the local, regional, and global economies remains a major challenge (Xiaoyang, 2004).

This challenge is ongoing throughout much of the world, especially in small developing countries even at lower levels of education. Zembylas (2002) conducted a case study of the development of elementary science curriculum in Cyprus. The objectives of the study were to examine the tensions between global and local needs and to understand how to create a balance between the two opposing needs. Even with such paradoxical situation, the researcher concludes that both local and global contexts can coexist by emphasizing the "performative" aspects of both local and global needs. In other words, using local values and traditions as the stage on which global needs and values are addressed instead of treating them as contradictory epistemologies.

The dilemma presented by the above cases illustrates a challenge that arises when higher education must serve several contradictory and ambiguous goals, as is often the case in developing countries (Chapman, 2002). Resolving this challenge as well as strengthening higher education systems overall necessitates a redefinition of government/higher education relationship (Chapman, 2002). However, in the absence of a higher education act in many developing countries, policies that govern higher education are often arbitrarily formulated and hardly ever implemented (Aird, 2006; Bloom, 2003; Kirby-Harris, 2003).

In the absence of a coherent framework, institutions are perceived to be autonomous but with little framework to develop and establish their own identities. In these situations, institutions often pose little or no resistance to governmental values and controls (Kirby-Harris, 2003). In his case study of the University of Namibia, Kirby-Harris (2003) found that the values of the government, articulated through subtle discourses and influences, dominated the university and controlled the changes in the university in its eight-year history. Richardson and Fielden (1997) conclude that “the more sophisticated the government controls are through planning mechanisms, buffer bodies or financial controls, the less interest Government seems to have in being directly involved with university governance” (p. 10).

#### *Institutional Autonomy in Higher Education*

Autonomy is defined as the freedom of institutions from state control to determine goals and priorities and decide how to realize their goals (Johnstone & Bain, 2002; Richardson and Fielden 1997; van Vught, 1993). Autonomy, however, must be distinguished from academic freedom, which is the freedom an individual enjoys in the

conduct of his/her teaching or scholarly activities without fear or retribution (Ashby, 1966 in Berdahl, 1990). Berdahl (1990) notes that:

a major source of current friction is that many academics are trying to protect too much, and many persons in government are trying to claim too much. A fundamental cause of this confusion is the failure of persons on both sides to recognize that academic freedom and university autonomy, though related, are not synonymous and that university-state relations in one area may quite properly differ from the other. (p. 5)

Although academic freedom or some commitment to it has been accepted and recognized as an essential part of academe's mission in most parts of the world, there is still concern about its status in some countries (Altbach, 2001). In some countries where colonial powers controlled the establishment of universities, academic freedom was not allowed. Thus, academic freedom did not take root, and universities in those countries have struggled to establish academic freedom (Altbach, 2001). Even though academic freedom is now recognized and guaranteed most of the time, there are still limits and restraints placed on universities especially in times of political crisis. The fact that most of these universities depend on government funding further constrains their academic freedom (Altbach, 2001).

The limitations of institutional autonomy, like academic freedom, must be understood in the contextual boundaries in which government and university relations exist. Those boundaries are set by the nature of the government in power, the government's view of the role of higher education, the perceived role of the government in regulating higher education, and the power of individual and collective higher

education institutions (Neave & van Vught, 1994). The freedom of institutions to realize and implement their goals is often situated in an overall framework set by the state and varies in degrees and substance. For example, those domains that are traditionally easiest to delegate to individual institutions are those of structuring academic programs, methods of instruction, and objects of scholarly inquiry, while those that are unlikely to be given to institutions are the determination of missions, ultimate oversight and quality control (Johnstone & Bain, 2002). Traditionally in developing countries, controversial domains include those that deal with the appointments of the highest executive officer, curricula, admission standards, missions, appointments, employment conditions, remunerations of academic staff, and revenue expenditures (Johnstone & Bain, 2002).

Autonomy is neither linear nor simplistic; it is rather a complicated concept. In fact, autonomy has two dimensions: substantive autonomy and procedural autonomy (Berdahl, 1990). Substantive autonomy refers to “the power of the university or college in its corporate form to determine its own goals and programs- “the what” of academe (Berdahl, 1990, p.172). Procedural autonomy is “the power of the university or college in its corporate form to determine the means by which its goals and programs will be pursued- “the how” of academe (Berdahl, 1990, p.172). Therefore, in referring to institutional autonomy it is important to understand which dimension of autonomy is in question. Thus, when a central ministry refers to “enhancing autonomy, it matters considerably what it intends to shed and what it will continue to hold” (Johnstone & Bain, 2002, p. 65). For example, in his 2000 address to the University of Belize faculty and staff on the amalgamation of five government institutions, the then Minister of Education said, “We recognize that a university must be autonomous, such autonomy

provides the environment for excellence in scholarship, research and service” (Tun, 2004, p. 58). However, when the UB Act (2000) was officially passed, the Minister was given ultimate control of the University. This led Tun (2004) to conclude that while the amalgamation brought together five different institutions, each with their own cultures, all institutions shared a common reality: they were all dependent on government for financing their institutions and their missions were inextricably tied to that of their sponsor. Thus, in this situation, the substantive autonomy (the mission) of the new university was compromised.

The case is made for a high degree of institutional autonomy in developing countries especially since higher education is often cited as important to the economic, social, and cultural development of a country (Hall & Symes, 2003; Neave & van Vught, 1994; TFHES, 2000). However, it must be understood that the state has a definitive role to play in higher education (Taylor & Miroux 2002; TFHES, 2000) and institutional autonomy does not transfer total control to institutions. Berdahl (1990) suggests that even while academic institutions should be granted academic freedom and autonomy, the state has a major role to play in relation to substantive policies. This balance in the substantive autonomy of institutions and the state’s role in the overall policy framework is what Hall, Symes and Luescher (2005) refer to as “conditional autonomy.” Conditional autonomy recognizes that institutions are granted substantive autonomy, but their procedural autonomy remains moderated by state controls over funding, quality, and accreditation. In the often uncertain environments in which higher education exists and operates, it is imperative that higher education

establish the terms of a discourse that supports both its relationship with the state in serving the public good, and the substantive autonomy of its institutions that allows the creation of new knowledge and the education of fully qualified graduates. (Hall, Symes and Luescher, 2005, p. 211)

If conditional autonomy is to provide an effective balance between the needs and responsibilities of the state and those of higher education, then the rights of institutions must be respected. In many countries, including some developing countries, governments have moved away from a state control system to state supervisory role by devolving control to “buffer mechanisms.”

#### *The Role of Buffer Organizations in Higher Education*

A buffer entity is an “organization which is formally constituted and functions in an intermediary capacity between government and the university sector” (Bjarvason, 1998, p.1). In the United States, for example, buffer organizations fall into three main categories: coordinating boards, governing boards, or planning agencies (McGuiness, 2003). In all three scenarios, these boards create buffers from extensive government control and emphasize the importance of some institutional autonomy (McGuiness, 2003). Buffer entities have also been formalized in some developing countries. Neave (1992) offers a possible distinction of these buffer bodies: those that have powers of allocation, those that advise and coordinate, and those that serve as arenas for debate and discussion. He notes, however, that the categories are not exclusive and, rather, in some instances, may be cumulative. Bjarnasan (1998) studied the functions, activities and structures of “buffer” organizations in Commonwealth countries. For the purpose of this study, however, only those in the developing countries of Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya,

and Zimbabwe will be analyzed. Utilizing Schmidlein and Berdahls' typology of functions of buffer entities in the United States, Bjarnasan (1998) compared the buffer organizations according to their functions. In the countries listed above, there were significant similarities in the buffer organizations. All four buffer entities had planning, academic program review, budget development/funding, and quality standards initiatives as their functions. However, in respect to policy analysis/problem resolution, student access, and mission definition, only those buffer organizations in Kenya and Nigeria had these as functions. Overall, Zimbabwe's buffer organization had the fewest of the functions used in the comparisons.

In regard to the membership and appointments of members of the buffer entities for the above countries, it is interesting to note that the president of the country or the minister of education plays an extremely important role. For example, in South Africa, the Minister of Education appoints all members of the Council. Hall and Symes (2005) thus conclude that even while the Council of Higher Education was to act as an independent buffer between the government and higher education, its composition (ministerial appointees) reflected the opposite view. In Kenya, of the 20 members, the President appoints more than half, and five are permanent secretaries in various governmental ministries.

In other case studies conducted on Uganda, Tanzania, and Botswana, the findings show a similar trend such that these buffer entities are largely composed of governmental appointees and function more as extensions of government controls (Mwiria, 1998). In those cases where legislation has been introduced to create buffer institutions, several of the Acts have yet to be passed or implemented (Bjarnasan & Lund, 1999). In Belize,

legislation has been passed establishing a National Accreditation Council with the responsibility for ensuring quality in higher education; however, to date, the Council has not been established (Aird, 2006). Bjarnasan and Lund (1999) conclude that a lack of political will or lack of resources may explain why some governments have taken so long to create and/or operationalize buffer mechanisms. Buffer institutions have the potential of reframing the relationship between higher education and governments by holding institutions accountable while reducing governmental controls (Johnstone & Bain, 2002) and mitigating the effects of market forces on higher education.

#### *Market Forces in Higher Education*

Many developing countries have adopted policies which have resulted in the marketization of higher education (Tilak, 2003). Market forces occur in several forms such as the reduction of public expenditures for higher education and the subsequent need for alternative sources of funding; the belief that higher education should be aligned with the needs of the national economy; the commercialization of research or ‘entrepreneurialism’; managerialism; and competition between and within institutions (Jonathan, 2006). These market forces are direct consequences of global market forces which force governments to make decisions and take appropriate responses which subsequently affect higher education (Jonathan, 2006). Jonathan (2006) notes:

that judgment of global market placing and appropriate response determines what kind of public accountability demands are placed on a nation’s higher education system, and the extent to which those demands constrain or erode traditional conceptions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. (p. 44)

In his study of the impacts of globalization on community colleges in Canada and the United States, Levin (1999) found that organizational behaviors of these institutions have been altered in several ways. First, the shrinking of government subsidies has forced these institutions to adopt strategies to generate external revenues especially from business and industry. Second, the emphasis on efficiency has increased employees workloads; in the instructional area, there is an emphasis on distance education to serve more students with the same resources. Third, there is little emphasis on remedial education as more resources are diverted to higher level programs. The most significant change, however, is in the curriculum as more and more, there is a shift from education to training and a push for “employability skills and adaptation of critical thinking to fit the business and industry contexts”(Levin, 1999, p. 397). Increasingly, the needs of business and industry are taking precedent over the needs of individual students (Levin, 1999).

In studying the restructuring of Chinese vocational universities, Ding and Levin (2007) noted that:

The academic disciplinary based program structure and curricular system were changed to those based on market requirements and job competencies...this was consistent with national patterns where programs and curricula, traditionally regarded as the core of the academic institution, became industry and commercially oriented. (p. 556)

In writing about the restructuring of the Chinese higher education system in response to global forces, Mok (2005) describes four major restructuring strategies as ‘restructuring’, ‘joint development’, ‘merging’, and ‘cooperation’ that took place after the Chinese government instituted a policy of decentralization in the governance of higher

education. Under the ‘joint development’ initiative, some universities were readjusted to fall under the direct supervision of both central and local governments. Under this agreement, the central government would continue to provide funding, the provincial governments would provide funds for capital investments, and the universities would focus on the developmental needs of their local communities in their curricula, admission of graduates, and scientific research. University merging was also encouraged to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and improve standards and competitiveness. Cooperation was encouraged among universities in order to maximize resources. These restructuring strategies came about at the time when the Chinese government realized that its higher education system was insufficiently prepared to meet the global challenges (Mok, 2005).

In assessing market mechanisms for higher education in New Zealand and Australia, Hauptman (2003) notes that both countries have adopted a national strategy in which market forces are much more active and reliance on public funding and government control of higher education is less prominent. For example, in both countries, the reliance on tuition fees has increased from less than five percent to more than thirty three percent in 2000 (Hauptman, 2003). In respect to student choice, students in New Zealand have considerable choice among a variety of institutions whereas in Australia, the trend has been for the consolidation of public institutions into larger ones. In both countries participation and completion of higher education has drastically increased. Despite the increase in participation, the equity gaps have not been resolved (Hauptman, 2003). The impacts of quality in a competitive higher education system are also critical to analyze in a “marketized” higher education system (Hauptman, 2003). In New Zealand,

for example, insufficient quality control has caused inferior academic programs to proliferate (Hauptman, 2003).

In writing about market forces and their effects on higher education in South Africa, Jonathan (2006) notes that market pressures had an impact on policies for South African higher education. For example, university restructuring was necessary to respond to the demand for skills and to align its research agenda to promote a strategic position for South Africa within the global economy. In responding to that policy initiative, the Council of Higher Education in South Africa warned that "...this (policy) in turn has sparked concerns within higher education that fundamental research may be systematically eroded within the academic sector" (cited in Jonathan, 2006, p. 47). In the new global economy, basic research has now given way to applied and commercial research in which industry dictates the conditions under which research is conducted and findings released (Currie, 2003). Jonathan (2006) also notes that competition in the South African higher education system, in which there is inequalities and varying degrees of access, is not very beneficial. She notes that "in these circumstances, the competitive features which are one of the inevitable hallmarks of higher education become interesting and problematic" (p. 53). Jonathan (2006) concludes that market pressures can damage the social and public good of higher education and its value as a "site of unconstrained knowledge production, development, and dissemination" (p.55).

Tilak (2003) notes that market forces in developing countries have become very active with often negative consequences since markets in developing countries are "imperfect and incomplete" (p.1). He notes that emerging trends in policy, planning, and financing of higher education in developing countries suggest that higher education is

succumbing to market forces. These emerging trends show that the welfare approach to higher education is quickly making way for a market approach; public financing for higher education is yielding to private financing; and low levels of fees are now substituted by high levels of fees with accompanying student loan programs.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

This study examined the relationship between governments and higher education in developing countries to understand how governments exert control over their higher education systems and how higher education responds to these external influences. Two dominant theories within organizational theory - resource dependency and institutional isomorphism- were used to understand this relationship. These two theories share the assumptions that organizations are subjected to external forces which limit their actions and choices, and they depend on external resources to survive. However, the theories differ on how and to what extent organizations respond to external influences.

#### *Resource Dependency Theory*

In organizational theory, organizations are described as either closed or open systems. Closed system theory posits that organizations are self-contained entities and do not depend on the external environment since all elements of the organization are closely connected. Conversely, open system theory holds that organizations are constantly in interaction with their environments, which are neither constant nor predictable. Organizations and their external environments interact with each other, both exerting some measure of influence. Higher education systems are often viewed as open systems because they operate in unstable environments, are loosely coupled, and interact constantly with and are very much influenced by their external environments. The

relationship between higher education systems and their external environments, for example governments, is often described as one of dependency in which higher education systems depend heavily on resources from the government. In studying this relationship, the resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) is useful.

Resource dependency theory posits that organizational behavior is dependent on the organization's ability to garner those critical resources it needs to function and survive. In seeking those critical resources, organizations will respond to and become reliant on those entities in their environment that control those resources. In their dependency on external forces for critical resources, organizations often become constrained by external directives, and their subsequent actions are thus shaped by their abilities to manage the dependency and negotiate situations of external demands. The theory emphasizes that in managing such dependency, organizations act strategically to counteract these external demands and to lessen dependency. There are several factors that allow an organization to respond to external dependencies. First, the interdependencies of organizations must be recognized. "The potential for one organization influencing another derives from its discretionary control over resources needed by the other and the other's dependence on the resources and lack of countervailing resources and access to alternative sources." (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 53) For instance, a university is dependent on its government since it relies on it for finances; however, the government is dependent on its higher education system to provide education to its citizens. Second, organizations have options to defy external demands by managing and manipulating their dependencies. For example, there have been situations where institutions have refused government funding so as not to comply

with the corresponding demands or have sought and developed alternative sources of resources so as not to be dependent on only one entity, such as government. Third, the intra-organizational climate must be recognized when examining how organizations react to their environments. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) suggest that “the contest of control within an organization intervenes to affect the enactment of organizational environments. Since coping with critical contingencies is an important determination of influence, sub-units will seek to enact environments to favor their position” (p. 261). Resource dependency theory holds that organizations are not solely at the mercy of their external environments but have certain features which help them to manage external dependencies.

Some organizations, however, are less adept at managing external forces than others (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and are more vulnerable to external demands since they are more dependent on external resources. Using this proposition in respect to higher education systems, it may seem logical to suggest that since higher education systems and institutions in developing countries receive most or in some instances all of their funding from their national governments, then they would be more vulnerable to governmental control. This conclusion in respect to institutional autonomy has been challenged (Chang, 2004). In his study of the relationship between autonomy and funding in Taiwan and England, Chang (2004) found that autonomy in Taiwanese institutions was not solely based on a reduced dependency on government funding, because even when some institutions diversified their funding bases, they did not enjoy more autonomy. In respect to institutional autonomy in England, institutions had more autonomy if they were able to establish alternative sources of money. Chang concludes that “the effect of funding on

university autonomy in a given country is conditioned by the context in which those universities exist” (p. 207). Neave and van Vught (1994) also support the view that institutional autonomy is contextually defined. Case studies on higher education systems in developing countries also support the view that institutional autonomy is dependent on the higher education environment. Even where institutions have been able to diversify their funding bases, they still rely heavily on government funding and governments continue to exert controls. (Kirby-Harris, 2003; Kotecha, 1999; Mwiria, 1999).

Kirby-Harris (2003) used a theoretical framework that combines resource dependency and neo-institutional theories to study organizational change at the University of Namibia. Comparing the findings to the theoretical framework, Kirby-Harris concluded that university administrators instituted changes in order to strengthen their “bargaining position” (p.370) with the government for needed resources while, at the same time, lessen the obvious dependency on government funding. Ultimately, however, the changes reflected the broad values of the government (Kirby-Harris, 2003). In relating the findings to the individual theories used in the study, Kirby-Harris (2003) concluded that resource dependency was more useful than neo-institutional theory to explain the changes.

Resource dependency theory has also been used to examine curricular changes in higher education institutions (Huisman, 1997; Huisman & Van Heffen, 2003; Morpew, 1997). Huisman (1997) examined the effect of government funding on the emergence of new academic programs and specializations within these programs in Dutch universities. He notes that study programs are generally dependent on government for funding, which is influenced by the number of students enrolled in such programs. Therefore,

dependency of academic programs on government funding is inversely proportional to the number of students enrolled. When confronted with decrease enrollments, academics will develop certain strategies to cope with the situation. These new strategies include program differentiation or new specializations within the field (Huisman, 1997).

Huisman and Van Heffen (2003) examined the restructuring of programs with the view of decreasing the number of professional programs in Dutch higher education. They used resource dependency theory to try to explain why different sub-sectors (agriculture, engineering, economics, and social-cultural) reacted differently to the pressure from the government to cut back on study programs. Their findings show that the larger the dependency on government and the market, and the more heterogeneous the sub-sector, the more it was inclined to follow the directive of the government. This study shows that academic programs in higher education institutions are susceptible to external influences by governments and labor markets (Huisman & Van Heffen, 2003).

### *Institutional Isomorphism*

New-institutional theorists like Powell and Di Maggio (1983) propose that organizational changes result from processes that make organizations within a highly structured organizational field more homogeneous, but not necessarily more efficient. An organizational field becomes “institutionally defined” through the increased interaction among organizations in the field, the emergence of formal organizational structures, and the mutual understanding and recognition of participants in the organizational field that they belong to a common enterprise (Powell & Di Maggio, 1983, p. 148). For example, higher education is a highly structured field in which several formal structures are evident: loose coupling, ambiguous goals, and unclear technology (Cohen, Olsen, &

March, 1981). In addition, practices such as research, teaching, and service have become institutionalized. Once an organizational field has been defined, organizations within this field will frame organizational changes in accordance to the established norms of the field (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). Thus, organizations may try to change constantly but are constrained from doing so and are influenced to adopt institutionalized practices. In adopting these institutionalized practices, they tend to become isomorphic with their environments, that is, other formal organizations in their fields (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Institutional isomorphism provides organizations with legitimacy and promotes survival since organizational elements of formal structure have been legitimated externally, meaning that organizations do not need to provide evidence of efficiency or use internal assessments to define the value of these elements (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Powell and DiMaggio (1983) identify three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphism occurs: (1) coercive isomorphism (2) mimetic isomorphism and (3) normative isomorphism.

*Coercive isomorphism.* Coercive isomorphism is described as those “formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983, p. 150). These pressures may take the form of force, persuasion, or invitations for collusion. For example, in higher education government may exert control on institutions to adopt certain academic programs to meet national development needs with the threat of reduced funding if the directive is not met. In this way, institutions are more prone to submit to these directives since other institutions in the field are likely to comply. As organizations conform to these coercive

forces, they become more homogeneous and their elements of formal structure become ritualized in accordance with other more powerful institutions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Their legitimacy, then, is tied to group solidarity.

*Mimetic isomorphism.* Organizations that have ambiguous goals, are uncertain about their technologies, and operate on the peripheral of their environmental field tend to model themselves on other organizations deemed to be successful (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). Models may be diffused through employee turnovers or transfers or explicitly through membership in associations or by using major consulting firms in the field. In organizations such as higher education institutions, goals are often ambiguous and contradictory, technologies are unclear, participation very fluid (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1981) and there is a high degree of uncertainty in some organizations in the field. Peripheral institutions, then, will emulate those that are perceived to be successful in order to gain legitimacy in the environment.

*Normative isomorphism.* Normative pressure results from “professionalization,” which is the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define conditions and methods of their work, to control the production of producers, and to establish a cognitive base and legitimacy for their occupational autonomy” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983, p. 152). Two aspects of professionalization that contribute to isomorphism are formal education and its corresponding cognitive base, and the expansion of professional networks and associations. Formal education highly defines the norms of a given profession (in regards to content, research, and practices) while professional networks develop and refine normative rules about a given profession (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). The result is that individuals in a given profession in organizations across the field will have similar

orientations and views which will control the variations in the field (Powell & DiMaggio, 1983).

Coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism do not necessarily provide support for organizational efficiency. But organizations are often rewarded for their similarity to other organizations since the similarities are often equated with efficiency or effectiveness. Powell and DiMaggio conclude that:

this similarity can make it easier for organizations to transact with other organizations, ... to be acknowledged as legitimate and reputable, and to fit into administrative categories that define eligibility for public and private grants and contracts. None of this, however, ensures that conformist organizations do what they do more efficiently than do their more deviant peers. (p. 73)

Morphew (1997) examined the external forces that motivate college faculty to propose new degree programs and to what extent these impetuses can be explained using either resource dependency or neo-institutional theory. He used a sample of 39 faculty members from universities in seven states who had been actively involved in the development and submissions of proposals for new programs. He used an open-ended interview guide to collect data from all 39 participants. Three major themes evolved from the data: competition for resources, competition for new faculty, and community need and student demands. Respondents cited the need to offer graduate programs to compete for limited funds. In the absence of such graduate programs, the needs of the department were largely overlooked. They also cited the need for “legitimacy” and to be “key players” in the institution as reasons why they proposed new graduate programs. Some faculty also cited that external forces such as labor markets and student interests drove

them to propose new graduate programs. Morpew (1997) notes that data from the study show that the impetuses for new academic programs could be contributed to mimetic and normative forces that result in institutional isomorphism.

Glazier (2002) examined the disciplinary changes in library and information science by using institutional isomorphism. In the study, the discipline of library and information science is viewed as the organizational field, while the various paradigms are considered as the organizations in an organizational field. The writer notes that the discipline in the United States is struggling to maintain legitimacy amidst questions of its status as a scholarly enterprise. The curricula in many schools in library and information science continue to follow the traditional paradigm which emphasizes the technical and clerical activities of the discipline. The dominance of this paradigm has constrained the evolution of other theoretical approaches; the result is that the discipline continues to lose legitimacy as many individuals continue to frown upon it as a legitimate professional career. The writer ascribes the problem to normative pressures to conform to the dominant paradigm.

Isomorphic tendencies are also evident in the patterns of scholarly publications in higher education institutions. Since publishing is a crucial determinant of academic rewards and institutional stratification, it is important to understand how different processes affect this scholarly activity (Dey, Milem, & Berger, 1997). In the study of patterns of scholarly publications, the researchers examined the systematic variation in publication activity at different types of institutions: research, doctoral, and comprehensive universities, and liberal arts and two-year colleges at two different time frames. They also studied the two-year publication rates for each institution. The results

showed that scholarly publication significantly increased at all types of institutions. The writers attribute this trend to institutional isomorphism in that even those institutions that have traditionally emphasized teaching (two year colleges) are moving towards the mission of those institutions that occupy the top positions in the hierarchy. Doctoral universities had the largest gains in regards to published articles while comprehensive universities and research universities were on par. In the two-year rate of publication, both doctoral and comprehensive universities showed higher rates than research universities. In the overall gains across all three measures of publication, comprehensive universities had the largest gains, followed by doctoral and research universities. The researchers conclude that this trend is evidence of institutional isomorphism in that over the period of time, the rates of publication at all types of institutions were becoming more similar. The universal increase in publication is a result of mimetic and normative pressures on less influential institutions to increase scholarly publication.

Morphew (2002) examined the characteristics of colleges that changed their names and became universities. He proposed three hypotheses to explain why these colleges changed, using institutional theory, resource dependency theory and an alternative explanation, respectively. His findings show that two thirds of the institutions that changed their names from colleges to universities were classified in the “moderately difficult” admissions category as defined by Peterson’s ranking. In other words, these institutions were not in the top selective categories. This finding supports hypothesis one of the study which was that “less selective postsecondary institutions were more likely than their more selective peers to change their name from college to university during the study period” (p. 214). In developing hypothesis one, Morphew (2002) used institutional

theory to argue that colleges change to universities to become more legitimate and to gain more prestige as a result of normative and mimetic pressures in the organizational field. Less selective universities with only moderately or minimally difficult admissions criteria are more likely to pursue a higher classification not so much because they serve a precise need but to adopt the formal structures of those institutions perceived to be more prestigious (Morphew, 2002).

The theory of institutional isomorphism (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983) offers one possible explanation for institutional changes as they respond to environmental pressures. These responses, however, are often stimulated by a need for legitimacy rather than a need for efficiency. The studies cited in this section illustrate that more and more institutions are becoming alike, as less legitimate institutions continue to “mimic” those which they perceive to be more legitimate. Legitimacy, however, does not automatically translate to efficiency but rather provides the perception of efficiency.

#### *Summary of Chapter*

This chapter introduced the state supervisory/state control systems of governance. It also provided a detailed description of governance of higher education in developing countries. Reference was also made to the importance of institutional autonomy and buffer institutions in lessening the grip of the state on institutions. Resource dependency theory was examined as a useful framework to examine why institutions in developing countries continue to be dominated by the state and how they manage their dependencies on finances from the state. Finally, institutional isomorphism was described for its usefulness in explaining how institutions deal with external pressures.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this case study was to understand governance of higher education in the developing country of Belize by examining how the system of governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize. The Study asked:

1. What is the structure and the system of governance of higher education in Belize?
2. How does the system of governance affect financial decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
3. How does the system of governance affect curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
4. How do market factors affect financial and curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?

### *Research Paradigm*

The study was guided by a qualitative paradigm. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (p. 15). The intent of this research paradigm is to understand a specific situation, group or interaction (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) propose that this method of inquiry “involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (p. 3). Some of the unique characteristics of this paradigm are that the researcher is the primary

instrument in data collection (Merriam, 1998), the data that emerge are reported in rich descriptions and are primarily the participants' words (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1998), and the focus of the research is on the process as well as the outcomes since the researcher is interested in the "how" of things (Merriam, 1988). Patton (1985) summarizes the nature of qualitative research in this way

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of the setting- what it means for participants to be in the setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting... The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)

Since the purpose of this study was to understand how the governance model in higher education in Belize affects financing and curricula in higher education from the perspectives of higher education administrators and policy makers, a qualitative methodology was both appropriate and justified. This study was guided by the constructivist paradigm which assumes that knowledge is constructed by the knower and respondent, there are multiple realities, and knowledge is gained through perspectives and meanings of people in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### *Research Design*

My intent in this study was to understand the specific or “bounded” (Merriam, p. 27) case of governance in Belize. A case study design is used when the phenomenon being studied is a single entity and has definite boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The single most distinguishing characteristic of the case study is its delimited nature (Merriam, 1998). This study was delimited to governance of higher education in Belize and included only those individuals who had some knowledge and experience of working in this system; therefore, a case study design was appropriate to use. This study was an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2005) that reflected my interest in understanding state governance of higher education in Belize. Case studies also employ different data collection strategies such as observations, interviews, and document analysis in order to provide “depth and breadth” of the case (Merriam, 1998, p.134).

Case studies have been used in several studies on governance in higher education (Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2002; Kotecha, 1999; Mok, 2001; Mok, 2005; Mwiria, 1999). In these studies a combination of interviews, observations, and document reviews are used to collect data. For this study, I used document reviews and interviews to collect data in order to get a description of how higher education governance in Belize affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education.

### *Case Description*

The purpose of this study was to understand governance of higher education in Belize and to understand how the system of governance affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education. Therefore, the case for this study was the governance system of higher education in Belize. Stake (2005) notes that an intrinsic case

study normally begins with the case already specified because the case is of interest before the study begins.

The higher education system in Belize is comprised of ten junior colleges (similar to community colleges in the United States): St. John's College Junior College, Muffles Junior College, Corozal Junior College, Sacred Heart Junior College, Ecumenical Junior College, Wesley Junior College, San Pedro Junior College, Seventh Day Adventist Junior College, Ecumenical Junior College, Escuela Mexico Junior College; one public university, The University of Belize; Galen University which is a private for-profit university; The University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies, and a few medical off-shores colleges. The higher education system also includes the Ministry of Education [MOE], which is responsible for developing and implementing policies for all levels of education in Belize. The Association of Tertiary Level Institutions [ATLIB] is the association that promotes higher education in Belize and works with the MOE through the Tertiary and Post Secondary Division in implementing policy directives. The membership of ATLIB is comprised of all junior college deans and assistant deans, the provost of UB, the President and Director of Curriculum at Galen University, a representative of the MOE, and a representative of the Belize Association of Principals of Secondary Schools.

#### *Selection of Participants*

The population in this study consisted of deans, presidents, and Ministry of Education officials. A purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. This method of sampling is based on the assumption that the study sample selected includes those who can contribute the most to the study (Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin,

2005). Patton (1990) justifies using a purposeful sampling because “*information-rich cases* are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus *purposeful sampling*” (p. 169, emphasis in original). The participants in this study included:

(1) The deans of six junior colleges; the deans of the junior colleges are responsible, in most cases, for finance and program offerings at the institution. The dean of Sacred Heart Junior College and the President of Sacred Heart Junior College were not used in the study since I am a former assistant academic dean of the college and have now assumed a position as dean at the College; thus, including Sacred Heart Junior College would have created further researcher bias. The Dean of San Pedro Junior College did not participate in the study. At St. John’s Junior College, finance is under the purview of the President; however, the President of St. John’s College Junior College declined to participate in the study.

(2) Current and past administrators of the University of Belize.

(3) The Chair of ATLIB; The Chair of ATLIB was selected since she works closely with all higher education administrators and the MOE. She was also able to provide ATLIB documents as well as intimate knowledge of the relationship between ATLIB and the MOE.

(4) Ministry of Education officials.

The administrators selected for the study shared the experiences of working in the higher education system in Belize and belonging to ATLIB. The Ministry of Education officials have been working in their capacities since 2003 and are very involved in setting policies and directives that come from the national government. Therefore, their views

gave some indication as to how policy makers perceive the system of governance in Belize and illuminated how similar or different administrators and government representatives perceive the governance structure in Belize.

### *Data Collection*

#### *Interviews*

Interviews are helpful to understand participants' perspectives and experiences and also in reconstructing events to which the researcher is not privy or in which the researcher did not participate (Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Qualitative interviews are described as "conversations in which the researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005. p. 4). The purpose of this "guided conversation" is to elicit information that will provide depth and detail to the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six junior college deans, one university president, one former university president, one former university provost, two Ministry of Education representatives, and the current Chair of ATLIB. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit higher education administrators' perspectives on governance in higher education in Belize, specifically in reference to curricula and financing. I included the two MOE representatives to get their views on governance of higher education and to explore the relationship between government and higher education in Belize. The semi-structured interviews accommodate the participants' responses and emerging viewpoints while providing some structure and direction to the interview (Merriam, 1998).

Prior to the interviews, I sent e-mail invitations to each of the selected participants asking them to participate in the study. Based on their responses, I then sent follow-up e-mails to request an interview on a specified date, place, and time and I also called each one to verify their participation and to inform them of the need to sign an IRB consent form. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form (approved by the Institutional Review Board) which described the purpose of the study, the promise of confidentiality, and the participant's consent, prior to the study. The interviews were formal conversations and took place at the interviewees' places of work so that the interviewees were comfortable but not too casual. Also, a formal conversation prevented me from injecting my feelings into the responses. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. In this way, I was able to preserve everything said in the interview for future data analysis (Merriam, 1998) and would not be hindered or distracted by trying to take detailed notes. I took brief notes during the interview to reflect my reactions to the participants' responses and capture the participant's non-verbal communication. The interview guides used reflected the research questions and asked the participants' for their perspectives on how curricula (academic program development) and financing are implemented, how the governance model affects curricula and financing, the role of the market in Belize, and how globalization affects higher education in Belize.

I conducted pilot interviews with two higher education administrators at Sacred Heart Junior College to determine which questions were confusing, misleading, or useless, and to gain some experience in using prompt. After the pilot interviews, I asked each participant to provide feedback on those questions they may have had difficulty

understanding. Both participants provided meaningful feedback in regards to the clarity of the questions and in one case, one participant suggested that I divide some questions into two parts. I transcribed the first pilot interview, coded and analyzed it. I also coded and analyzed the second interview using the list of codes from the first interview. At the end of the pilot phase, I revised my interview guide using the suggestions I had received from the participants as well as from my own analysis of the interviews. I recorded a list of codes and some themes that I would pursue in the interviews with the study participants. One round of approximately one-hour interviews was then conducted with each participant. I conducted brief follow-up interviews with four participants to clarify information or fill in gaps that I noted during the analysis.

#### *Document review*

Documents are an unobtrusive source of data easily available to the researcher (Merriam, 1998). Three types of documents are public records, personal documents, and physical material. In this study, I used public documents. These included government documents such as The University of Belize Act (2000), The National Accreditation Council Act (2004), the Draft Tertiary Revised Education Rules (2006), The Joint Education Staff Relations Council (2006), Position paper on CAPE by the CXC Committee, MOE Digest (2004-2005), MOE Action Plan (2005), and government directives via memoranda to higher education institutions. Minutes of recent ATLIB meetings and ATLIB correspondences to the MOE in reference to government directives; the Belize Higher Education Conference Report, and the Minister of Education's address to the Consortium of Belizean Education Cooperation [COBEC] were also reviewed.

I also used institutional data such as college catalogues, curricular documents, policy documents, institutional enrollment, and academic faculty qualifications. Unfortunately, most institutions have a confidentiality clause that guards data such as budgets and financial statements, therefore, those documents could not be used in the study. In fact, a recent memo from the Chief Education Officer in the Ministry of Education to higher education administrators reminds them that “the section of the Tertiary Education Management Information System [TEMIS] Form which covers institutional income and expenditure is seldom completed by tertiary education” (MEMO to higher education administrators, July 2007) even though the same institutions had requested that a study be conducted to determine the true cost of tertiary education. Since there is no law in Belize which forces institutions to divulge their budgets and financial statements, it is common practice for institutions to be very secretive about these documents.

#### *Data analysis*

The process of data collection and analysis are iterative and dynamic in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988), therefore, analysis of data commenced as soon as the first transcription of the interviews was completed. The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe the interview. After the first transcription was completed, I converted the text to a table with three columns using Microsoft word. Each row was a separate interview question. The first column was the interview question, the second was “notes to myself” and the third column was labeled “codes.” I read through the entire transcript and made notes in the margins and columns to register any particular observations, ideas, queries, and words that appeared often in the data (Merriam, 1998). I also used a

computer software program (Atlas ti) to conduct the analysis. I first transported the data from Microsoft Word to Atlas ti. I then divided the data into meaningful units. I defined a unit as “meaningful or potentially meaningful segment of data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). This unit of data must be potentially relevant to the study and must be the “smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 345). After separating the data into units, I read each unit and labeled each unit with a descriptive code based on key words or words that are repeated often or that summarized the meaning of the text. A list of these codes was stored in the computer program. The next data set was analyzed the same way using the stored list of codes. At the end of the third analysis, I analyzed for recurring patterns. Pattern coding reduces the data into smaller analytic units, encourages data analysis during data collection, helps to focus future data collection, and helps the researcher to understand what is happening (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These patterns formed the initial themes that were used to analyze the other data sets. To test the efficacy of the emerging themes, I compared them to the broad headings of financial decision-making, curricular decision-making, and market forces. After establishing the initial themes, I tested the themes in subsequent interviews and searched for disconfirming data. After all the data were collected, I modified the themes accordingly.

I used classical content analysis (Merriam, 1998) to analyze both the institutional and public documents such The University of Belize Act (2000), The CAPE Act (2004), The National Accreditation Act (2005), the Draft Revised Education Rules(2006), government directives via memoranda to higher education institutions, minutes of recent ATLIB meetings, ATLIB correspondences to the MOE in reference to government

directives, reports or presentations at the recent National Higher Education Conference, speeches, and other public statements. I coded the data and constructed categories that reflected the documents' contents. These categories were then compared with those of the emerging interview data.

### *Verification of Data*

Guba and Lincoln (1985) offer four means whereby trustworthiness of a study may be obtained. These include “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 301). For this study, I employed techniques to ensure that my findings were credible, transferable, and confirmable.

### *Credibility*

For the purpose of this study, I used triangulation and member checking to ensure that my findings and interpretations were credible. I accomplished some measure of triangulation by using interviews with both administrators and Ministry of Education policy makers and by analyzing a wide range of documents in order to obtain a variety of perspectives on governance. I engaged in member checking by using several different probes during the course of the interviews. For example, clarification probes elicited explanations for something that was not clear to me (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), elaboration probes asked for more details or explanation of a particular concept which seems to be important to the study (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), and evidence probes generated specific examples for broad generalizations (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I also conducted follow-up interviews when necessary to include missing data or to verify or clarify previous information.

I also conducted peer debriefing defined as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p. 308). The peer debriefing process allowed an individual unrelated to the study to conduct an evaluation of the study by reviewing the data and asking questions, particularly related to the findings. The peer debriefer for this study was a Director of International Study at a Florida Community College who presently chairs the Consortium of Belizean Education and Cooperation [COBEC], has worked with Belizean institutions for many years, and has a good working knowledge of the higher education system. In conducting the peer debriefing session, I provided a sample of my transcripts, a thorough explanation of my data analysis procedures, and a detailed account of how I arrived at the different themes and conclusions.

### *Transferability*

In a qualitative study, the researcher provides “thick description” in order to enable someone to determine whether the findings from one study can be compared to those of another (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). For this study, the report contains thick rich description of both “substantive” and “methodological” considerations (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p. 361). The report contains an explanation of the problem, a thorough description of the context of the study, and of the findings and analysis. Verbatim texts are taken from interviews with higher education administrators and Ministry of Education officials who took part in the study. Each higher education administrator and Ministry of Education official is quoted several times in chapter 4 of the study. More of the verbatim texts come from the junior college administrators since they made up 50% of the

participants with UB and Ministry officials making up the other 50%. The report includes as well a thorough explanation of my biases and how they may affect the findings, a detailed description of the methods used to collect data, and the different measures I have employed to enhance trustworthiness of the study.

### *Confirmability*

One of the techniques to ensure confirmability is the audit trail (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). For this study I saved electronic files of interviews, electronic and paper copies of interview transcripts, personal interview notes, summaries of transcripts, copies of memos. I also kept an “audit trail” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p.319) which included a list of codes, and the tentative write-ups of coding and thematic schemes. I also recorded all data collection procedures, including dates of interviews, participant initials, time, and length of interview as well records of my own notes during interviews.

### *Summary of Chapter*

This chapter described and justified the use of the case study design by outlining the characteristics of a case study, providing examples of its use in other studies on governance, and demonstrating how the nature of this study conforms with that of a case study. The chapter also described the characteristics of the case (higher education governance), and the selection and the characteristics of the study participants. The chapter concluded with a description of the data collection and analysis procedures, and verification procedures.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussions

This chapter presents the findings from both interview and document reviews in accordance with the four research questions presented in chapter one of the study:

1. What is the structure and the system of governance of higher education in Belize?
2. How does the system of governance affect financial decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
3. How does the system of governance affect curricular decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?
4. How do market factors affect financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize?

Findings and discussions are presented in sections under their relevant research question.

*Question One: What is the structure and the system of governance of higher education in Belize?*

Higher Education in Belize is comprised of ten junior colleges, one public university, one private for-profit university, the University of the West Indies Center for Continuing Studies, and a few offshore medical institutions. For the purpose of this study, only the public institutions that fall under the control of the Ministry of Education [MOE] are included. To explore question 1, which asks “What is the structure and the system of governance of higher education in Belize?” findings have been classified into five sections. The first section addresses the role of the government of Belize in higher

education; the second addresses the role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education [MOE] in higher education. The third section describes the higher education system; the fourth section addresses the role of the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions [ATLIB], and the last section addresses the role of politics in higher education.

### *The Role of the Government in Higher Education in Belize*

The role of the government in respect to higher education in Belize is to provide salary grants for administrative, academic and support staff at all junior colleges and a yearly subvention to the University of Belize. This role was highlighted by a prominent Ministry of Education official:

government has an important obligation and important responsibility to provide as much support to education as possible so I don't think there will ever be a day when the government does not have to provide resources for education. (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

In addition, the government provides financial assistance to students who meet certain merit criteria. Funding for junior colleges is designated to cover approximately 70 percent of salaries. The disbursement is made on a monthly basis and is calculated based on the total salary bill of each institution and as approved by MOE. Funding for the University of Belize is determined by the Ministry of Finance with input from the Minister of Education. This funding is provided based on the University's budget request for an entire academic year as approved by the Board of Trustees of the University and ultimately approved by the Cabinet which is comprised of government ministers. In addition to its yearly budget, the University receives funding for financial assistance to students through the MOE.

### *The Role and Responsibilities of the Ministry of Education*

The MOE is responsible for the entire education system and the Tertiary and Post Secondary Services Unit of the MOE is charged with the supervision of higher education in Belize. This unit has five main areas of responsibilities: (1) selection and monitoring of government scholarships (2) financial disbursements to all institutions and scholarship recipients (3) development of policies and regulations for tertiary education, (4) international representation, and (5) development and implementation of projects. The unit, however, has only two staff members, who carry out the financial responsibilities of the unit.

Several of the administrators in the study mentioned that the “unit” is not really a unit but a tertiary desk that deals only with finances. A ministry official verified that “the tertiary desk facilitates the movement of funds, paying salaries, etc” (face- to- face interview, March 15, 2007). Another ministry official referred to a “tertiary unit” but was quick to add that the unit is not where the ministry would like it to be. “The structure of the MOE as it currently stands is not fully able and prepared to handle all of the issues that arise that are related to tertiary education” (face- to- face interview, March 23, 2007).

One former higher education administrator regretted the fact that there is:

no provision within the MOE with human resources that are designated for higher education. It’s not surprising, not even coincidental, that the phrase used is a higher education ‘desk.’ They don’t even talk about an officer...That is very instructive. (face- to- face interview, February 20, 2007)

To understand the organization of the tertiary unit, one must first know that higher education is a recent phenomenon in Belize, dating back to the early 1950s with the opening of the first Teacher Training College. The first sixth form (now called junior college) opened in the early 1950s, offering studies beyond the secondary school curricula. The turning point in Belize higher education was in 1966 when St. John's Sixth Form's proposal to offer an associate degree modeled on the American junior college (community college) was accepted by the government of Belize. The programs were geared toward preparing students to matriculate into baccalaureate degree programs at American universities. Since the opening of the St. John's College Sixth Form (later known as St. John's College Junior College), a number of other junior colleges have been established. Currently, there are ten junior colleges, two of which were opened in August 2007. There is also, the University of Belize which was established in 2000 when five government institutions were amalgamated. To date, however, the tertiary sector remains very small, especially in comparison to the primary and secondary school systems. In the academic year 2005-2006, there were 288 primary schools, 50 secondary schools, and 17 tertiary and post-secondary institutions (including off-shore institutions) (Statistical Digests, 2005-2006, MOE). In the academic year 2005-2006, there were 64,516 students enrolled at the primary level; 16,696 at the secondary level, and 4,854 enrolled at the junior college and university level (Statistical Digests, 2005- 2006, MOE). In the academic year 2006- 2007, 2,594 students were enrolled in eight junior colleges and 2,431 were enrolled at the University of Belize. In the academic year 2007-2008, 2,739 students were enrolled in 10 junior colleges and 2,341 at the University of Belize.

This author believes that historically and even today, the primary and secondary school systems in Belize have been more developed than the higher education system for three main reasons: (a) policies of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank in the first half of the 1990s encouraged developing countries to strengthen their primary and secondary systems much to the detriment of higher education, which was considered a luxury (Chapman & Austin, 2002; Tilak, 2003), (b) many in the country still believe that higher education is a private good and should be financed by the individual who will enjoy the benefit). As one higher education administrator mentioned, “people say tertiary education is for the individual so the individual should pay for that education” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). A Ministry of Education official noted that many individuals have made the point that higher education is a private good and should be subsidized by the individual not the government (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007) and (c) only 2.5 percent of the population pursue tertiary or higher education (Chan, 2005).

One Ministry of Education official showed clear preference for the primary and secondary school systems even though that individual admitted that higher education is important:

If we were living in a society where we had universal access to secondary even universal access to primary, I can see where the government can look at improving the higher level, but because we still have that huge gap with respect to access at the secondary, it is burdensome to have to carry such a heavy load for the higher level sector. (face-to-face-interview, March 15, 2007)

Another official in the MOE stated that higher education is both a public and private good. The official disagreed with the extreme notions that government must either subsidize 100% of the cost of higher education or not subsidize higher education and instead use its money to support primary and secondary schools. The official suggested that there has to be a balance between the two positions in which government continues to play an important role in higher education, and families and communities are willing to make the sacrifice for the higher education of their children. When asked however, whether the message of this balance is getting across to all stakeholders in tertiary education, that official suggested that there is still a long way to go in getting this message across. Another ministry official noted that “we need to concentrate on strengthening our lower levels” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). Some higher education administrators, however, are of the view that the government has to do much more in strengthening higher education. Undoubtedly, there is much to be done before higher education can occupy a prominent position in the hierarchy of education in Belize, especially since higher education remains a small sector. One higher education administrator opined that “the ministry never thought that education would have reached a point where we would be ready for higher levels” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007); consequently, structures were never put in place to address the needs of the tertiary sector.

Several higher education administrators in the study pointed out that the individual who deals with tertiary issues is the director of school support services and also deals with issues affecting primary and secondary schools. One administrator concluded that “the Minister doesn’t have anybody around him in the ministry who could

give him good advice to guide tertiary education; that's a ministry of primary and secondary" (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Another higher education administrator noted that "there isn't a tertiary education specialist or a tertiary education person and participation from the current person has been in trying to work with ATLIB in completing some tertiary education rules governing the administration of junior colleges" (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). However, MOE and ATLIB documents show that these tertiary rules remain at a draft stage even after there were several working sessions that included ATLIB members and a British consultant hired by the MOE. Even while some participants pointed out that the officer in charge of the tertiary desk has been very efficient in carrying out the financial responsibilities of the MOE, they mentioned that the same individual also has other roles to play in the ministry. Consequently, that individual has limited time to be active in ATLIB and COBEC (Consortium for Belizean Educational Cooperation) and has little knowledge of the movement towards accreditation for higher education in Belize or the global thrust of higher education.

The perceived lack of expertise in the MOE creates a vacuum in leadership to guide the development of tertiary education. As one ministry official suggested, "on the development side of tertiary education, we have little input and that is an area that needs to be addressed" (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). In the past five years, the tertiary and post secondary division has had at least four different directors. In more recent years, the sector has been without any official leadership. One higher education administrator strongly suggested that the minister of education has to be a strong leader and receive strong support from the technocrats in the ministry. But he asks, "if you have

a tertiary education desk but no one at the desk, who is going to advise the minister on higher education? Who is going to insist that you have the data from which you will formulate policy?”(face-to face-interview, February 20. 2007).

*Development of higher education policies.* Higher education policies are determined and ratified by MOE officials sometimes with the participation of higher educator administrators and other education officials. But college and university leaders complain that this participation is often limited to providing feedback rather than input in the formulation of policies. For example, the move towards adopting the Caribbean Advance Proficiency Exam [CAPE] curriculum was a government decision which was communicated to the junior colleges through the Ministry of Education. One Ministry of Education official said that the CAPE curriculum was not imposed on the junior colleges, but that:

a policy decision was taken both at the national and regional levels to embrace CAPE and to institutionalize CAPE, but we do so not at the expense of an institution’s ability to run other programs. Our policy is that CAPE should be a fundamental part of your curriculum and examination processes...It’s a policy decision and one that is in the interest of Belize. (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

One junior college administrator whose institution was not offering A Levels (the British counterpart of the CAPE) stated quite clearly that “CAPE was imposed on us. This is one example of how government exercises control over institutions” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another junior college administrator whose institution was offering A Levels before the CAPE was introduced mentioned that they switched to CAPE after it

was “announced that junior colleges were expected to kind of implement the CAPE program, although no one from the Ministry of Education has come to say how or ask how we are implementing it” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). An additional policy in regards to CAPE was the switching of the Belize Open Scholarship from A Level passes to CAPE passes, thus, those institutions that traditionally prepared students for A Levels and competed for the prestigious Belize Open Scholarship, had little choice but to switch to CAPE criteria in their curricula.

Another example of policy development and implementation at the ministry level was the more recent National Accreditation Act of 2004. An inter-ministerial committee made comprising MOE personnel and chief executive officers from other ministries drafted the National Accreditation Act. In fact, a key person in ATLIB and other ATLIB members noted that the national accreditation act was copied from a commonwealth template that was given to all Caribbean Community [CARICOM] countries and revised to fit the Belizean context. One higher education administrator discussed the substantive difference between higher education administrators participating in writing the draft and providing input on the finished draft:

If you participate in the draft, it’s different from being invited to look at a finished draft because there is a lot of discussion, debate and, yes, effort and energy that goes into drafting. If you are invited to provide feedback you cannot change much of what is already there. (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

Other higher education administrators noted that ATLIB was invited to provide feedback only after members of ATLIB learned of the existence of the policy document. A prominent member of ATLIB recalled the manner in which ATLIB became involved:

I got a copy of the bill by chance from someone at the ministry and someone in ATLIB made copies and we had a special meeting to read and decide how to respond to it. We approached the ministry and asked if we could respond to the bill before it reached the House. We then had a meeting with ministry personnel and suggested to them how the bill could be revised.

(face-to-face interview, March 20, 2007)

Another higher education administrator recalled ATLIB making a presentation right before the National Accreditation act was passed into law asking for 11 changes in the draft. Only some of the recommendations were accepted. “One of ATLIB’s recommendations was that the Executive Director of the National Accreditation Council not be directly appointed by the minister and that was not changed” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). In fact, Part Two Clause Five of the Act states that “There shall be an Executive Director of the Council appointed by the Minister after consultation with the Board of the Council” (National Accreditation Council Act, 2004, p. 751).

Another higher education administrator suggested that since government officials drafted the Act, it was natural that the minister would be given the final control. “He who paints the tiger sketches it in his own way” (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007). In fact, the Act states that “the Council shall report to the Minister as often as may be required” (National Accreditation Council Act, 2004, p. 759) and “the minister may, after consultation with the chairperson give to the council in writing such directions of a

general policy nature as appear to the Minister to be necessary in the public interest.”(National Accreditation Council Act, 2004, p. 759). The above clauses are almost identical to those in the UB Act which allow the minister to appoint the Board of Trustees and give the board directives of a general nature.

The drafting of the National Accreditation Act occurred much like the drafting of the Tertiary Education Rules, in which a MOE consultant drafted the rules and invited ATLIB members to provide feedback. More recently, the ministry has commissioned a Joint Education Staff Relations Council [JESRC] to put in place rules governing all educational institutions. The mission of the Council is to:

- (a) secure the greatest measure of cooperation between the government and general managers of primary and secondary schools as joint employers, and the Belize National Teachers Union in matters affecting the teaching profession with the primary view of increasing the efficiency in the teaching profession as well as the well being of those employed and (b) to provide a machinery for dealing with problems of a general nature and to offer solutions and ideas that may be beneficial to our educational system and the teaching profession by bringing together the experience and view points of representatives of the various sectors of the teaching profession (Constitution of the JESRC, 2007, p.).

ATLIB was not invited to the inaugural meeting and the minutes of that meeting record ATLIB as being absent. Those minutes were revised at the second meeting on January 15, 2007 to reflect the fact that ATLIB was given a late invitation to join the Council and was now being invited to have representation on the Council. The Council requested that ATLIB make recommendations on several points including salary scales for tertiary

teachers, a standardized school year for ATLIB schools, the JESRC as a recruiting and selection body at the tertiary level, and a staffing formula, among others. Recent minutes of ATLIB meetings show that ATLIB members reject the ideas presented by the Council noting that the move to standardize all levels of education in Belize is counterproductive to higher education. They instead favor the drafting of a national policy for higher education and a complementary higher education Act because they believe that higher education should be treated differently from primary and secondary schools (ATLIB minutes, February 19, 2007).

*Institutional autonomy and institutional accountability.* Good governance is created when there is a balance between institutional autonomy and institutional accountability (Hall and Symes, 2005). However, both institutional autonomy and institutional accountability must be understood in the context of the higher education environment operating in individual countries (Neave and van Vught, 1994). In Belize, several higher education administrators and Ministry of Education officials suggested that higher education is autonomous because they can “do what they want” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007) with little accountability to the public or government from which they receive most of their funding. One Ministry of Education official noted that “the Ministry has to develop its tertiary unit otherwise institutions will continue to throw out what they feel is best for them. One prominent MOE official noted that:

institutions have every right to be autonomous but that autonomy must come with a corresponding level of accountability. Some institutions want to tell us, ‘just give us the cheque and leave us alone’ but that accountability doesn’t mean only reporting how you spent the money but demonstrating value for money, for

example, in the performance of your students. (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

While this view is characteristic of government officials throughout the world, the context of such comment must be noted. In Belize, there is an absence of guidelines or structures to ensure this accountability. One junior college administrator suggested that “there is no accountability right now. It takes institutional will to want to improve but there is nobody saying these are the rules you have to follow” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). As one Ministry of Education official summarized it, “the rules are in place for up to secondary, but there are none addressing the higher level sector and so some rules will be adopted from secondary to tertiary, but there is no manner of enforcing them.” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). One higher education administrator complained that “whenever there are problems at the tertiary level, it’s the secondary rules that have to be used to solve the problem. So the secondary rules are used when they are convenient and not used when they are not convenient” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). For example, primary and secondary school teachers are entitled to “long leave” (four months of paid vacation) after they have taught for 15 consecutive years at a government or government-aided institution. This privilege is not extended to tertiary teachers because it is not convenient at the tertiary level for teachers to be absent from work for such an extended period of time. In another context, because there is no separate pay scale for tertiary teachers at the junior college level, secondary schools pay scales are used to remunerate teachers at the junior colleges.

A MOE official noted that “any plan for higher education has to make provisions to hold institutions accountable” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). The lack of

rules governing higher education promulgates the notion that institutions are not seen as being or wanting to be accountable to the state. In his address to COBEC, the Minister of Education said, “waste and inefficiencies are enemies of your institutions and must be regarded as such. This requires greater planning, enhanced administrative capacity and improved accountability supported by clear penalties” (Fonseca, 2007, p. 2). Another ministry official mentioned that many colleges do not feel the need to communicate with the ministry of education in respect to new program offerings or the increase of tuition and other fees (face-to-face interview, March 15).

But one higher education administrator pointed out that the ministry is not accountable to higher education so there is no accountability any at all (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). Another higher education administrator described the lack of institutional accountability by saying, “we have been allowed to operate almost in our own little world with very little interference from outside” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Another higher education administrator noted, “whenever you talk about accountability, institutions take it to mean that they will be told what to do and they balk at that” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). But most administrators agreed that the MOE “needs to make provisions to allow for accountability without taking away autonomy completely” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Some higher education administrators also suggested that higher education institutions are neither autonomous nor accountable. One higher education administrator suggested that the “junior colleges have neither autonomy nor is there the internal drive for accountability or the external forces that are asking for accountability” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). One higher education administrator blamed the lack of institutional autonomy on the fact that

junior colleges are still treated as extensions of high schools which are heavily controlled by MOE (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). For example, the revised draft tertiary education rules were developed using the primary and secondary rules and policies. Those rules that could be applied to tertiary were kept; others were revised to accommodate the major differences in the sectors. In respect to financing and curricula at the tertiary level, the MOE seems to be following the primary and secondary policies for junior college financing and curricula. For example, financing of salaries at the secondary level is also calculated at 70 percent of the total salary bill. Since primary and secondary schools follow a set curriculum for standardization purposes, the Ministry of Education has used that as a justification for the standardization of curricula at the tertiary level.

*The higher education system.* In defining the system of higher education one higher education administrator said, “it’s a system in my mind; its not structured, it’s haphazard, it’s *ad hoc*, it’s eclectic, and it borrows from different systems... it doesn’t fall under any general guidance” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another said “it’s a system of individual schools with a Minister of Education in an office” (face-to-face interview, March 20, 2007). Another higher education administrator referred to the system as:

a non-system- what passes as our system is actually colleges that have grown mostly out of high schools. It’s one that has merely grown. When it’s too big we just create an extension, but we have not planned.

(face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

Here the reference is to the creation of sixth forms (junior colleges) from existing high schools that have become too large to effectively and efficiently manage. The

consequence of this unplanned system of higher education is that some colleges share infrastructure with their high school counterparts, often on one existing campus. Others have their own infrastructure but are managed by one institutional board, while others have their separate infrastructure and institutional boards. This situation creates inequalities since many stakeholders (parents, students, and faculty) may perceive those institutions that have neither their own infrastructure nor institutional board to be merely extensions of high schools with little room to develop a college culture. Several higher education administrators cited the need for their junior colleges to be separated from the related high schools in order to establish their own identities. One higher education administrator put it this way, “we have to stop seeing the junior college as part of the high school. That is a psychological impact that is perpetuating. We are no longer sixth forms. We are junior colleges” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007).

Beside the psychological impact, there is the financial impact when colleges in some instances share revenues and expenditures with their high school counterparts. In discussing finance, one higher education administrator insisted that:

the financial managers have to recognize that things have changed.

Junior colleges are independent entities that should operate independently.

Having a junior college should not be a profit-making venture for high school principals. (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007)

In other circumstances the opposite is true. The high school has actually subsidized the establishment of the junior college until such time as the junior college has become viable. In either situation, however, most of the junior colleges are still treated as extensions of their high schools and their management activities are similar to those of

high schools. In addition, most of the junior colleges operate under one institutional board along with their related high school and this was cited by some as a hindrance to the development of the junior college. One higher education administrator expressed frustration about going to board meetings because “people get engaged in these conversations that have absolutely nothing to do with the future of the junior college” (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007). Of the six junior colleges in the study, five have only one institutional board that manages both the high school and junior college. The other junior college has only in the past years established separate boards for each division of its institution.

Higher education in Belize is affected by the fact that institutions do not collaborate with each other very often. One higher education administrator described the higher education system as one in which “everybody does his/her own thing and you are in your own world and thinking what you are doing is great and there isn’t much collaboration” (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007).

Another higher education administrator mentioned that:

each institution is doing its own thing because there is nothing that will mandate us. We are in ATLIB and we collaborate, but there is the situation in which an institution can decide we don’t need to follow that and there is nothing to stop it. (face- to- face interview, March 6, 2007)

Apart from doing their own thing, institutions seem to be heading in different directions.

One higher education administrator lamented that:

UB is going in one direction and the others are going in another direction.  
If ATLIB was all going in one direction, then fine, but I am not certain

that the junior colleges are all going in one direction. (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

In fact, it is unclear whether individual institutions have any kind of strategic plan in place to shape their futures. When the question of having a strategic plan was raised with the higher education administrators in the study, responses varied from an emphatic “yes we have one” to “it’s under review.” At the ATLIB level, minutes of the February 20, 2007 meeting note that a strategic plan would have been finalized in July 2007. The University of Belize has been working on its strategic plan since 2004 and it remains in draft stage, even though the Board of Trustees has ratified it. One former administrator revealed that it was the UB Board that made the decision to stop the strategic plan and wait for the national higher education conference in September 2006.

*The vision for higher education.* In the last two decades, greater emphasis has been placed on higher education in both developed and developing countries (St. George, 2006). In both these contexts, higher education is recognized to be a driver of economic development and the growth of national economies. In 1998 at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, higher education was declared to be important to the “sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole to be preserved, reinforced, and further expanded”

(p. 2). In 2000, after decades of linking primary and secondary education to the economic development of developing countries, the World Bank revised its position on higher education stating that:

tertiary education institutions support knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and poverty reduction by (a) training a qualified and adaptable labor

force (b) generating new knowledge; and (c) building the capacity to access existing stores of global knowledge and to adapt that knowledge to local use.

Tertiary education institutions are unique in their ability to integrate and create synergy among these three dimensions...The norms, values, attitudes, ethics, and knowledge that tertiary institutions can impart to students constitute is this supposed to “contribute” to the social capital necessary to construct healthy civil societies and socially cohesive cultures. (p.6)

The development and direction of higher education in any national context depends on the interaction among key stakeholders such as students, faculty, administrators, state administrators, politicians, and the market (St. George, 2006). In Belize in the more recent years, much discussion has taken place on the importance of higher education, but little has occurred to demonstrate its importance. In a recent address to COBEC, the Minister of Education remarked that:

there is a re-awakening taking place among our young people reflected in a growing awareness and consciousness of the critical need to be fully engaged in the growth and development of our nation. Attendant to this re-awakening is an increasing appreciation and understanding of the fundamental role of education in achieving that growth and development.

(Fonseca, February 8, 2007, p. 1)

This re-awakening extends to educators involved in higher education, who in more recent years, have endeavored to initiate discussions on the need for higher education to be recognized as a national priority. A good example is the 2006 National Conference on Higher Education convened by ATLIB to raise awareness of the importance of higher

education to the economic, social, cultural, and political development of Belize and to address key issues such as financing and governance. The outcomes of this conference are being used as background information to develop a national policy on higher education.

Higher education in Belize does not have a higher education policy or a higher education act. Even though several efforts have been made in the past to develop a higher education policy, none of the efforts has been formally recognized as a policy (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). More recently, the Minister of Education appointed a Working Group and a Steering Group to develop the higher education policy; to date, however, the work has not been completed. An MOE official confirmed that the policy would have been completed in June 2007; however, at a meeting on May 14, 2007, the Minister of Education requested that ATLIB make recommendations to the higher education policy Working Group. On July 2 and 3, ATLIB held a special working session to draft recommendations to be included in the National Policy for Higher Education (ATLIB minutes, July 10, 2007). Those recommendations are included in a position paper that ATLIB will submit to the Ministry of Education; however, at this time, the position paper has not been submitted.

The development of a national policy for higher education is one of the most urgent responsibilities of the Ministry of Education. As one higher administrator remarked:

because there is no higher education policy, higher education is just floating around. There is a new paradigm in respect to the public good of higher education

but there is no competence in the Ministry of Education to address that new paradigm at a policy level. (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007)

Because the Ministry has limited capacity to accomplish this task, the responsibility is being relegated to ATLIB despite the fact that ATLIB does not have the official authority to devise a national policy for higher education.

### *The Relationship between Higher Education and the Ministry of Education*

Higher education has only begun to blossom in the more recent years with the establishment of junior colleges across the country, the University of Belize, Galen University, and other offshore medical institutions. The establishment and, more recently, the strong advocacy for higher education by the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions of Belize (ATLIB) has provoked discussion of the importance of higher education in Belize. One higher education administrator interviewed for this study summarized the role of ATLIB as filling the gap that exists because of the lack of expertise in higher education at the ministry level. However, ATLIB is a voluntary association, “an interest group pushing for higher education issues” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). One higher education administrator mentioned that “In the last three or four years the MOE has come to see ATLIB as a structured and forceful entity” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007), but ATLIB holds no formal authority to regulate, manage, or develop policies for higher education. ATLIB is essentially the higher education system in Belize since it comprises all ten junior colleges, UB, and Galen University. The relationship between MOE and higher education is essentially the relationship between MOE and ATLIB (face-to-face interview, March 22, 2007).

One higher education administrator described the relationship between the MOE and ATLIB as “tenuous.” There are people that are trying to forge a relationship with the Ministry of Education, and then I think there are those who don’t really care and people in the Ministry who have an ‘iffy’ attitude to ATLIB” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). One MOE official described the relationship with ATLIB by saying:

we have been able to see the shortcomings but we don’t want to rock the boat yet so we enjoy a good relationship with higher education. The relationship may not be so good in the future when we have to change things to improve the system.

But we need to rock the boat more in the interest of the public.

Most administrators believe that the relationship between the two groups remains cordial but insufficient to really forge the development of higher education. In fact, one MOE official characterized the ministry’s relationship with higher education as:

fairly good but we have constraints and challenges. The Ministry of Education itself does not have the sufficient capacity to deal with higher education. We have a well developed structure for liaising with primary and secondary institutions; that structure, however, is not in place for us to communicate properly with tertiary institutions and our relationship with higher education is a long way from where we would want it to be.

(face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

### *The Role of Politics in Higher Education*

A study conducted on higher education in developing countries notes that “the direct involvement of politicians has generally politicized higher education widening the possibilities for corruption, nepotism, and political opportunism” (TFHES, p. 53) and

lessening the autonomy of institutions. In Belize, politicians and politics dominate all levels of education, but at the higher levels, the dominance is more subtle. An MOE official has publicly asserted that “politics has no place in education” but privately has confessed that “it is difficult to keep it out.”(face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). In higher education in Belize, politicians and politics are prominent in areas such as the establishment and financial assistance to colleges and the appointment of important university personnel.

*Establishment of and financial assistance to institutions.* Since there are no rules and regulations officially in place for the establishment of tertiary institutions, the opening of colleges seems to be very much arbitrary and often based on promises that politicians make to their constituencies prior to being elected into office. One higher education administrator explained that “in many cases in Belize, the opening of an institution was really based on an agreement with a politician” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). A good example of the lack of rules regarding the opening of junior colleges is the recent controversy over the establishment of a junior college in the northern part of the country. One ATLIB member mentioned that the Minister of Education had agreed that there would be no new junior colleges in the near future until a higher education policy was completed; however, it was made as a verbal agreement and not as a policy (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). Issues of the *Amandala Newspaper* for May 2007 contained advertisements addressed to prospective students and faculty for the opening of a new junior college in the Corozal District. In addressing this issue, one higher education administrator said, “the opening of the junior college has to do with a politician opening a school in an election year because he promised it” (face-to-

face interview, March 13, 2007). A higher education administrator suggested that “the opening of another junior college does create more access to students but I think we need to be wiser in how we allocate our resources and be careful that we are not just duplicating efforts” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another administrator also decried the opening of junior colleges for “political gain when the quality is below standard” (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007). In the case of the new junior college, one higher education administrator suggested that there was no fear of competition since the curriculum at the new junior college is more vocational but expressed the fear that the new institution may eventually branch into academic fields that are already being catered to in several other institutions (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007). Another administrator reflected that more junior colleges in Belize means that there are fewer resources available for existing colleges and this could seriously affect the quality of existing colleges (face-to-face- interview, March 9, 2007). A more recent edition of the *Amandala Newspaper* contained advertisements for faculty for yet another junior college that commenced operation in August 2007 in the village of Independence.

The promise to establish the University of Belize in order to maximize resources by amalgamating five government institutions and diversifying the curricular offerings was made by the People’s United Party prior to the general elections of 1998. Upon assuming office in 1998, the promise was fulfilled, and the following year, preparations for the establishment of the University began under the auspices of a Secretariat. But some involved in the planning at that time now say that the plan was wrought with missteps and failures that haunt the University of Belize even today. One former UB administrator remembers that the policy to amalgamate the five institutions was

announced in October and each institution was presumably given the opportunity to discuss it internally. At the time of such announcement the University College of Belize [UCB] felt that:

that kind of direction fitted well with where we saw ourselves in the middle and long term planning but not in the short term because we thought we would do it slowly and thoughtfully. We would do it incrementally since that is how UCB would have preferred it. My view is that politicians tend to think in five year cycles. They are elected to five year terms and so the thinking of the ministry was that they would do it in one big decision. (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

A former higher education administrator of UB concurred with the above sentiment saying that “the President’s vision was that we would not wait until the government tells us what to do. We were the closest thing to a university so we would work with other schools to build a full-fledge university.”(face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007).

Unfortunately, the government did not wait to get directions from UCB and despite objections from many educators and institutions that were to be amalgamated, the planning of the merger proceeded. About a year and half before the inauguration of the University of Belize, a secretariat with two co-directors was appointed; however, the co-directorship failed and a single director was appointed, and that also failed (face-to-face-interview, February 20, 2007). In February 2000, just seven months prior to the inauguration of UB, a third director was appointed. This meant that the there was now less than seven months to plan because the University was to open on August 1, 2000. One director of the secretariat recounts that:

there was less than one year of solid planning. That was a big weakness. That planning showed me that none of the savings that government thought they were going to effect were going to be realized; in fact, it would cost the government more, at least in the first instance, since there was need for start up monies. (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

On August 1, 2000, the University of Belize was inaugurated. Two years later, the government announced that it would cut the University's budget from 10 million to nine million. Later it was cut to seven million; then increased to seven and one half million and now eight million for the academic year 2007-2008. The tuition fee at the time of inauguration was fixed by the government. To some that was a mistake because UB could not survive on such a low cost of tuition. One former UB administrator suggested "that was an unfortunate decision that government made; again there is some politics in that; it was done in order to buy the good will on the part of the students and their parents" (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007).

When UB came into existence it was governed by the University of Belize Act. The UB Act gives the power to the Minister of Education to give directions of a general nature to the Board of Trustees and allows for the membership of several government-appointed representatives. A former UB administrator explained that the clause that gives the Minister of Education control of UB was also present in the UCB Act, albeit in a milder form and pointed out that:

if there was any area in which the two political parties (PUP and UDP) agreed, that clause was it. They both wanted that clause there. I think both political parties subscribe to the kind of legislative culture that we have inherited from

the British. Almost in every Act the minister is very powerful. Perhaps the British have moved away from that, but we have remained.

(face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

When the UB Act was first proposed, the university community bitterly opposed the clause (Tun, 2004) but, in the end, the “clause prevailed even in its draconian form” (higher education administrator, face-to-face interview, February 20, 2004). Even though two of the UB administrators interviewed for this study say that such clause has not been invoked, the fact that it is there raises the concern that the Minister can invoke that clause (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). In fact, more recently, the President’s Cabinet at the University of Belize recommended that the clause be revised and the composition of the Board, with such heavy government representation, be reviewed (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). One UB official stated that “there was strong sentiment by many members of the University community that the heavy presence of government appointees on the Board was intentional, designed to do the bidding of the government” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). One former UB administrator provided a metaphorical comparison of the political interference at the now defunct University College of Belize [UCB] and UB:

UCB developed under both the People’s United Party and the United Democratic Party governments and the principle that operated was “benign neglect.” Benign in the sense that they voted a certain amount of money to us and they left us alone, so we developed mechanisms to develop our higher education institution. Under UB, the principle was no longer “benign neglect”- it was a “Bear Hug”- more money from the

government but there was far more government participation in decision-making.  
(face- to- face interview, February 20, 2007)

*The appointment of key university personnel.* Throughout much of Africa the President or Prime Minister is also the university chancellor, who has the ultimate authority to appoint key university administrators such as the Vice-Chancellor (Bjarason & Lund, 1999; Kirby-Harris, 2003; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). In Belize, the President of the University of Belize is officially appointed by the Prime Minister (UB Act, 2000). A former president of UB was officially removed from that position in June 2007; however, no official announcement was made to the university community even though the media were reporting the removal of the president. At a press conference held in April 2007, the Prime Minister responded to a question by a reporter and officially announced that a new president had been appointed effective June 1, 2007. It was also disclosed that the former president, whose contract as President of UB expires in 2008, would be selected to head a secretariat to oversee the development of higher education in Belize.

The removal of this UB president is not without precedence. In December 2001, the UB president at the time was removed from the position in a similar manner and was redirected to oversee the African/Mayan History Project. The removal paved the way for the now former president of UB. In the University's seven year history, it has had three presidents, four provosts, and two interim provosts. While the appointment of the president of UB is a responsibility of the Prime Minister, the deans of the junior colleges are appointed and if necessary, dismissed by their respective managing boards.

At a different level of management, the Executive Director of the National Accreditation Council and the members of the council, are appointed by the Minister of

Education (National Accreditation Council Act, 2004). ATLIB members were vehemently opposed to this clause, citing the fact that the council may in fact end up being an extension of the MOE without any real power of its own. One junior college administrator expressed that “this clause is a major loop hole so those participating in the provision of higher education will also have to be professionally competent and vigilant to participate in the process (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

Another higher education administrator who was very involved in the lobbying to revise some of the clauses in the National Accreditation Council Act recalled that top ministry personnel were “literally translating the act to make it very political- the CARICOM model wasn’t as politicized as this one was” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007).

The powers of appointment of key personnel at the University of Belize and other agencies such as NAC have implications for the autonomy of these institutions. As one higher education administrator remarked about the director of the NAC being appointed by the Minister of Education:

the executive director should not be directly appointed by the minister but that clause remains in the NAC Act so in that respect government still can put its weight around. We know it’s not right but there isn’t much we can do because we depend on government for money. We have to hope that the director will be a principled individual who will know how to operate under that circumstance. (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007)

In the case of UB, political interference affects UB’s autonomy. The *Amandala* Newspaper for August 19, 2007 reported that the Ministry of Education has established a History Department at UB which will offer a baccalaureate degree in history. The

announcement was made by the Ministry of Education and not by the University of Belize. Speaking about the amalgamation of UB, one former UB administrator noted that:

at UCB we had been questioning the viability of a multi campus model but to close down the other campuses and move everyone to Belmopan under UB would have been too traumatic. It would perhaps have been politically explosive and politicians don't like to take that risk so they tried to amalgamate and still retain campuses in Belize City and Punta Gorda (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007).

But the decision to retain campuses at different sites in Belize City was costly to UB. As one UB administrator mentioned, "having three campuses is very costly for a university this size with the kind of financing we get." (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007).

A former UB administrator also noted that maintaining three different sites in Belize was inefficient use of resources since there were overhead and maintenance costs (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007).

In 2004, when the government of Belize made the decision to relocate most of the UB site campuses to Belmopan (the main campus) the administration of UB suggested to government that there was a need to discontinue some program offerings since they believed that the university would not be sustainable in its newly constituted form. Faculty members, however, argued that instead of cutting programs, the university was to restructure its administration to decrease costs. They submitted a proposal to the Prime Minister to revise the administrative structure to decrease expenditures (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). The faculty proposal was approved and the administrative structure was revised. The consequences of that decision were that the position of provost

was created to replace the vice-president of academics and some control from the vice-president of finance was transferred to the new provost position. For example, building and grounds maintenance was now the responsibility of the provost (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). One of the difficulties of that restructuring according to one former provost was that “the provost spent a lot of time dealing with rusty pipes and old buildings and on top of that, the office of the provost couldn’t make decisions that involved budgeting” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007).

A good example of the implications of political interference is the manner in which fees at UB are regulated closely by the government. Several UB administrators and even one MOE official noted that the proposed fee increase at UB was problematic for the government because it was close to an election year. One former UB higher education administrator noted that:

the decision to subsidize the fee increase was a political decision but one that had major implication for other junior colleges wanting to raise fees that government currently pays. Such institutions would have to pay attention to the volatility of the political situation. (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007)

In Belize, there is a lack of vision for higher education resulting from (a) the lack of expertise in the ministry to provide meaningful leadership and (b) the lack of a coherent framework or policy to manage and guide the development of this sector. The lack of expertise at the ministry level and the lack of a coherent policy to guide higher education in Belize have serious implications for the manner in which decisions are made at the Ministry of Education. Often, policies are developed without the input from higher education and this situation affects the relationship between MOE and higher education.

Very often, higher education administrators perceive these policies to be impositions and are reluctant to implement them effectively. Also, the involvement of politicians in higher education seriously affects its ability to make innovative changes to improve the quality of education offered to students.

*Question Two: How does the system of governance affect financial decision-making in higher education institutions in Belize?*

#### *Financing Higher Education in Belize*

In Belize, as in many other countries, financing higher education is a challenge, especially as more and more resources are committed to other equally important social issues. In developing countries burgeoning debts, poverty, and the health concerns of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and others, force governments to reduce their funding for higher education and encourage higher education institutions to seek alternative sources of funding. In his address to COBEC, the Minister of Education highlighted his concerns on financing for higher education:

financing for higher education remains a vexing issue. Government must, of course continue to do its part, and indeed do more. We must advance the discussion on a fixed funding formula and tax incentives for education contributions. Institutions, themselves, must be more creative and effective in their efforts to achieve a greater level of self-sustainability. (Address to COBEC, February 8, 2007)

In Belize, funding for higher education institutions comes primarily from the government of Belize. In the 2005- 2006 fiscal year, the government allotted 20.7 percent of its recurring budget to education. Of this 20.7 percent, post-secondary (including

junior colleges and UB) received five and a half percent in comparison to 60.9 percent and 28.9 percent for primary and secondary, respectively (Education Statistics, 2005-2006, Ministry of Education). The government spends 1, 260 BZ dollars per student in higher education compared to 1, 062 BZ dollars and 1,926 BZ dollars per student at the primary and secondary levels, respectively (Education Statistics, 2005-2006, Ministry of Education). Funding for higher education also comes from tuition and fees collected from students. At the junior colleges, tuition and fees amount to 1,340 U.S. dollars per student per academic year (two semesters). AT UB, tuition and fees average approximately 1,000 U.S dollars per student per annum for associate degrees and approximately 1,600 U.S dollars per annum for baccalaureate degrees. A comparison of these fees to the per capita income in Belize which is approximately 3,650 U.S. dollars shows that the cost of higher education is extremely high.

In funding junior colleges, the government provides 70 percent of the salary bill for all academic personnel attached to the institution, disbursed on a monthly basis. Once an institution is recognized by the Ministry of Education that institution will automatically qualify for this funding. Institutions prepare a list of academic personnel and their individual qualifications, referred to as the salary budget, and submit that list to the MOE for approval. This list is usually submitted by November of any academic year for the subsequent academic year. Once that list is approved by the Tertiary Desk in the Ministry, institutions will receive a monthly subvention for the entire academic year. In other words, the subvention is usually fixed unless there are changes in faculty.

The University of Belize receives an annual budget approved by the Ministry of Finance with input from the Minister of Education. UB administrators prepare their

annual budget, which is then submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval. Once this budget is approved, it then goes to the Cabinet for final ratification. The budget process at UB is much more complex than that at the junior colleges because, whereas junior colleges only receive 70 percent of their salary bills, UB receives an annual grant that includes recurrent and capital expenditures.

*Lack of an effective and transparent funding formula.* The lack of an effective and transparent funding mechanism for higher education in Belize is frequently criticized. In fact, at the National Tertiary Conference in 2006, financing of higher education was a major theme. An MOE official noted that “we really should aim at providing some certainty in financing education at the tertiary level” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). In fact, as one MOE official offered:

there are different schools of thought on how financing should be applied.

Should it be a formula based on a student per capita basis or should there be some other formula based on the programs an institution offers and the relevance of those programs to national development?” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

To date, however, the Ministry has not adopted any of these funding options. To date, funding for the junior colleges remains dependent on the number of academic personnel employed in any given year while funding for UB is based on the previous year’s budget even though they submit an official budget ratified by the Board of Trustees. Budget figures for UB show that for the academic years 2000-2001 UB received 10 million BZ dollars; in 2002-2003, it was cut to nine million dollars and in 2004-2005 it was cut to

seven million dollars; in 2006-2007 it was increased to seven and a half million and in 2007-2008 it was increased to eight million dollars (UB budget history).

*Funding for junior colleges.* Since funding for junior colleges and UB is applied differently, each will be discussed separately. In the case of junior colleges, as has been mentioned earlier, monthly subventions totaling 70 percent of the salary bill for all academic faculty, staff, and administrators are given to each institution. However, not all administrators agreed that the subvention is actually 70 percent of the salary bill. While most were adamant that it is 70 percent, some administrators argued vehemently that it is less than 70 percent. MOE officials interviewed, insisted that it is indeed 70 percent, saying that all institutions are treated equally and given the exact percentage of their total salary cost. The confusion, however, seems to be in the number of academic staff that the ministry will approve for each institution. If an institution submits a staff list with a number of qualified staff and the ministry believes that the number is not proportionate to the number of students at the institution, then it might refuse to pay for the “extra” staff and the college’s grant will reflect non-payment for those positions. Again, the non-existence of an effective and transparent funding formula or mechanism makes the decision as to how many academic personnel will be funded seem arbitrary to some junior college administrators.

There seems to be no rational explanation for the “magic” 70 percent. One MOE official did not know how the percentage was arrived at except to say that at one time it was 50 percent and the Teachers’ Union had successfully negotiated for it to increase to 70 percent for secondary schools. Since junior colleges are offshoots of high schools, the

70 percent was applied to them as well (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). One higher education administrator suggested that it is:

historical more than anything else. Now why the number 70? I would want to think that it's based on the fee structure of schools and, when these discussions were going on, they felt that tuition and fees could supply 30 percent, but I don't think any discussion has been held on that topic in recent years. (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007)

Even while the 70 percent or thereabout remains the set percentage to fund junior college salary costs, some administrators believe that it is no longer adequate and the funding for junior colleges should be reviewed to include funding for capital expenditures as well. One higher education administrator noted that "if the government would pay 100% of teachers' salaries it would allow institutions to further their development without leaning too much on the government every time you need infrastructure" (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). And even while government may assist in infrastructure, there is no official mechanism in place to guarantee such assistance. Another junior college administrator suggested, "institutions need more than just salaries. They need funding to develop their infrastructure and there is nothing in place in Belize that assists institutions in that aspect" (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

In outlining the process of salary budget approval, administrators reveal that there is no formal mechanism to inform colleges of their budget approval. One higher education administrator described this situation in this way:

there is no year when we are informed in writing that the budget has been approved, nor is there any formal structure. We have insisted that these

kinds of things be made in writing, but it never happens so we just have to hope that what we have requested will be honored. (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007)

Without any formal notification, administrators believe that there is the risk that they may employ individuals only to find out later that their request was not fully approved. When that happens, institutions have to assume the short fall, since at that point there is no negotiation that can take place given that the budget has already been fixed.

*Funding for the University of Belize.* In the case of UB, the government provides an annual budget disbursed in monthly portions. UB personnel who were interviewed for this study paint a picture of arbitrary decisions in regard to their funding. In fact, the arbitrary funding dates back to the University College of Belize [UCB]. In chronicling funding for UCB, a former UB administrator described it this way:

it is interesting that, in my UCB experience towards the beginning of that ten year, there was no implicit formula, much less explicit. There was nothing; only a vague statement that said we were to submit our request. The ministry would look at it and would make whatever modifications necessary then send it to the National Assembly. (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007)

In the UCB Act there is indeed only a brief reference to the submission of a budget to the MOE. Furthermore, there was no explanation for the final amount that would be approved for UCB, except that it seemed that the funding remained consistent from year to year. One former UB administrator described the situation by saying that:

government was very consistent. If in a given year they gave you two hundred thousand, the following year it might go up by five or 10 thousand

dollars but there was no formula. For instance we didn't know whether they were looking at a cost of living index, at inflation, or what indicators they were using to modify, adjust, or whether they were looking at priority areas. (face-to-face-interview, February 20, 2007)

In fact, it seemed likely to UCB administrators that, at the government level, decisions were not always in accordance with those at the MOE. For example, in regards to UCB funding, the MOE would approve UCB's budget, but when it went to the national government, the budget would be revised. This situation became very clear when in the academic year 1994-1995, the government of Belize placed a cap on its funding to UCB at one million BZ dollars. "There was no rationale, just a nicely rounded figure that for the rest of that decade, did not change" (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007).

When it came to funding UB, the situation was much the same, but the figure was different. In its initial two years because of the size and its infancy stage, UB received a budget of 10 million BZ dollars (5 million US) from the government of Belize. In the third year, the budget was reduced to nine million BZ dollars and in later years further decreased to seven million BZ dollars. Again, there was no justification for the decrease in funding except that "government needed to cut their budget so we were, in a sense, victims in that exercise. So they cut it to seven" (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). Later the budget was increased to seven and a half million around the time when teachers and public officers were threatening to strike, however, there is no concrete evidence the two situations were linked. A UB administrator agrees that the government has no rationale for decreasing or increasing UB's budget, or that it really pays attention to UB's budgetary request, saying that:

there is no process for funding because although we prepare our budget each academic year and submit that to the government, they don't fund us based on our budget. They give us seven and a half million dollars each year although our request always exceeds that amount. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

Effective academic year 2007-2008, the government of Belize announced an increase in UB's budget to eight million Belize (four million US dollars) dollars. A MOE official confirmed that the budget would be increased to eight million dollars after a meeting between UB officials and MOE personnel in which it was agreed that there was a need to increase the budget. There remains, however, no effective and transparent funding formula for the financing of UB and the junior colleges.

*Funding and long term planning in higher education.* The government of Belize provides funding for institutions based on previous year's budgets and/or decisions from one year to the next. This situation creates uncertainty in institutional planning because, from one year to the next, institutions are not certain how much they will receive from the government. For the junior colleges, this uncertainty affects how they recruit faculty since there is no guarantee that the government will provide the funding for the additional faculty. In some cases, then, institutions prefer to "play it safe" and increase their faculty numbers minimally each year, even when there is need to employ more faculty to improve the faculty/student ratio at the institution. As one junior college administrator noted, "we are sometimes hesitant to just increase faculty. Instead we make conservative requests" (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). In other cases, institutions hire the number of qualified faculty they need and risk having to pay additional faculty with

monies collected from tuition and other fees. As one administrator explained it, “we often have to hire additional faculty because our enrollment goes up steadily and we have to balance the faculty/student ratio but we often have to pay the shortfall” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). Often this situation creates a ripple effect since monies diverted to salaries are often budgeted for infrastructure projects, equipment purchases, and/or maintenance so that there is always some under-funding somewhere. One higher education administrator suggested that this situation creates an environment in which institutions engage in “crisis management, instead of developing a culture of readiness for opportunity” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). At one institution, finances were so inadequate that the institution could not embark on recruitment drives. This situation in turn affected its enrolment in the subsequent academic year (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). In other situations, institutions often have to rely on their high school counterparts to make up the shortfall or to share facilities with the high school.

But the financial uncertainty facing junior colleges and UB is not only limited to funding for academic faculty but also in the irregularity with which monies for student tuition are disbursed.. The government of Belize provides tuition for all second year students pursuing associate degrees at any of the junior colleges or UB. The government also provides merit scholarships to students who obtain at least six CXC passes at the end of their senior year in high school and enroll in any tertiary institution. But most of the junior college and UB administrators relate that these monies are randomly disbursed and this creates financial hardships for institutions, since they depend heavily on income generated by tuition and other fees. One higher education administrator described an

occasion when tuition fees were not disbursed in a timely manner. The institution had to “borrow from Peter to pay Paul. Some of our payables that we should have paid were just not paid after we had to use those monies to help pay teachers’ salaries” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). When the government does not pay its tuition on which institutions partially rely to complement the 70 percent salary grants, institutions often use overdraft facilities to make up the shortfall. As one higher education administrator noted, “sometimes we are so much in the red that the banks own our schools” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). Some institutions have funds set aside for such contingencies but administrators confessed that using those savings is not fiscally responsible. One higher education administrator mentioned that “we have a high risk fund. Because of the situation we are in, we have saved so that we can operate for one month without government and without overdraft” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). A higher education administrator explained that when government agreed to incur an increase in fees in place of the students:

that created a problem for us in that it was a challenge for us to collect that increase. The increase should have come into effect in August but we didn’t get anything from government until October. So from August to October we couldn’t really do anything we had planned to do from the increase of fees. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

The funding situation also affects UB’s long term planning because although UB administrators project an increase in expenditures and include such increase in their budget, the budget they receive does not reflect such increase and they have no control over how much funds they will receive, even after the budget request is made. This

affects long-term planning for faculties and their individual departments. As one UB administrator said:

the faculties know what they have access to and they will put forward a budget for certain things and the CFO will look at that and he will have to sometimes send it back and they have to cut. They are forced to prioritize; in fact, the entire university has to prioritize. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

In addition, UB administrators interviewed note that because of a lack of funds, UB cannot embark on research, which seriously undermines part of their mission as a university. As one administrator said, “research is another area that we would like to promote but the issue of finance affects us significantly there. So we are challenged to do some things that we know are critical to our mission” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). In addition, budget constraints often mean that tuition funds from students often have to be used to pay salaries for academic and support staff, leaving very little to invest in program development, and equipment and facilities upgrades that ultimately affect academic quality. As one administrator at UB said:

the increase in operational costs and the fixed budget for the years affects the quality of our programs because the money you need becomes less because it’s the same money you’re using to do a lot more... it has really been a challenge for us. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

*Alternative sources of funding.* Undoubtedly, as is the case in many other developing countries and even developed countries, government funding in Belize is inadequate to support higher education. Institutions, then, must seek alternative funding.

In developed countries, higher education institutions have developed strong partnerships with business and industry through research and development, however in Belize, this situation is a long way from producing any meaningful funding for institutions. At the junior college level, where basic and applied research are non-existent, institutions have to depend greatly on tuition and fees to complement government subventions. Unlike community colleges in the US which develop ties with industry by conducting job training that companies pay for, junior colleges in Belize have not explored this alternative source of revenue. Since there is no government tuition policy that specifies tuition and fees at this level, tuition costs vary from 29 dollars to 40 dollars per credit hour. Even while the Ministry of Education tries to monitor the increase of fees at this level, one ministry official explained that the absence of a national policy for higher education makes it extremely difficult for the ministry to restrict the increase of fees, so that “if a junior college decides the fees will go up, we have little input in that. You have to depend on the community or the market to set realistic fees” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). But another MOE official felt that there should be a clear policy on tuition and fees, and the lack of such policy allows some institutions to charge tuition and fees that are too high. Junior college administrators, however, express a preference for setting their own tuition rates, especially since they rely heavily on these monies. As one junior college administrator suggested, “one of the things that is still in the junior colleges’ favor is that government cannot dictate a ceiling for setting fees, so we are still at liberty to review our fees structure every once in a while and determine the fees”(face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

Tuition and fees at the University of Belize are strongly monitored by the MOE. In fact, a ministry official mentioned that while there is no official policy for tuition and fees at the ministry level, they “participate with UB in trying to arrive at a tuition fee and set a tuition policy for UB” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). This participation, according to UB administrators, amounts to controlling the fees that UB charges. One former administrator mentioned that “for the first time in many years the Board of UB supported bringing an increase into effect, however, the government did not support it” (face-to-face interview, March 28, 2007). In fact, the control of fees dates back to UCB, where the tuition per credit hour remained fixed for the duration of this institution. In 2006, the Board of Trustees of UB authorized an increase in fees but according to one UB administrator, “the government did not approve it in a sense. In the sense that students did not want to see that happen, so they took to the streets and, at the end of day, the government decided they would pay”(face-to-face interview, February, 28, 2007). One ministry official justified the government paying the increase by saying that since “there was no longer a viable student loan institution (the Development Finance Corporation which offered student loans had collapsed), there was the worry that students would face undue hardships to continue their studies” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). A former UB administrator at the time of the tuition controversy disputed that rationale saying that “when the decision was made by the government to pay the increase, many students had already gone ahead and paid the increase. If the increase had been studied properly, it would have been obvious that some students, not all, needed help” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007).

Another MOE official suggested that paying the tuition fees was not prudent, especially since the Belizean economy is facing severe challenges at this time, but suggested:

it makes a government look good to be able to say to that level of the education system- you are dealing with people who can vote- ‘we will support you by paying your fees.’ But it’s not sustainable. It’s a short term fix, and we need to look for something more long term such as loan schemes to assist students to pursue higher education. (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007)

One former administrator described the situation as one in which “the government was afraid of the bad publicity, especially since it was on the back drop of the DFC and Social Security Board Commissions of Inquiry and the threats by the labor unions”(face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Whatever the true reason for the government absorbing the costs of the increase in tuition, there is no denying that UB relies heavily on tuition fees collected from students or the government of Belize. Although UB closed its research and development office because of lack of funds, it still generates some income from research organizations and receives grants from various non-governmental organizations.

*Funding for capital projects.* Unlike UB which receives funding for capital projects from the government of Belize, junior colleges must often look to their respective churches, communities, area representatives, and fund raising drives to access funding for capital projects. Even though the MOE does have provisions for capital projects, one MOE official mentioned that “there is no formula to determine who gets the capital grant. We look at the access in the area, the need, and the service it would provide in the area” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). But it became obvious that funding

for capital projects for junior colleges is at the bottom of the “needs” hierarchy when the same official noted that:

If a sixth form (junior college) wants to introduce a new program and, lets say they want to introduce computer technology, they will approach us and ask us for assistance to build that computer lab and resource it. If we do that, we are actually depriving a secondary school from some facility. (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007)

Some higher education administrators mentioned that the receipt of monies for capital projects almost always depends on knowledge of crucial information that is seldom made public to tertiary institutions. One higher education administrator mentioned that those who are privy to information, such as when projects proposals are due and which agencies provide funding for infrastructural development, have an advantage in getting their projects funded (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). But that information seems to come to those who are politically connected. As the same administrator mentioned:

the receipt of money for capital projects depends on how well you are connected politically, which depends on where you are. In most cases, if your elected area representative in the House of Representatives and the minister of education are of the same political party, they can lobby and you might get more and that’s one of the reasons why, when you look at our country, some areas seem to be getting more. (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007)

Of the six junior colleges participating in this study, two institutions share classroom space with their high school counterparts, three institutions are physically

located adjacent to their high schools, and one is located entirely separate from its high school counterpart. In almost all situations, junior colleges share or have shared facilities such as computer and science laboratories with their high schools. Most administrators believe that this situation has to be changed, as it limits the work of the junior colleges, especially in their ability to diversify programs and enroll more students who meet the criteria for junior college education. One higher education administrator confessed that “we really need to move out of that sharing of facilities so that we can start classes earlier and expand our programs” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). One administrator remarked:

in Belize, the whole mindset of institutional development has to change.

Institutions need more than just salaries. Capital investments are a major part of institutional growth and development, but we still believe that once you have a number of classrooms, a number of teachers, and one administrator, you have a school. (face-to-face-interview, March 6, 2007)

At UB, infrastructural development comes from funding from the government of Belize. Whereas junior colleges have to seek their own funding for initial and subsequent infrastructure, the government of Belize provided the capital for the UB campus in Belmopan. But the challenge for UB remains accessing funding for upgrade and maintenance of laboratory facilities and computer equipment that are crucial to the quality of education at UB. Even with the increase of fees, which were paid by the government, UB is still limited with funding for these projects. As one UB administrator pointed out, “the increase was a targeted sum of money to be used for specific student

services, not to be used in the general fund, and could not be used to purchase necessary equipment” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007).

The lack of an effective and transparent funding formula to finance UB and the junior colleges affects the development of higher education in Belize. Basing funding solely on a portion of salaries does not promote capital and other development and there are better ways to calculate what the government subsidies should be. In addition, the lack of adequate financial resources to fund infrastructural development, particularly at the junior colleges, forces institutions to seek alternative sources of revenues, often at the expense of students through the increase in tuition. This in turn affects access to higher education for many students, especially of low socio-economic status. In general, the lack of adequate funding affects the quality of education at the higher education level since crucial resources such as appropriate library holdings, laboratory and computer equipment, and others are difficult to acquire.

*Question Three: How does the system of governance affect the curricular decision-making in higher education institutions?*

In many developing countries, governments insist that curricula in higher education must cater predominantly to the needs of the national economy whereas the faculty and administrators in higher education institutions believe that curricula must also focus on the needs of the individual person. This dichotomy creates a challenge for higher education institutions trying to balance the two major goals of curriculum development. In Belize, the challenge is prominent, as both government officials and higher education administrators accept the need for the curricula to focus on both goals, but disagree on how to do it. A prominent MOE official insist that curricula in higher

education are not aligned with national development goals (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007) and higher administrators argue that, in the absence of any clear indication of a national development plan, it is difficult to align curricula with national development.

### *The Development of Academic Programs*

A review of institutional academic catalogues reveal that major curricular offerings are concentrated in the broad areas of business, science, and information technology. Examples of academic programs are Business Administration, Biology and Chemistry, Computer Science, Environmental Science, and Tourism Management. In describing how one junior college institution makes curricular decisions, one administrator related that “unfortunately, curricular decisions are largely guess work; everything is all guess work because we do not have a research culture to provide us with data on which to base our decisions” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

Notwithstanding the lack of hard data, institutions rely on the market needs to develop academic programs. For example, some institutions conduct basic surveys within the surrounding communities to determine which programs they would want to pursue; other institutions contact their church communities, while others wait for families to urge them to offer one academic program or another. Using this information, institutions will then decide which academic programs to offer and hope for high enrollments once their academic programs are advertised. But enrollments often do not reflect the demand indicated in survey results. One institution realized there was a lack of social science courses at the tertiary level so a program was developed to address that need. However, enrollment failed to materialize and the institution was forced to offer other choices. One junior college administrator described this situation as one in which “institutions see

themselves as being able to serve a certain clientele or fill a certain need, but when the reality hits, the need might not be there” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). On the other hand, institutions sometimes initially decide against offering certain programs but later find out that there is a large market for it. A good example of this phenomenon is the case of business programs. Often, institutions will relent and offer business programs because there is a large demand for business programs. Administrators confessed that business degree offerings are important to keep their institutions viable and satisfy student demands. In fact, often these business programs subsidize social needs programs that are less popular.

*National development needs.* In many developing countries, educators try to link academic programs to national development, but are often unclear on a definition of “national development” (Woolman, 2001). The absence of a clear national development plan constrains higher education from developing curricula that are relevant to national development needs. Curriculum developers often rely on their own perceptions of what the country’s developmental needs are likely to be, but they are often unsure of the alignment between their curricula and national development needs. Even while a prominent MOE official mentioned the dissatisfaction with the current alignment between curricula and national development needs, higher education administrators insist that there is no national development plan to guide their decisions. One higher education administrator noted that “when you ask for government’s national development plan you are asking for something that does not exist” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another higher education administrator described the situation as one in which:

it's hard to know whether your curriculum reflects national development needs because there is no document that you can go to find out what are the needs that our institutions should be filling at this time. We really are guessing. There is a vacuum, too, in that we do not work in harmony with the country's national development unit. (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007)

Another administrator concurred by saying that "there is very little in print that you can go to that tells us these are the needs of the country and these are the areas that higher education needs to pursue" (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2008).

One MOE official interviewed for the study also agreed that "we need a development plan for the nation and we need a blueprint to coordinate the education sector for the way forward" (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). A senior MOE official indicated that a national development plan is currently being developed called "Vision 2025" by the Ministry of National Development, and the MOE is very involved in the process to ensure that "our goals and objectives are directly linked with the national development goals of the country"(face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). But until such development plan is completed, institutions will continue to rely on their perceptions of national development to guide curriculum development at their institutions.

*Community needs.* The missions of most junior colleges and UB relate to community needs, both at the local and national levels. Community needs refer to the needs of business/industry as well as those of religious and social groups. Even though junior colleges and UB do not rely on business/industry relationships for alternative funding, they often use their expertise to make curricular decisions. As one higher education administrator described, "we turned to managers of resorts for their suggestions

and in turn came up with a package that says ‘this is our tourism program’ (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). One good example of seizing upon business/industry needs is St. John’s College School of Professional Studies, which was established to offer certificate programs to train individuals in areas that were deemed necessary for business and industry (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007).

Because several junior colleges in Belize are affiliated with particular religious denomination, curricular decisions often revolve around this reality. Such institutions will offer academic programs or courses that educate students in accordance with the philosophies of their churches. For example, one junior college administrator mentioned that, as students of a Methodist institution, there was a need to offer a course in theology. A review of college catalogues of religious affiliated institutions show that at the Catholic institutions students must take between three and six credit hours of theology or moral decisions courses. One religious-affiliated institution offers courses called “Life Skills” and “Christian Beliefs,” and although the names do not necessarily suggest religious courses, they are both based on religious principles of the church.

But offering religious courses for some institutions is sometimes challenging because the MOE will not pay for these courses. One administrator related how she was informed that the state would not pay for a religion teacher at her institution, but when she investigated, the government was paying for the religion teacher at another institution. An MOE official mentioned that the salary budget is approved based on the needs of the institution and not necessarily on the courses offered. But when the institution changed the names of the courses to disguise the religious nature of the courses, the MOE had no difficulty providing the funds for the teachers.

Institutions also find the need to offer programs that are socially responsive to the communities they serve, even when these programs are expensive or have low enrollments. For example, institutions offering physics often have low enrollments “but because there is a shortage of physics teachers in the high schools in Belize, we continue to offer it” (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007). Sometimes programs are offered that are related to the policies of the Ministry of Education. For example, four junior colleges are offering associate degrees in primary education and UB is offering a baccalaureate degree in primary education. This program is very costly but extremely important since a large portion of primary school teachers are not trained in pedagogy. While the government does contribute to the offering of this program by providing funding for student teachers, they also control the number of institutions offering the program. Only one junior college in each region of the country was allowed to offer the program. In fact, the program was shut down in one institution after the MOE authorized another institution in that same region to offer it. The administrator of that institution mentioned that “a directive from one MOE official informed us that we had to stop offering the program in March and the students were to graduate in May of the same year. The students had to stop their studies and divert to the General Studies Program” (face-to-face interview, February 27, 2007). Other administrators also mention that if their institutions wanted to offer the program, they would have to seek approval from the MOE.

AT UB, social needs programs are offered despite low enrollments and high costs of implementation. For example, the Faculty of Nursing, Allied Health and Social Work is the smallest faculty, but one of the most expensive to maintain because of the

specialized training and equipment costs. But these programs are offered because there is a social need for them. Other programs such as agriculture and engineering continue to be offered because “there was no way we could say we wouldn’t run these programs because government would not have accepted that” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007). In the case of agriculture, one UB administrator explained the need to continue to offer “this expensive, yet least productive program” (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007) even after several attempts to close it down:

When UB was amalgamated as a university, the people who came with that program were considered government employees and they brought that status over with them, so they are not people we can just terminate because the government would then have to pay them and government refuses to do that. In a sense, this is one way in which government does have influence in what happens with us that we don’t have much control over. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

### *The Adoption of CAPE*

In 2004, the CAPE exam was adopted as the official exit exam at the junior college level, replacing the Cambridge A level. For junior colleges, it meant that they had to fully adopt the CAPE curriculum or at the very least integrate it into their existing curricula. According to one junior college administrator, colleges which had traditionally offered the Cambridge A Levels switched to CAPE and those which were not offering any exit exam embraced CAPE, albeit in some cases, reluctantly (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Currently, all junior colleges are offering the exam in different forms. But the change to and adoption of CAPE was not without controversy. In fact, nationwide

consultations conducted prior to the National Higher Education Conference in 2006, suggested that many educators at different levels of the education system doubt the relevance of CAPE to the developmental needs of Belize. Those colleges which were offering Cambridge A Levels were not all convinced of the need to switch to CAPE, and those colleges not offering the exam were reluctant to change their curriculum to embrace this new exam. A directive from the MOE, however, convinced colleges to embrace the CAPE curricula. As one higher education administrator put it, “there is not much influence from the ministry in the way we develop curriculum other than the fact that it was announced that junior colleges were expected to implement the CAPE Program” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). One higher education administrator said, “my institution was the last one which kept resisting; but I am believer that once a decision is made I will never sabotage it, so we are now following the CAPE exam, but it was imposed on us.” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another higher education administrator noted that:

when the CAPE came, we started moving gradually towards CAPE, but we didn't make just a complete change to CAPE. There was a point when we were working both exam (CAPE and A Level ) syllabi simultaneously. This year we have moved completely to CAPE. (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007)

While junior colleges were expected to offer CAPE, there was no discussion on whether UB would offer CAPE at the Associate Level or how UB would accept credits earned from the CAPE curricula. In fact one UB administrator mentioned that, “ when the discussion on CAPE came up, we (UB) weren't even listening to that so we could have easily said to students ‘if you don't want to mess with all that CAPE stuff because we

won't accept it from anybody, just come straight to UB”(face-to-face interview, March 27, 2008). The effect of this oversight is now being debated, and there is a move toward pressuring UB to adopt the CAPE exam and to implement a transfer system for CAPE credits. Minutes of ATLIB meeting held in February, 2007 show that concerns were raised about the transfer of CAPE credits to UB, and at a meeting of ATLIB representatives with MOE officials the issue was raised once again. There was no official response other than that the matter would be raised with UB officials. However, in the absence of a clear policy on transfer and articulation between junior colleges and UB, there is no guarantee that credits earned in CAPE programs will be transferable to UB.

#### *The Implementation of CAPE*

Curricula at the junior colleges are modeled on the U.S. system with a number of specialized courses (ranging from 36- 42 credit hours) and general education courses (ranging from 36- 42 credit hours). A CAPE curriculum also contains a specialization (major) with three units of general education: Caribbean Studies, Communication Studies, and Information Technology. Each major and general education is separated into a series of units with each unit comprising two or three modules or courses. For example, a major in management contains the following units: Accounting Unit 1, Economics Unit 1, Management of Business Unit 1, and Management of Business Unit 2. Each of these units is further divided into three modules (courses). A general education unit, for example, Caribbean Studies is divided into two modules (courses): Caribbean Society and Culture and Caribbean Development. To obtain an associate degree in CAPE, students are required to sit and pass seven units, which include four units of specialization and three units of general education.

Currently, all junior colleges are offering CAPE in different forms. One junior college administrator mentioned, “since the ministry did not specify how the CAPE should be offered, if you look at the curriculum, we’re covering the content but implementing it in different ways” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). Most institutions are offering the CAPE in several content areas. This means that students cover the contents of the CAPE syllabi and at the end of the units sit for the exam if they choose to; however, there are some institutions that use CAPE syllabi but do not prepare the students to sit for the exam. Four junior colleges are offering equivalent CAPE associate degrees alongside their traditional associate degrees.

The way CAPE is offered depends largely on the kind of exams that were being offered before the CAPE was introduced. For example, the institutions that were previously offering A Levels, offer a variety of subject areas in CAPE. As one higher education administrator said, “We have moved from A Levels to CAPE and we now offer additional fields of study in CAPE; whereas A Levels only offered science subjects, CAPE offers different courses in business” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). Another administrator whose institution was offering A Levels said, “what we have done is take those A Levels and replace them with CAPE and that has allowed us to add some other programs in business.” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). Other institutions that were not offering any form of external exams are now just offering a few areas in CAPE or just using CAPE syllabi for some courses already offered at their institution. In fact, one higher education administrator noted that the CAPE program is in its second year of the pilot stage, while another noted that “we are not yet sitting any of the CAPE exams but we are following the syllabi. I wanted to see us be able to deliver the content

sufficiently with a level of competence before our students signed up” (face-to-face, March 27, 2007).

Notwithstanding the form in which the CAPE is offered, CAPE has now become an integral part of the curriculum at each junior college. However, the offering of CAPE has forced changes in the curriculum at each institution. The magnitude of these changes, however, depends on the manner in which CAPE is offered. For example, offering the CAPE Associate Degree “allows for very little room to do more” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Since the Belize Open Scholarship is tied to the CAPE, a student wanting to compete for this scholarship has to cover at least five units of specialization in three different disciplines along with the general education units. In the past, students who competed for the scholarship had to have obtained passes in A Levels in at least three disciplines; however, no general education was required. One higher education administrator noted that “the Associate Degree takes over your general core because there are general core components of the CAPE as well” (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). This means that institutions must decide whether they want to prepare students to vie for the scholarship or to get a well rounded education. A few diligent students endeavor to compete for the scholarship by following the CAPE curricula but students generally opt to complete their institution’s academic programs and not bother to sit the CAPE exam. The total number of students who sat the CAPE exam in 2007 was 227. One higher education administrator noted that:

if we offer the CAPE Associate Degree it will cover all the credit hours  
that students will need to take and we wouldn’t be able to offer courses

such as philosophy, psychology. It's too important for them to have that well rounded education than the choice to win a Belize scholarship. (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007)

Because institutions were following the American associate degree model, curricula included specialization and general education courses. With the introduction of CAPE, institutions have had to change their general education courses and/or change the number of credit hours of general education courses. For example, at one institution, students still take 36 credit hours of general education but the courses are all those of the CAPE units. A review of the general education at this institution points out that this new general education core contains courses in only two major areas of knowledge: language and communication, and social science. There are no courses in the broad areas of Mathematics or Natural Science. According to the Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000), general education in developing countries is often the stepchild of specialized education, a weakness that higher education in developing countries urgently needs to address. In Belize, there is too much emphasis on specialized education and too little focus on general education courses. But there are some who criticize the emphasis on specialized education and too little focus on general education courses. One MOE official mentioned that "the curriculum is very specialized. Our students do not get a broad curriculum so they can explore; from early we streamline into major areas" (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). A higher education administrator remarked, "at the end of sixteen years of study, many of our students lack certain values, skills, attitudes, and the ability to speak proper English, so we must emphasize those courses from which

students gain these competencies” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2008). A MOE official noted:

we focus too much on specialization. There is a need for some of that in a developing country but we cannot overemphasize that at the expense of our students getting a general education...we need to find a more appropriate balance between specialization and general education. (face-to-face interview, March 22, 2007).

One higher education administrator mentioned that in adopting the CAPE curriculum, “our direct input into making sure that our students are prepared sufficiently was affected. There wasn’t as much freedom with that” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007).

Another higher education administrator recalled that:

When we were preparing the general education core we wanted students to do a course in theology and Belizean studies, but when we shifted over to CAPE we lost some of that freedom, but we tried to maintain some of it. (face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007)

Another higher education administrator noted that “CAPE dictates what your course offering will be and you have to make decisions as to what will be eliminated” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Another higher education administrator summarized the effects of CAPE on their curriculum in this way:

We had two exciting courses here - Political Science and Introduction to Journalism, but there are no exams connected to them. They were fun courses, though. CAPE came along and increased the credit hours and since students only need 72 credit hours, they did not sign up for the courses so we discontinued

them. As you offer the next subjects for CAPE, you have to sacrifice something and that's why we sacrificed those courses. (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007)

In balancing the CAPE curriculum with community needs, administrators noted that they try to offer CAPE areas that fit with community needs but sometimes they have to make adjustments to their curricula to be able to do so. For example, one junior college administrator mentioned that in evaluating their CAPE Computer Science Program, they realized that it was too theoretical and the community was asking that the program include some more practical aspects. They decided to add two additional courses to satisfy the community's request, but it meant that the students would have additional credit hours to complete. And how did the institution deal with the additional credits? "It meant that something had to be eliminated; it meant that there would be changes in other programs as well" (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007).

And while CAPE has great breath in terms of the number of courses it offers, administrators believe that some of the courses do not have sufficient depth and they have to integrate additional topics. One higher education administrator noted that "what is covered in one CAPE syllabus is much less than what needs to be covered in a course, so there is room for enrichment in other some courses"(face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007).

Another higher education administrator noted that:

the CAPE syllabus at my institution is the minimum requirement, because there are certain areas where there may be some topics that CAPE doesn't include but that we think are important to our students if they decide to

pursue further studies. An example is the math, which is restricted to a number of topics. (face-to-face interview, March 16, 2007)

Even though all junior colleges are now offering some form of the CAPE curriculum, a few administrators still believe that curricular decisions, specifically to offer CAPE or not, should be left to the institution and not imposed by the government. One former higher education administrator summed up this sentiment this way, “what makes a higher education institution is that it controls its curriculum and nobody can come and tell you what to teach for an exam” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). A higher education administrator mentioned that they will “fine tune their curriculum to make it more practical and will find other creative ways to offer courses without depending on government support since government officials told us that they will finance salaries for CAPE related courses” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

Curricula in higher education in Belize are developed based on perceptions rather than on sound evidence because there is very little guidance from the state as to what programs are necessary for national and human development. Many administrators noted that developing curricula to meet national development needs is difficult because there is no national development plan. But even in the absence of such national development plan, MOE officials say that they are dissatisfied with curricula in higher education because they are not aligned with national development needs. This dissatisfaction with curricula in higher education seemingly justifies the imposition of CAPE on the junior colleges and programs such as agriculture and engineering on the University of Belize. It also seemingly justifies the control MOE maintains over the Primary Education Program since that Program is designated as a national development need. But there is no sound

evidence that the move to CAPE curricula at the junior college is in the interest of national development. In fact many educators expressed doubts about the relevance of CAPE to national development needs. The control the MOE maintains over higher education through funding, allows the MOE to directly intervene in the institutions' curricular offerings. Although MOE officials noted that institutions were free to offer other academic programs, they seemingly have not grasped the extent of the changes institutions had to make to accommodate CAPE or the controversy surrounding the adoption and implementation of CAPE. It can be argued that uncertainty over the relevance of their own traditional curricula in respect to national development needs, affected higher education institutions' responses to the imposition of the CAPE. The imposition of the CAPE on junior colleges has seriously affected their abilities to offer innovative programs since funding is limited.

*Question Four: How do market forces affect curricular and financial decision-making in higher education in Belize?*

*Responding to Local Market Forces*

In this study, market forces include competition among institutions in Belize for students, faculty, and resources; response to labour markets; global and regional market forces such as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), and the decrease of public subsidies which force institutions to seek alternative sources of funding. Because research is almost non-existent in higher education in Belize, that aspect of market forces was not studied.

Zemsky, Wegner and Massy (2006) note that the colleges and universities need to be more mission-centred and market-smart. They note that embracing or paying attention

to the market does not mean renegeing on institutional mission; in fact, they argue, being sensitive to the market allows institutions to use the additional resources earned from being market-smart to enhance their institutional missions. They argue that “market-smart institutions exploit opportunities to gain revenues, money relaxes the financial limit and thus permits greater mission attainment” (p. 60).

In this study, I explored the effects of the market on both curricular and financial decision-making in higher education in Belize. To answer this question, I first established the participants’ perspectives on the role of the market in Belize. All participants noted that indeed the market has a role to play. One MOE official put it this way:

whether we like it or not there will be a role for the market, so our position should not be to fight and oppose market forces. Our position should be to embrace the market to enhance our capacities to respond to those market forces. (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

One higher education administrator suggested that “we need to pay attention to the market in determining our curricular offerings and making certain decisions so that we don’t end up duplicating programs. In fact, a lot of that is already happening” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). But one higher education administrator cautioned that “there needs to be other forces such as policies and measures put in place so that market forces don’t undermine higher education”(face-to-face interview, March 26, 2007). One higher education administrator suggested relying too much on the market can seriously affect weaker institutions. That individual noted that:

in Belize, weaker institutions do not get better because they have to compete

with other stronger institutions; in fact, the stronger ones get better with competition and the weaker ones get weaker. There are systems that can accommodate competition but not in Belize because we do not have the financial resources available to raise the standards in weaker institutions. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

### *Market Forces and Curricular and Financial Decision-making*

*Determining market needs.* In describing the effects of market forces on curricular decision-making, one administrator noted that “sometimes the decisions to offer a program over another are really difficult considering that the institution has a mission it has to uphold” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Administrators suggested three different effects of market forces on curricular and financial decision-making, noting that “curricular decisions are often based on financial decisions and financial decisions are often dependent on the needs and wants of our stakeholders” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). One effect is related to the need to offer academic programs that meet certain market demand. For example, one junior college administrator remarked that “we saw a need for high school students who did not meet requirements for tertiary education to come to get these requirements. So with that requirement the program for these students would be filling a clear market” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). Another higher education administrator noted that “the teacher education program at this institution was offered to fill a clear market demand for trained teachers... in the first year alone we had 40 students.”(face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). Another higher education administrator made it clear that:

we will only offer a program if it's in demand and maybe that's why we

haven't phased out business. While the experts will tell us there is a flood in the business market, business is what students want, and as long as they are willing to pay for it, we will offer it. We have to go where the money is.

(face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007)

Another effect of market forces on curricular and financial decision-making is related to the decision to offer academic programs that are not aligned with the mission of the institution but are profitable because there is a demand. As one higher education administrator said:

our institution wanted to offer social sciences because we saw a vacuum for social sciences at the tertiary level. So we developed the programs but nobody applied to the social science programs. We had no intention of offering business because we felt that business was well served by other institutions. By the following year we had to relent and offer business because people kept asking for it. In order to keep the school viable and satisfy their needs, we decided to offer business with concentration in accounting. (face-to-face-interview, March 27, 2007)

#### *Responding to Regional and Global Market Forces*

. *The Caribbean single market economy*. The July 9, 2002, edition of the *Amandala* Newspaper quoted the Prime Minister of Belize as saying:

for significant development to take place, we need a bigger market. We will attract major investment if the market is bigger ...in the globalized world that is fast upon us, it would be hard to believe that Belize can exist in isolation from the world (p.6)

Part of that development is the improvement of human resources which some believe will come from the free movement of people, particularly highly trained and skilled workers as stipulated in the CSME agreement. In fact, several administrators expressed the belief that the CSME is a positive step for higher education. As one higher education administrator noted:

I see the CSME as a challenge and an opportunity for us to improve. The challenge will be competing with other professionals for positions, but the opportunity will be that we have to change in order to improve the system of higher education. (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2006)

The Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME) is an initiative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), intended to benefit the people of the Caribbean region by improving opportunities in the production and sale of goods and services to attract investments. It is also meant to facilitate the free movement of people in the region (CARICOM, <http://www.caricom.org>). The establishment of the CSME is a consequence of the need to position and strengthen the economic system of the region in order to compete with global forces. Belize signed on to this treaty in order to improve its potential for economic development and as a signatory, must adhere to the mandates, principles, and regulations of the CSME.

A higher education administrator noted that it was the CSME that “has caused us to really look at ourselves carefully and realize that we are way behind in terms of higher education” (face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007). One MOE official agreed that the CSME will force educators to realize that “tertiary institutions, more than any others, have to be at that front line of promoting change and quality” (face-to-face interview,

March 23, 2007). But even while many educators believe that the CSME is a positive influence on higher education, many also believe that if higher education is not ready to meet these challenges, the CSME can have lasting negative effects on Belizean professionals and institutions. One MOE official cautioned that:

other people from other countries who are prepared will come to Belize, and they will fill the positions that are needed to grow and develop Belize, and our people will be left behind to function in lesser capacities.(face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

Among the academic community, the fear also exists that “there may be a loss of jobs for some our Belizean people and that will be unfortunate” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007). One higher education administrator noted that:

we have some concerns because somehow we don't see the CSME as being the case where our Belizean professionals will be heading to Barbados or Jamaica. I think they will be coming here instead to us, and so we have to strengthen our professionals and our programs. (face-to-face interview, February 28, 2007)

Since the CSME initiative is still in its infancy stage, it is difficult to ascertain whether the fears or optimisms are justified. But the CSME, which allows for the free movement of people, particularly professionals, “necessitated the development and ratification of the National Accreditation Council Act” (Face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007) which when operationalized will have major implications for both financial and curricular decision-making in higher education institutions. As one higher education administrator mentioned:

to improve our standards and quality to meet national and regional accreditation we will have to make serious decisions on what programs to offer, how financially viable those programs are, and make a serious commitment to upgrade our human resources.

(face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007)

*The national accreditation council act.* In January 2005, the Governor-General of Belize signed into law the National Accreditation Council Act to establish the National Accreditation Council [NAC] which would grant recognition to academic certification obtained in Belize and elsewhere, determine the equivalency of awards and certificates in the regional context, and set and monitor the standards which programs and courses at Belizean higher education institutions must meet (Preamble, National Accreditation Council Act, January 2005). This Act was a direct consequence of Belize's adoption of the CSME initiative. In fact, a MOE official verified this by saying:

it was critical for us to put in place a national accreditation council and put in place legislation that would provide the legal support for accreditation in Belize and to make sure that, as a region, we are committed to ensuring that there is an exchange and interchange of degrees and recognition of certain standards. (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007)

The National Accreditation Council is expected to set standards that junior colleges and UB will have to meet. Most administrators and ministry officials believe it is a move towards improving higher education, especially because more and more Belizean educators and institutions will face national and regional competition for market share. As one higher education administrator put it, "to survive in the regional context, we have

to hunger for knowledge, and you have to be flexible and able to adapt to changes” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). One official in the MOE said it has become imperative to “enhance our capacity to respond to market forces and ensure that we have in place the structures and institutions that are necessary to respond to those forces”(face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). A higher education administrator suggested that “ since higher education is no longer isolated but regional and international, Belize has to get on board with standards and accreditation if we are to compete at least regionally”(face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007).

The NAC was ratified in 2005, but there has been no official announcement of the composition of the Council. Even though one MOE official mentioned that the Council had been appointed, there was no evidence of that to be found. In fact, several administrators referred to the non-appointment of the Council, as well as to some of the clauses in the act that they deemed to be “too political.” One higher education administrator lamented the fact that the whole movement towards accreditation came from the government and not from the academic community saying, “we should have been the protagonist and should have been the ones to say to the government that we were ready for a national system of accreditation” (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007).

The issue of accreditation has raised new discussions on the rationalization of academic programs, role of competition/collaboration among Belizean institutions and between Belizean and regional and international institutions of higher learning, and the vision for higher education in Belize.

*Rationalization of academic programs.* One of the salient points raised at the 2006 National Conference on Higher Education was the issue of rationalization of academic programs. Many administrators participating in this study also noted the need for the rationalization of academic programs as a measure to maximize resources and improve the quality of higher education in Belize. One suggestion for rationalizing academic programs is to diversify the curricular offerings by establishing centres of excellence. One higher education administrator noted that “we need to seriously explore the need for centres of excellence where institutions will identify their strong professional programs and relinquish those that they deem to be weak.” (face-to-face interviews, March 6, 2007). In such a system, all institutions would still offer a general education and a professional core in a few disciplines. Students would be able to take the general education core courses in their home districts and transfer to another institution to take the professional core of their choice. But for such concept to be operationalized, there would be a need for a national policy on transfer and articulation. The absence of such a national policy allows administrators to make arbitrary decisions about what courses are accepted as transfer credits. One higher education administrator said, “we have a situation in which if the dean of the transfer institution is not friendly with the dean of the institution from which the student is transferring, the credits may not be transferred” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Transferring credits from the junior college to UB is also challenging. One higher education administrator noted that “if ATLIB works together to standardized courses, then UB will not give us a headache when it comes to transfer” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). To develop and implement a national policy on transfer and articulation would mean that ATLIB institutions would have to

work together to standardize courses and credit hours in order for students to have a seamless transfer. As one higher education administrator noted, “ATLIB will have to sit and work with what exists and decide on a common core” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007).

Several administrators and MOE officials believe that once the NAC becomes operational, colleges will have to improve their own institutional standards, and collectively, improve higher education in Belize. As one MOE official said, “the NAC will ensure that institutions are meeting more than just the minimum standards. It will ensure that institutions are striving for quality” (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007). Another MOE official mentioned that “institutions must understand the standards they are expected to meet and the time frame within which they must meet these standards” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2006). Once an institution is given a second chance to improve but fails to meet the required standards, then “having exhausted those options, that institution should not be allowed to continue to operate” (face-to-face interview, March 23, 2007). Administrators agree that institutions must not only meet minimum standards but must “understand the whole language of quality control and assurance, and we must maintain the standards and strive for quality” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). But to meet those standards, “we will require more than just monies for salaries. That will just not be sufficient to improve quality” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007).

Additionally, some administrators believe that even before the NAC is operationalized, there are a few institutions that should be closed down. One higher education administrator said, “there are a few colleges right now that need to be closed

down, but they will not because there is no political will”(face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Others suggest that maintaining standards prescribed by the NAC will require institutions to make drastic curricular and financial changes in their institutions. But since the NAC has not become operational, this observation is speculative at this point.

Among these presumed changes is the need for additional resources to upgrade faculty qualification as one higher education administrator said, “we can’t have teachers with a bachelor’s degree teaching at a junior college; we can’t have people training teachers with limited preparation in teacher training” (face-to-face interview, March 13, 2007).

There is also the need for more collaboration among junior colleges and between junior colleges and UB. As one higher education administrator noted, “I am hoping that one day collegiality will lead us to be less turfey and we can work together” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007).

*Competition/collaboration in higher education.* Most administrators mentioned that market forces in Belize are manifested in the competition that exists among institutions but were quick to add that collaboration is critical, especially in Belize where the system of higher education needs a lot of strengthening. One higher education administrator mentioned that “competition is healthy, but we need to know when to draw the line between competition and collaboration” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Another higher education administrator mentioned that “competition will always exist, but because there are so few of us offering higher education, we must instead work together” (face-to-face interview, March 9, 2007). One higher education administrator mentioned that competition is necessary in the context of collaboration:

it’s not competition in the sense that we are competing for the same students. It’s

competition that we want so that we can reach a certain standard so that we can collaborate especially in transferring credits from one institution to the next.

(face-to-face interview, March 27, 2007)

And collaboration transcends the junior colleges and UB in Belize. It also includes regional and international institutions. For example, the collaboration of Belizean higher education institutions and some US universities and two-year colleges through COBEC has allowed many Belizean students and faculty to earn advanced degrees in the United States, especially in fields and levels not offered by UB. In addition, other Belizean institutions, for example UB, have over the years established good relations with universities in Britain, Canada, and several Central American countries. In most cases, the collaboration includes faculty exchanges and technical assistance for UB faculty.

The market does affect financial and curricular decision-making as evidenced by the curricular choices that institutions make in response to perceived market needs. Also, competition among institutions is unavoidable but because of the small size of the higher education system, collaboration is critical not only at the local level but also at the regional and international levels.

Regional forces have also affected higher education. The Caribbean Single Market and Economy initiative has created a need for countries to develop accrediting agencies to accredit local as well as regional educational institutions. For Belizean academic institutions this means that they must begin to put in place institutional quality assurance mechanisms to meet the requirements for local and regional accreditation. Putting these quality assurance mechanisms in place has serious financial implications. It

also means Belizean institutions will need to maximize limited resources to become more effective and efficient, hence the discussion on the rationalization of academic programs.

### *Resource Dependency and Higher Education in Belize*

The resource dependency theory assumes that organizations depend on external resources to survive. The theory posits that organizational behavior is dependent on the organization's ability to garner those critical resources it needs to function and survive. In seeking those critical resources, organizations will respond to and become reliant on those entities in their environment that control those resources. In their dependency on external forces for critical resources, organizations often become constrained by external directives, and their subsequent actions are thus shaped by their abilities to manage the dependency and negotiate external demands. The theory emphasizes that in managing such dependency, organizations act strategically to counteract these external demands and lessen dependency. Organizations, therefore, are not solely at the mercy of their external environments, but have some features that help them manage external dependencies.

Using this theory to discuss how the Government of Belize maintains its control over higher education has to be done with the explicit understanding that autonomy is contextually defined (Neave and van Vught, 1994). For example, case studies on higher education systems in developing countries suggest that institutional autonomy is dependent on the higher education environment. In using this theory to discuss government control on higher education in Belize, the higher education system and its weaknesses need to be considered.

In Belize, higher education institutions exist in a policy vacuum and depend very heavily on government finances; therefore, as the theory posits, higher education will respond to the government and become constrained by the government's directives. The government provides these resources and retains the right to give directives and expect compliance. One MOE official confirmed this sentiment by saying that:

if I am the one paying you, then you don't have the right to go out there and do as you please. There has to be some level of responsibility that comes with that autonomy because I can still decide if I will give you that money. (face-to-face interview, March 15, 2007)

But the theory also posits that organizations have the potential to manage these external dependencies through such features such as the interdependencies of organizations and the ability to generate alternative sources of income. For example, higher education institutions depend on the government for funding, but government also depends on these institutions to provide education to its citizens. One higher education administrator noted that because of a lack of a coordinated higher education system and a lack of strong institutional leadership higher education does not realize its strength and potential. (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007) In addition, institutions can rely on alternative sources of funding to lessen their dependencies on government and deflect its control. Again, the higher education context and the instability of the Belizean economy adversely affect institutions' abilities to rely on alternative sources of funding. Even while most administrators and MOE officials interviewed for this study agreed that institutions rely too much on government for funding, they also admit that relying solely on tuition and fees is just not realistic without affecting access and quality. Reliance on

government funding and the subsequent controls, whether overt or covert, is a reality of the Belizean higher education system. Even so, some institutions are more susceptible to the controls of the government than others. For example, some larger and older junior colleges are able to manage their dependencies on government much better than smaller, newer junior colleges. As one higher education administrator said, “we have a vibrant finance committee made up of experts who are able to guide the institution in creating buffers to lessen the effects” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Others use their managing authorities and church influences to avert some governmental control, but ultimately all are subject to the policies of both the government and the Ministry of Education.

*Institutional isomorphism and Curricula in Higher Education in Belize*

Institutional isomorphism provides organizations with legitimacy and promotes survival since organizational elements of formal structure have been legitimated externally, meaning that organizations do not need to provide evidence of efficiency or use internal assessments to define the value of these elements. Powell and DiMaggio (1983) identify three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphism occurs: (1) coercive isomorphism (2) mimetic isomorphism and (3) normative isomorphism.

Curricula in higher education in Belize have become highly isomorphic. First, the adoption and implementation of CAPE through a government directive means that all junior colleges are offering very similar programs that fall under the CAPE umbrella. Second, institutions which are perceived to be more legitimate and credible, for example, St. John’s College Junior College (the first junior college in Belize), has been used by almost all other institutions, including the University of Belize, as a model for curriculum

development. Less prestigious institutions “mimic” St. Johns Junior College curriculum and management practices in order to gain some recognition and legitimacy with the MOE and the communities that they serve. Third, because of the few higher education institutions in Belize, there is a frequent and sustained movement of academic faculty from one institution to the next. For example, one institution has employed four faculty members from another junior college. Faculty moving from one institution often tend to carry with them their academic experiences and teaching preferences to their new institutions. In the case of the four new faculty members, they were hired because they are proficient in CAPE related courses. As one higher education administrator pointed out, “we started offering CAPE because one faculty member who had just moved here was knowledgeable about CAPE” (face-to-face interview, February 27, 2007).

The isomorphic nature of the curricula in Belize higher education and the pressures that force this isomorphism can ultimately be linked to the lack of autonomy in higher education. Because government controls the finances that institutions need, it can “coerce” institutions to adopt the changes in curricula it desires. A good example is the imposition of CAPE on the junior colleges. With the adoption and implementation of CAPE, most institutions are offering very similar academic programs so that many higher education administrators complained about the duplication of programs. Because institutions do not have the resources necessary to adapt and make innovative changes, their changes are limited to what others in the organizational field are doing; hence there is a lot of concurrence in curricular changes among institutions. The lack of a coherent framework to guide the development of higher education leaves institutions to second guess the direction they should take to contribute meaningfully to national development.

As one higher education administrator mentioned, “we make changes to improve but we are never sure these are the changes that are needed to develop higher education” (face-to-face interview, March 6, 2007). Uncertain about their own direction and development, and legitimacy, institutions mimic curricula and adopt policies of other more credible institutions to gain legitimacy.

### *Summary of Findings*

The chapter presented the results of the data analyses of interviews and documents. Interviews were conducted with 10 higher education administrators and two Ministry of Education officials. Document reviews were done using several different public and institutional documents.

Findings of this study show that the governance system of higher education in Belize can be described as state control in key areas such as financing and in some aspects of curricula. The control that the Ministry of Education holds over higher education comes from the fact that institutions depend very heavily on financing from the Ministry of Education; thus, institutions accept the dictates of the MOE with little or no resistance. The changes in higher education have come about from pressures by the government. This situation affects higher education’s capacities to be innovative. The relationship between higher education and the MOE and Government of Belize can be described as one in which MOE develops policies with little input from higher education; consequently, higher education institutions often view these policies with some mistrust. There is also a lack of expertise in the MOE to guide the development of higher education. This vacuum seriously affects the manner in which decisions are made and policies developed for higher education. In several instances, policies were developed

and imposed on higher education, which had little choice but to adopt them because it depends very heavily on government funding. The lack of a coherent framework to guide the development of higher education creates a situation in which institutions exist from day to day without any clear plan for their own development and that of the higher education system. The involvement of politicians in higher education also affects institutional innovation.

The inadequacy of financing for both the junior colleges and UB affects their abilities to plan ahead, and their capacities to contribute to the development of Belize. The lack of an effective and transparent funding mechanism affects institutional long-term planning, opportunities for research and professional development, and infrastructural development. Most administrators were not satisfied with the manner in which institutions are funded nor were they satisfied with the manner in which disbursements to institutions are made.

Most administrators agreed that it is indeed difficult to develop curricula that are related to national development because there is no plan to guide curricular decisions. Because there is no such plan, MOE officials feel that they need to direct curricular offerings at both junior colleges and UB, thus limiting higher education's capacities to be innovative in curriculum development. The adoption and implementation of CAPE has raised questions about the specialization of the curriculum at the cost of general education, a criticism often made about curriculum in developing countries (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000). Also, there are doubts about the relevance of CAPE to national development.

In Belize, the market plays a role in both financial and curricular decision-making in higher education but not to the extent it does in developed countries. In fact, as some administrators believed, there has to be policies to lessen the effects of the market on weak and small institutions. Competition for students, qualified faculty, and resources can seriously affect the development of smaller, less prestigious institutions. Regional market forces such as the Caribbean Single Market Economy have major implications for higher education and these implications have to be addressed. Discussions of these implications lead to suggestions for rationalization of academic programs to improve efficiency and maximize resources, the need for quality control mechanisms to enhance the quality of education, and for more collaborations and cooperation among institutions in Belize and abroad.

Chapter Five: *Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Implications for Theory, Practice and Research*

The purpose of this case study was to understand governance of higher education in the developing country of Belize by examining the existing governance structure and how this governance structure affects financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize. Furthermore, this study examined the role of market forces on higher education in Belize and their impact on financial and curricular decision-making.

For the purpose of this study, *governance* was defined as the relationship between a higher education system and its national government, and the effects of this relationship on the actions and behaviors of higher education institutions, individually and collectively. In other words, the study examined the relationship between the Government of Belize through the Ministry of Education and politicians and the higher education system.

*Emergent Themes*

Using qualitative data analyses techniques, this study explored four research questions presented below, each with a summary of the relevant findings.

The lack of expertise in the Ministry of Education affects the development of higher education policies the higher education system. Also, the lack of a conception of higher education as a system that is distinct from the other levels, affects the manner in which higher education is funded and policies are developed. Although the Ministry of Education through the Tertiary and Post Secondary Services Unit is responsible for the

supervision and development of the higher education system, this study revealed that there is a lack of expertise in this “Unit.” The lack of expertise means that there is no one who can advise the Ministry of Education in respect to the direction or development of higher education. Also, other agencies such as ATLIB have to take on the leadership role despite their lack of authority to do so. In addition, policies are often implemented without adequate consultation with higher education.

Politics plays a major role in higher education in the establishment of and financial assistance to institutions and the appointment of senior administrative officials at the University of Belize. This study highlighted the controversial clauses in the UB Act which allow the Prime Minister of Belize to appoint the president of UB and the Minister of Education to give directives to the Board of Trustees at UB. Additionally, the clauses in the National Accreditation Act which also gives the Minister of Education the final control of the Council are deemed as major weaknesses in the movement toward accreditation in a transparent and fair manner.

There is a lack of both institutional autonomy and institutional accountability in the higher education system. Most administrators and Ministry of Education officials concurred that institutions are not accountable to the government, but some administrators believe that higher education has little incentive to become accountable and also has little apparent autonomy that is substantially limited by financing and financial policies and by seemingly impulsive acts of politicians and governmental decisions in the regional context.

There is a lack of an effective and transparent funding formula to support the University of Belize and the junior colleges. While the junior colleges receive only salary grants, UB receives a yearly subvention for capital and recurring expenditures. This study revealed, however, that administrators at both levels believe that the funding is often arbitrarily set by Ministry of Education officials, so that institutions often receive funding based on the previous year's budget. In addition, the lack of a funding formula to include capital projects stifles the infrastructure development of the junior colleges and affects the quality of education. Furthermore, there is a lack of a formal system to communicate to the junior colleges the funding level that has been approved for each. This creates a situation in which institutions are forced to take the "risk," from year to year, of employing new faculty even though they do not know whether the positions will be partially subsidized by the government. In respect to UB, its funding has practically remained constant except in 2005 when it was increased by half a million dollars and in the 2007-2008 academic year when it will be increased by one million dollars. While the increases were welcome, the rationale for the timing and amount remained unclear to institution's administrators.

There is a lack of a national development plan to assist institutions in identifying academic programs that meet national development needs. Many of the participants in the study agreed that higher education should promote national development but could not agree on what are the priority academic needs. As a result, academic programs are often identified based on market needs, perceived community needs, and social and religious needs, depending on the religious affiliation of the institutions. The consequence of the lack of a national development plan to guide higher education curricula is that Ministry of

Education officials are not satisfied with the manner in which curricular decisions are made at the institutions and find it necessary to impose curricular policies on institutions, such as the imposition of the CAPE curricula.

The adoption and implementation of the CAPE at the junior colleges after the Ministry of Education directed junior colleges to revise their curricula to include CAPE is a good example of how the system of governance in Belize affects curricular decision-making in higher education. Offering CAPE meant that institutions had to make some revisions to their existing curricula, which in some cases, have meant eliminating certain academic programs or courses.

Most administrators agree that the market plays or should play a role in guiding higher education in Belize but several pointed out the need for policies and measures to be put in place as well. Also, participants noted that while competition among institutions is unavoidable because of the small size of the higher education system, collaboration is even more crucial.

Regional forces have also affected higher education. The Caribbean Single Market and Economy initiative has created a need for countries to develop accrediting agencies to accredit local as well as regional educational institutions. For Belizean academic institutions this means that they must begin to put in place institutional quality assurance mechanisms to meet the requirements for local and regional accreditation. It also means that Belizean institutions will need to maximize limited resources to become more effective and efficient. For example, recent discussions have highlighted the possibility of establishing centers of excellence.

## *Conclusions*

The study of governance of higher education has been well researched in developed countries such as the United States. However, studies on governance of higher education in developing countries are limited. In those instances where studies have been conducted, they have tended to examine governance of higher education in general, rather than specifically in one country. In a few instances, studies have been conducted on regions, for example, the African region. Before this study, the system of governance of higher education and its effects on financial and curricular decision-making in higher education in Belize had not been studied.

### *Governance of Higher Education in Belize*

A larger study on higher education in developing countries (Task Force for Higher Education and Society [TFHES], 2000) indicated that good governance is perhaps the key issue for achieving quality in higher education in developing countries. This study found that the governance structure, which is defined in this study as the relationship between the government of Belize (via the Ministry of Education) and the higher education system, is more of a state control than a state supervisory, using the Neave and van Vught (1994) model of governance. The absence of a “buffer entity” in the form of a council of higher education creates a situation in which higher education institutions interact directly with the Ministry of Education, politicians and government officials in Belize.

A study by the TFHES (2000) notes “...the direct involvement of politicians has generally politicized higher education widening the possibilities for corruption, nepotism, and political opportunism” (p.53). This situation exists in higher education in Belize

where the establishment of and financial assistance to colleges, and more recently, curricular changes, often fall to the discretion of politicians. In the establishment of institutions, the Ministry of Education [MOE] often does not have any input in the schools that are opened even though there is a formal request that has to be filed with the MOE. When the decision comes from a politician, there is little the ministry will do to reject that request. The lack of standards to evaluate the preparedness of an institution to offer high- quality programs may allow substandard institutions to open. Because these institutions are recognized by the MOE, they must also receive the appropriate funding. In addition, quite often politicians will lobby for financial support for institutional infrastructure in their own constituencies, often to the detriment of other, perhaps needier, institutions. The consequence of this practice is that there is no equitable distribution of finances for infrastructure development, so there are still junior colleges that rely on existing high school infrastructure.

The lack of higher education expertise at the MOE creates a situation in which decisions are often made without any research and/or the involvement of professionals in the field of higher education. For example, in developing the National Accreditation Council Act, an inter-ministerial committee developed the Act based on their limited knowledge of accreditation. Since there is a lack of expertise in higher education, decisions are often made that exclude or severely marginalize the higher education sector. In 2004, the MOE held a National Education Summit to develop a strategic plan for education in Belize. There was no provision in that summit for the discussion of higher education. The then Director of Projects at the MOE argued to include tertiary education in the discussion and was allowed to prepare a policy paper addressing the development

of higher education. The 2005 Action Plan of the MOE shows that the drafting of and ratification of policies for higher education was to be completed by August 2005. The National Accreditation Council was to have been established by April 2006. Neither has been completed thus far. It must be noted, however, that the development of a higher education policy and a higher education act are currently in progress. However, if these are not completed before 2008, there is a risk that they may not come to fruition or the process and content may significantly be altered depending on the philosophy of higher education of the new government. As one higher education administrator commented, “we will have to wait and see since 2008 is an election year and we don’t know if there were to be a change in government will there be continuity or will they scrap all of that and start fresh” (face-to-face interview, February 20, 2007).

Furthermore, communication between the MOE and ATLIB is affected by the lack of a specific individual to liaise with ATLIB, so that decisions are often made without adequate consultations with ATLIB. In fact, several administrators pointed out that the Ministry’s representative to ATLIB also has several other duties to perform in the other sectors of education and has limited time to really interact with ATLIB and COBEC. Also, key individuals in the MOE are not always current with ATLIB’s plans and activities and often express doubts about the quality of education at the tertiary level. These doubts often arise from the perceptions that higher education institutions and administrators are not doing enough to enhance the quality of education or be accountable for public monies. Ministry officials, therefore, often feel the need to set the direction, even if they lack the expertise. The result of this sometimes mutual distrust between MOE and higher education institutions becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy in

which MOE officials do not trust higher education institutions to fulfill the mandate of offering quality education, therefore, they do not feel justified in allotting more finances to institutions. The inadequate funding in turn hinders the development of the institutions and further prohibits them from improving their standard and quality of education.

It is interesting that most of the higher education administrators were insistent that the government does not control their institutions. In response to a question posed on the balance of institutional autonomy and institutional accountability, almost all administrators and ministry officials interviewed for this study said that the scale is tipping on the side of institutional autonomy and not institutional accountability. It is obvious that the ministry does not have the structures in place, for example, to evaluate the academic and financial robustness of institutions. Institutions, therefore, perceive themselves to be autonomous as a result. But, the government through its control of the financial resources does control higher education in Belize.

The absence of a higher education policy or a higher education Act allows the government to make arbitrary policies which affect higher education in Belize. In the absence of such policy, it is difficult to increase access either through a financial aid system or the offering of developmental education for students who are deficient in areas such as Math and English. Perhaps it is paradoxical that the very structures that are missing from higher education in Belize, and which some administrators believe allow them to “do things their own way,” are the very ones which control institutional growth and development. Tilak (2003) suggests that in the absence of higher education policy, either “ad hocism” or chaos is created by those actors in higher education. Cal (2006) observes that:

it is not surprising that in the absence of clear, coherent, long term vision, mission and goals and structures articulated for the tertiary level sector, macro-policy decisions with concomitant institutional arrangements are subject to reversal depending on the views of the political directorate in Belmopan (p. 26).

Richardson and Fielden (1997) also suggest that:

those countries where systems are less sophisticated seem to attach greater importance to government choosing the key figures in positions of power and exercising control through their representatives having a more hands-on involvement in university governance. (p. 10)

Barrow (2001) also suggests the need for a higher education policy framework that would guide the development of academic programs to meet national needs and establish a funding mechanism. He notes that the government of Belize should play a supervisory role in higher education rather than a controlling one.

#### *Funding of Higher Education*

The lack of an effective and transparent funding formula and the inadequacy of the current funding for higher education in Belize have at least four immediate and serious implications: (a) infrastructure development is severely affected since there is no provision for capital projects, (b) long-term planning is seriously impaired, (c) higher education's capacity to adapt and innovate is severely limited, and (d) research opportunities and professional development for faculty are limited. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000) notes that financial dependence on the state means that funding remains unstable, subject to the fluctuating of government resources. The result of this is that institutional ability to be innovative and execute research is stifled.

Since there is no formal structure in place to provide funding for capital projects, especially at the junior college level, institutions often have to use alternative sources of revenues such as fund-raising and tuition increases. In situations in which institutions rely heavily on fund-raising, valuable time is spent planning and implementing these activities. Fund-raising activities include food sales, queen contests, raffles, and community fairs on the college grounds. These fund-raising activities involve teachers, students, and parents and often require that classes be suspended in order to accommodate the need for classroom space and the assistance of teachers and students. The consequence of fund raising activities is that valuable class time is lost. In addition, these activities often pressure students to subsidize these drives, in some form or the other, thus, placing a further burden on their limited financial resources. Furthermore, these fund-raising activities rely greatly on the business communities in the area, which in many cases already suffer from “fund-raising fatigue,” since there are only so many businesses that can be called upon to contribute.

Raising tuition and other fees to provide for capital expenditures affects access, since students cannot pay their higher tuition fees and thus cannot enroll in college courses. Even though the government of Belize provides free tuition to students in the second year of college, the students must first be able to pay their first year tuition to get to the point at which they can enjoy the free tuition policy. The current free tuition for the second year does not increase access for students who cannot first pay the first year of college tuition and fees. Unless a financial aid program is developed to address the initial access to higher education, access to higher education remains an elusive dream for many students. Thus, even though more and more students are graduating from the secondary

schools each year, the percentage of student enrollment at the tertiary level remains almost constant.

The lack of funding for infrastructure also affects institutions' abilities to diversify their curricular offerings since there is insufficient classroom space, inadequate library holdings, and laboratory facilities and equipment. Thus, curricular offerings at the junior colleges and UB often remain consistent and there are only negligible changes to report over a five year time span. Consequently, each year students graduate from college with degrees in the same major areas and compete for the available positions in these fields. Furthermore, several institutions have had to place a cap on their enrollment because they simply lack the physical space to accept more students. This further compromises access.

The inadequacy of crucial library, laboratory, and technology resources has major implications for institutions as they prepare for national and regional accreditation. Most institutions have their own library facilities, but in many cases, these would not meet accreditation criteria simply because the librarians are not credentialed and the holdings are inadequate for college level coursework.

The current funding of higher education also affects the institutions' capacities to do long-term planning. Whereas some institutions have embarked on developing strategic plans, the inadequacy of funding, the sometimes untimely disbursement of funds, and the lack of communication between higher education and the Ministry of Education seriously affect the implementation of these plans. Institutions exist from academic year to academic year with little or no vision for institutional growth and development. The net

effect is that the development of the system is stymied and does not have its optimal impact on national development.

The inadequate resources available for higher education affect higher education's capacity to adapt and innovate. The changes, therefore, that institutions make are more likely to fall into the range of those changes that the government wants. This happens because the mechanisms operating in the higher education environment are those that force institutions to do what is "expected" by either the demands of the external environment (resource dependency) or the established institutionalism of the Belize higher education system (institutional isomorphism).

The lack of funding also limits opportunities for professional development for faculty especially at the junior colleges. UB provides some opportunities for faculty professional development through their Study Leave Program, in which faculty are given between one and three years to pursue further studies abroad while receiving a portion of their salaries. Most of the junior colleges do not have a Study Leave program in place, so faculty members must pursue professional development opportunities through other avenues. The effect of this lack of opportunity creates a situation in which many instructors have degrees only one level higher than the level at which they teach. Additionally, many have Master's degrees, but in many instances, not in the subject areas they teach. Research at the University of Belize is also limited because of inadequate government resources to support research either for its intrinsic value or for national development needs.

### *Curricula and National Development*

One of the major challenges in higher education in Belize is the disconnect between national development and curricula in higher education. While MOE and government officials express dissatisfaction with curricula in higher education, higher education administrators also express frustration with the lack of a national development plan. Because a national development plan does not exist, institutions rely on their perceptions of market needs to develop curricula. This situation often means that curricula in higher education are meeting market needs but not national development needs. For example, there is a high demand in the market for business programs, but these business programs, as one government official noted, are not meeting national development needs. Additionally, while curricula are meeting market demands, they are limited to the traditional areas of business, science, and information technology. Other academic areas that are beneficial to Belize such as linguistics, cultural heritage, visual and performing arts, and public health are not offered as options because they may not attract enough students to make the program viable. For example, UB is currently offering a program in Environmental Health with fewer than 12 students. With such small enrollment, tuition from students is negligible and the government of Belize is subsidizing the program. In many cases, scarce institutional financial resources discourage other institutions from offering these different programs. While Ministry of Education officials encourage institutions to offer academic programs that they deem necessary for Belize's development, there are no financial incentives to do so. For example, there is a shortage of Physics teachers at the secondary schools level, yet UB does not offer a baccalaureate degree in Physics Education because the program

consistently had only a few applicants and was discontinued after a few years. The perception often, then, is that higher education is not meeting national needs, so MOE officials must direct curricular offerings at the institutions. It can be argued that the greater the government control over curricular decisions in higher education, the more difficult it is for institutions to be innovative.

### *Market Forces and Higher Education*

The offering of the CAPE was a government decision as a signatory to CARICOM. The directive from the MOE to institutions to institutionalize CAPE was to satisfy one of the requirements of the Caribbean Single Market Economy and to standardize tertiary education in Belize. However, the fact that institutions vary in the manner in which they implement CAPE undermines the goal of standardization. It must be noted that CAPE has not been officially recognized by US institutions, therefore, students who have decided to pursue studies in the US and Latin America are not encouraged to sit for the CAPE exam or follow its curriculum.

The adoption and implementation of CAPE has affected the depth and breadth of curricula at the junior college in that, while there are more subjects to take at the exam level, not all the courses have the depth that is necessary for the transfer of credits to the University of Belize and other four-year institutions. Also, general education courses which are important to the personal growth and development of the individual may be decreased, depending on the number of credit hours that the respective CAPE model requires. According to the Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000), general education in developing countries is often the stepchild of specialized education, a weakness that higher education in developing countries urgently needs to address.

While most institutions have now integrated CAPE in their curriculum, nationwide consultations conducted prior to the National Higher Education Conference in 2006, suggested that many educators at different levels of the education system doubt the relevance of CAPE to the developmental needs of Belize. In the absence of a national development plan by which national needs can be determined, there is little evidence to support the view that CAPE curricula are meeting national needs; instead it seems that CAPE is merely satisfying the need to adhere to a regional initiative. The fact that UB does not have any policy to accept transfer of credits earned in CAPE courses indicates that the policy directive to institutionalize CAPE at the junior colleges was not well devised or implemented. Consequently, junior college administrators are now clamoring for the Ministry of Education to restructure UB's curriculum to allow for the transfer of credits earned in the CAPE programs. However, in the absence of a clear policy on transfer and articulation between junior colleges and UB, there is no guarantee that credits earned in CAPE programs will be transferable to UB.

The adoption and implementation of CAPE in Belizean junior colleges became necessary after the government of Belize became a signatory to the Caribbean Single Market Economy, which in itself, was a regional response designed to mitigate the effects of globalization on small, developing nations. Thus, it can be concluded that higher education in Belize, although a national enterprise, is not immune from the pressures of 'market forces'. These market pressures occur in the form of competition among institutions for students, prestige, most qualified faculty, and limited resources; and external forces such as regional initiatives like the CSME and its conditions and requirements. To overcome these pressures, higher education in Belize must be allowed

full institutional autonomy over its core functions of finance and curricula and must be held accountable not only for the public subsidy but also in its duty to provide quality education to students.

While competition is inevitable in higher education, junior colleges in Belize need to collaborate more in order to assist weaker institutions with fewer resources to rise to a level at which competition for students becomes more just. In this manner, educational opportunities for all students become equitable and degrees earned from any junior college are recognized equally. Junior colleges and UB, as well, need to collaborate more so that the junior colleges can benefit from UB resources. Similarly, academic departments at both the junior colleges and UB must work closer together so that those programs that have small enrollments, but are of high priority needs, can be offered. Additionally, government must mitigate the forces of the market by providing financial and other incentives for low enrollment, high priority areas.

Because higher education in Belize remains a very small sector with a small enrollment, the government must play a role in steering the direction of higher education. Leaving it unplanned and solely to market forces can severely impair both the public and private good of higher education. Leaving higher education to succumb to market forces to make up the shortfall between subsidy and operational costs creates a situation in which institutions may design curricula to meet market needs at the expense of national development and human development needs. It will probably also further perpetuate inequalities in the system, since larger and more prestigious institutions are likely to generate more funding to enhance their capacities whereas smaller and less prestigious institutions will be marginalized.

The challenges facing higher education in Belize are diverse and extensive. The most significant challenge remains the inadequate finances to suitably enhance the human resources, facilities, infrastructure, and curricular offerings of higher education in Belize. The government must make a serious commitment to divert some of the revenues from other sources such as the oil industry to improve the quality of education at the higher education level. Institutions must be more efficient in allocating limited resources and more committed to instituting internal quality controls in order to enhance the learning opportunities of their students. As a system, higher education needs to collaborate more, maximize limited human and financial resources, improve quality, eliminate inefficiencies, and use the market to generate income that will in turn be used to strengthen its core mission.

The relationship between higher education and government through the Ministry of Education needs to be improved by establishing a “buffer entity” such as a council of higher education which will interface between higher education and the government. The council would manage higher education so that control of higher education rests neither with institutions nor with the Ministry of Education. The composition of the board, its duties and mandates, and its organizational autonomy are critical details since any undue influence on the board from either party will significantly erode its function, credibility, and purpose. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society (2000) notes that these “bodies require clear mandates, well-established operating procedures, and full autonomy from both government and academia” (p.53). The absence of a formal council of higher education puts higher education in Belize in a weaker negotiating position since government often perceives institutions to be concerned primarily about their own

survival and vested interests. Conversely, higher education often views government and the Ministry of Education with distrust. A council of higher education would mediate between higher education and the Ministry of Education to lessen the mistrust, thus strengthening the relationship between the two entities. In addition, a council would ensure some measure of autonomy for higher education while holding them accountable. It would also represent the interests of the country and ensure that higher education contributes meaningfully to the economic and social development of the country.

#### *Implications for Theory and Further Research*

Studies on higher education in developing countries (Hall and Symes, 2005; Kirby-Harris, 2003; Neave and van Vught, 1994) establish the fundamental role of governments in higher education and advocate for governments to play more supervisory rather than controlling roles. These studies extol the values of enhancing the relationship between higher education and governments through the establishment of “buffer entities” which interface between governments and higher education. Bjarson (1998) studied buffer entities in four African countries and found that most of them shared common functions, compositions, and selection of members. In all cases, a majority of the members were government representatives. Since there is no “buffer entity” in higher education in Belize, this study could not determine the effects, but this author concludes that there is certainly a need for higher education to be managed by an entity other than the Ministry of Education, and the council should reflect an even distribution of members from various stakeholder groups.

Bjarson and Lund (1998) used case studies to examine the relationship between higher education and governments in three African countries. They concluded that

government interference in the internal affairs of the higher education system or individual institutions seriously affected the development of higher education. This study has also found that the strong, but often subtle, political interference in the higher education system in Belize has affected the development of this sector.

Using Neave and van Vught's (1994) state control/state supervisory governance model, Richardson and Fielden conducted a study in Commonwealth countries to examine whether governments were exerting undue control over higher education in their respective countries. The study found that in the African countries there was a high tendency toward state control even though data from institutional leaders suggested differently. This study has also found that institutional leaders do not readily admit that the government, through the Ministry of Education, controls higher education, but analysis of their responses and review of public documents paint a different picture of the relationship between higher education and the government and Ministry of Education.

Kirby-Harris (2003) examined the changes at the University of Namibia over an eight year period and concluded that the values of the government, articulated through subtle discourses and influences, dominated the university and controlled the changes in the university during its brief history. This study found that changes in curricular offerings, tuition policies, and infrastructural development are controlled by the government through the Ministry of Education. The leverage that the government maintains over the higher education institutions in Belize is its control of the financial resources that these institutions need to survive and its ability to demand certain curricular changes. Kirby-Harris (2003) concluded that in the absence of a coherent framework, institutions are perceived to be autonomous but with little framework to

develop and establish their own identities. In these situations, institutions often pose little or no resistance to governmental values and controls (Kirby-Harris, 2003). This study has found that even though institutional leaders believe that their institutions are autonomous, the reality is that the government through the Ministry of Education does control higher education since decisions and initiatives at the national level do affect management processes at the institutional levels.

Based on the findings of this study and the limited research on governance of higher education in developing countries and, in particular, Belize, future research should not only examine system-wide governance but also institutional governance. Research should focus on how institutional governance affects financial and curricular decision-making at the institutional level, and how institutional governance affects system-wide governance of higher education in Belize. Future studies should also examine the role of the institutional leadership and how it affects the governance of higher education.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The results of this study lead to several implications for improved governance and management processes in the higher education system of Belize. First, the government of Belize should establish a council of higher education that would act as a buffer between the Ministry of Education and higher education. This council would be comprised of higher education professionals who would be responsible to oversee higher education. Some of the council's responsibility would be to review and approve academic programs based on set criteria; make recommendations to the Ministry of Education for the funding of institutions; set policies for transfer and articulation along with higher education,

and establish a management information system to manage institutional and system data, Second, the Government of Belize and Ministry of Education should establish an effective and transparent funding formula for both recurring and capital expenditures for both junior colleges and UB. They should also establish a transparent and efficient mechanism for the allocation and disbursement of finances to the junior colleges and UB. The development of a financial aid system to improve access to higher education is critical if the enrolment rate in higher education is to be increased. Third, the Government of Belize and the Ministry of Education should develop a national development plan which identifies the areas of priorities for the country to guide curriculum development in higher education. They should also offer incentives for institutions to offer low enrollment/high priority fields of study and ensure that CAPE, other curricula, and general education courses are aligned with national and human development needs.

Finally, the Government of Belize and the Ministry of Education should offer more financial support to weaker institutions which may not be able to vie for stronger students and more qualified faculty. They should mitigate or respond to the effects of regional market forces by providing more financial resources for the improvement of faculty and administrators' qualifications, and for institutional strengthening. They should also develop and enforce policies which govern the establishment of both local and foreign higher education institutions in Belize and the rationalization of academic programs.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear Administrator:

I am in the process of collecting data for my dissertation entitled: A Case Study of Governance of Higher Education in Belize: Implications for finance and curricula in higher education. I would like to request your permission to include your institution as part of my study and would like to invite you to participate in the study. This research must be in compliance with USF IRB guidelines; therefore, I must maintain all confidentiality in respect to data I collect.

Thank you for your assistance at this crucial stage of my dissertation.

Respectfully,

Olda Hoare  
Doctoral Student  
University of South Florida

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide for Administrators

1. Under the current system, the government of Belize provides a portion of the funding for HE institutions. Can you describe the process by which this funding is provided by GOB?
2. What is your understanding of how this funding is calculated?
3. How is this grant used at your institution?
4. How do you decide how to use government's subvention?
5. What other source/s of revenue do you rely on to cover your budget?
6. Under the current system of governance in HE, what do you think are the effects of this system on financial decision-making at your institution?
7. What do you think are the effects of this system on strategic planning at your institution?
8. At your institution, how do you decide which academic programs to offer? discontinue?
9. How is your curriculum related to human development needs?
10. How does your curriculum reflect the national needs of Belize?
11. What significant curriculum changes have you made in the last five years? What or who stimulated those changes?
12. How does the relationship between your institution and government affect curriculum development at your institution?
13. How does this relationship affect the curriculum changes at your institution?
14. Do you believe that the market has a role to play in higher education in Belize? If so, what is that role?
15. How do market factors affect financial decision-making at your institution?
16. How do market factors affect curriculum decision-making at your institution?
17. How does globalization affect the future of your institution?

Appendix B Continued

18. How does globalization affect the future of higher education in Belize?

19. What is your vision for higher education in Belize?

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide for Ministry of Education Officials

1. Under the current system the government provides a portion of funding for HE. How this funding is decided upon at the ministry's level? At the national level?
2. You mentioned in your address to COBEC that there is a need for a fixed funding formula? What is the importance of having such a formula?
3. HE education depends on both government subsidies and tuition and fees from students. Does the ministry have set tuition policies for HE in general?
4. What is the role of HE in Belize?
5. Does Belize have a national development plan? Is there a clear alignment between HE curriculum and the national development plan of Belize?
6. How satisfied are you with curriculum development in HE?
7. The task force on higher education and society (2000) wrote that higher education is plagued by massive increases in enrollments, controversy over its status as a public or private good, extremely inadequate funding, corruption, outdated curricula, and inadequate and rigid governance structures (Holm-Nielson, 2001; Task Force on Higher Education and Society [TFHES], 2000). To what extent is this a fair assessment of HE in Belize?
8. How would you characterize the ministry's relationship with HE?
9. Is this relationship being examined to make it more effective?
10. What is the government's view of HE: is it a public good or a private good?
11. Is there a role for the market in HE in Belize?
12. How do market factors affect governments' financial decision-making in respect to higher education?
13. How does globalization affect the future of HE in Belize?
14. How is the ministry preparing for the effects of CSME on HE in Belize?
15. How does the relationship between HE and the ministry affect HE's ability to be innovative in dealing with the effects of the globalization?

## Appendix C Continued

16. Good governance is created when there is a balance between institutional autonomy and institutional accountability. Have we created that balance?
17. What is your vision for HE in Belize?

## Appendix D

### IRB Approval Letter



February 8, 2007

Olda Hoare, M.Ed  
P.O. Box 163  
Sacred Heart Junior College  
San Ignacio, BELIZE

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review

IRB#: 105432 (I)

Title: *A Case Study of Governance of Higher Education in Belize: Implications for Finance and Curricula in Higher Education*

Study Approval Period: February 7, 2007 to February 6, 2008

Dear Olda Hoare:

On February 7, 2007, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above protocol **for the period indicated above**. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number 7. Your adult informed consent was also approved.

Please note, if applicable, the **enclosed informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on page one of the form**. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form. Make copies from the enclosed original.

**Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence** regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. In addition, we have enclosed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Quick Reference Guide providing guidelines and resources to assist you in meeting your responsibilities in the conduction of human participant research. Please read this guide carefully. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH • DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY & COMPLIANCE  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS, FWA NO. 00001669  
University of South Florida • 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

Appendix E

Informed Consent to Participate in Research



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

IRB Approval
FWA 00091609
IRB Number: 105432 I
From 02-07-07
Thru 02-06-08

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research**  
**Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study**

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:

A Case Study of Governance of Higher Education in Belize: Implications for Finance and Curricula in Higher Education.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Oida R. Hoare, doctoral candidate, University of South Florida.

The research will be done at University of Belize, Corozal Junior College, Muffles Junior College, San Pedro Junior College, Adventist Junior College, Ecumenical Junior College, St. Johns Junior College, Wesley Junior College, Ministry of Education.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to understand governance of higher education in Belize. As higher education administrators, your perspectives will be extremely helpful in understanding system-wide governance in Belize.

**Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one tape-recorded interview at your place of work with the possibility of one follow-up telephone interview. Person to person interviews are expected to last one hour and telephone interviews will last approximately half an hour. Both interviews will take place during normal working hours at a time convenient to you.

**Alternatives**

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.



**Benefits**

The potential benefit to you is:

1. to help to understand the higher education governance structure in Belize by providing empirical evidence of how the structure affects financing and curricula in higher education in Belize and perhaps pave the way for further discussion on how to improve the system.

**Risks or Discomfort**

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

We *will not* pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Confidentiality**

- o We must keep your study records confidential. All electronic files of interviews will be stored in a password-protected computer file. No actual names will be used in the interviews or in the final reports; pseudonyms will be used for both participants and institutions. All interview transcripts, data analysis cards will be kept in a file cabinet which will only be accessible to the researcher. The electronic files of interviews will be kept for one year and then deleted. None of the data will be shown to any other person beside the researcher.

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- o the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.
- o The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

**Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the study doctor or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study

**Questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Olda R. Hoare, 824-2102

If you have questions about your rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

If you experience an adverse event or unanticipated problem call Olda R. Hoare at 824-2102.

Appendix E Continued

**Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study



**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

I also certify that he or she does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research. This person speaks the language that was used to explain this research.

This person reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her.

This person does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give informed consent.

This person is not taking drugs that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Olda R. Hoare  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

## About the Author

Olda Ramona Zetina Hoare is currently the Dean of Sacred Heart Junior College in San Ignacio, Belize. She holds a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida and a Bachelor of Education in English Education from the University of Belize, Belize. Olda has been an educator for the last twenty years at the secondary and tertiary levels. In 1999, Olda was appointed as the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at Sacred Heart Junior College, a position she held until 2003 when she left to pursue doctoral studies at University of South Florida. In 2007 she was appointed Dean of Sacred Heart Junior College.

Olda represents her institution at ATLIB and COBEC. She is interested in conducting further research in the areas of governance, transfer and articulation, and finance. Olda is married to Ismael Hoare and has three children: Alyssa, Ismael, and Kieran Hoare.