

The Role of Information in New York Higher Education Policymaking: The Budgetary Process

by

Christine G. Shakespeare

Introduction

This paper proposes the use of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier, 2003) to describe and explain a particular aspect of higher education policy. It highlights some preliminary findings from my dissertation research.

Background

Because public funds are used to finance higher education institutions, a wide range of interest groups cast their eyes on higher education institutions with demands for productivity and public accountability (Boer & Goedegebuure, 2003). Higher education institutions in particular are expected to prove their contributions to economic growth (Berdahl & Millett, 1991). Higher education is held to determine a “society’s evolution potential, and, in economic terms, affects international competitiveness and choice of industrial location” (Goedegebuure et al., 1994). States and nations invest a significant proportion of their overall spending on higher education. In New York State, the 2003-04 enacted budget for higher education was \$6,579 billion which amounted to about 6.6% of the overall state budget (Senate Finance Committee, 2004). States and nations face rising health care costs and are attempting to shift the burden of finance of higher education from the state to the student. In the U.S., it is often in the budget process where a battle over higher education occurs.

In the annual state budget process, difficult decisions are made about the funding of higher education and policymakers point to certain performance indicators such as graduation rates, cost per student, and rank of institutions in the state, country, and world to explain their financing decisions. The budget process is a crucial work process in a state higher education system (Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999). Budget processes highlight the manner that information is collected, disseminated, and utilized in higher education policymaking, as well as how actors interface with information during that process.

In New York State, politics and the budget process are principle drivers of higher education policy. The hope is that in the budget process policymakers engage in rational decision-making with sufficient information to make sound decisions (Fiorina & Skocpol, 1999). The absence or presence of information in a policy environment is a policy issue. Information leads to a state’s ability to define the purposes of its higher education system, to convey expectations to institutions, and to assess how the state is performing in areas it has targeted (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2003). One would assume that the more information circulates through the legislative process, the better the results for higher education policymaking. On the other hand, as Paul A. Sabatier suggests, the more information circulates through the legislative process, the more conflict is present. Therefore, policymaking results do

not improve and approach a stalemate as actors produce information to support pre-existing suppositions and attack others' beliefs.

Purpose

The purpose of my dissertation is to describe and explain how information is used in higher education policymaking in New York State through an examination of the budgetary process. My dissertation will cover the entire term of the Pataki administration; 1995 to the present. This paper, however, will focus on the 2002-03 budget process. Specifically, I will look at the administrative processes of budgeting and information management. In addition, I will identify political coalitions, their stability, and how they influence policy. This paper focuses on the following research question: *How does the use of information influence change in higher education policy?* Paul Sabatier says,

Theories of the policy process or policy change need to address the role played in the process by technical information concerning the magnitude and facets of the problem, its causes, and the probable impacts of various solutions. (1998)

I will also briefly assess the usefulness of the ACF for studying New York State higher education policymaking.

New York State: The Research Context

I chose to research higher education policymaking at the state level because the significant funding and policy decisions in American higher education generally occur at the state level. I conducted the research in New York State because of the unique characteristics of the state: its size, governance, and budget process. New York is currently the third most populous state behind California and Texas with 9.3% of its population comprised of 18 to 24 year-olds, the traditional college going age group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). A large proportion of its population resides in the "downstate" region—the New York metropolitan area—and accounts for 42% of the state's total population. Governance of New York is complicated by the state's dual cultural identities: that of the politically conservative, rural, economically stagnant upstate region, and that of the politically liberal, metropolitan, economically vibrant downstate region.

New York is an interesting state to study and offers unique opportunities for research regarding information and budget processes. The battle over funding for higher education will continue in light of the June 2003 New York State's Court of Appeals finding that the New York City school system did not provide the opportunity for all children to achieve a sound basic education. In order to meet the demands of the Court decision by July 30, 2004, New York State will need to spend an additional \$2.5 billion to \$5.6 billion on K-12 education. This implies even less funds available for higher education. During the 1990s, although New York's economy expanded, it did not increase at the rate of other large states, especially in the areas of job growth and population expansion (Stonecash, 2001). Therefore, New York higher education policy is currently formulated within the context of increasing revenue shortfalls. Funding for higher education became a key political issue during the 2002-3 budget debates. The legislature, led by Senate Majority Leader Bruno and Assembly Speaker Silver, overrode Governor Pataki's budget veto of the legislature's restorations to higher education funding. The usual higher education actors—the unions, the Senate, the Assembly, the Governor, the public and independent institutions—battled in the public arena over the higher education budget because the Governor

proposed dramatic program cuts and tuition increases. The 2002-3 budget battle highlighted the prominence of higher education in New York politics.

A Politicized Budget Process

In New York, the Senate Majority Leader and the Assembly Speaker represent the political wishes and priorities of each legislative chamber. During the budget process, the Senate's Finance Committee and the Assembly's Ways and Means Committee each perform a detailed analysis of the governor's proposed budget. These analyses are the predominant guiding reference documents for the lawmakers as the budget moves through the Assembly and Senate.

The Senate Majority Leader and the Assembly Speaker traditionally hash out the budget with the governor because of the power vested in each of these leaders by their colleagues and due to the desire to avoid a governor's veto. Usually a compromise budget will emerge that reflects the priorities of both the executive and legislative branches. The compromise occurs when the governor and the chamber leaders, without their staff, retreat to a room and work out the budget details through intense negotiation. This occurrence of the three-man negotiation session has been referred to as "three men in a room." Out of this "smoky room" step the three leaders with a negotiated agreement for a budget that will pass both chambers and will not be vetoed by the governor.

The Use of Information in Policymaking

Behind the scenes of the budget process is a significant amount of work to prepare the proposed executive budget, to analyze the proposal, and to offer alternate budgets. The work of policy analysts relies heavily on information gathering to inform budget policy options.

State policymakers rely increasingly on certain information to inform their policymaking, such as the average cost of tuition, average cost per student, where the state ranks regionally and nationally, and the reputation of the states' institutions. By 'information' I mean gathered data that is transformed into a meaningful format for the user. The user may acquire the information formally in a hearing or report. Or, the information may be acquired informally in a conversation or debate.

The concern is how information is employed, as well as its source, quality, frequency, and quantity. The source of the information may be experts, interest groups, the public, institutions or government information management. The former president of a New York independent institution said that the role of information in the New York policy process was "not a happy story." Despite what this former president experienced, there is an abundant supply of information available for the policymaking process which would not necessarily be an unhappy story.

Policy actors have limited time and capacity, yet they use information, especially statistical information, to simplify, rationalize, and explain their beliefs for policy options. The same data can be used to undermine, discredit, and attack the beliefs of their political opponents. In addition, a growing number of national and global information providers publish comparative reports such as the *Measuring UP 2000* report (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000), the annual Chronicle of Higher Education's *Almanac*, and the U.S. News and

World Report's annual ranking of colleges and universities. Higher education policymakers can easily find information that allows them to compare their state or nation with other states or nations. The public assumes that policymakers approach policy decision-making with a certain amount of rationality. That is, that policymakers cull through gathered information and carefully weigh various policy outcomes before taking action. This research examines that assumption through studying the interface between information and policymakers.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Higher Education Conceptual Frameworks

Many policy frameworks exist to understand the policymaking process. One is James E. Anderson's focus on policy process as distinct stages which are examined individually or entirely (1997). Another is Kingdon's detail of the path a proposed policy takes to end up on the political agenda (1995). Grindle and Thomas (1990) offer an economic-based framework with a focus on political reform in developing countries. Paul Sabatier moves from the study of policy implementation to an analysis of how coalitions influence the policymaking process (Sabatier, 1986b, 1986c, 1998, 1999b, 2003; Sabatier, Hunter, & McLaughlin, 1987; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, 1993; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979a, 1979b, 1981) and Weiss (1977a; 1977b; 1980; 1995) studies how information is used in policymaking. North (1990) uses a political economy perspective to consider how institutions interface with individuals who may not operate primarily on the basis of economic self-interest. Rothstein (1988) points out that policy studies from the 1970s onward have assumed that policy actors were motivated by self interest and utility-maximization similar to operating out of economic self-interest.

There are few higher education-specific policy frameworks. Clark (1983) developed a market, state, and oligarchic "triangular model" (1983, p. 142) where a higher education system can be classified on a continuum, depending where influence is most exerted—from the institutions, state, or market. Cloete et al (2002) adapt the Clark triangle to explain the post Apartheid higher education system changes in South Africa's emerging democracy. The Alliance for Higher Education Policy Studies (AIHEPS) has developed a framework which focuses on the performance of a higher education system, considering the state or nation's history, culture, and economy, along with the higher education system design and the rules operating within that system (Richardson & Martinez, 2002). Other higher education policy literature has focused on documenting the changes in Europe and elsewhere, where the emphasis of governance has moved from a state control to state supervisory model (Boer & Goedegebuure, 2003), with institutions permitted self-regulation (Neave & Vught, 1991).

To study New York's higher education policy process requires a framework that best captures the politicized policymaking process, particularly the colorful characters and organizations involved. The cast of characters and organizations are termed "actors." There are many actors in New York's higher education arena, including the teaching unions, the public system administration, the public and private institutions, the policymakers, the parents, and the students. The unique contextual elements of New York also play a role and the framework must make room for those elements.

Because the New York budget process is mandated by the State Constitution, it is a stable policymaking process. Only three individuals need to come to consensus to adopt a budget. The

manner in which that consensus develops, however, differs each year. The three statesmen and their respective constituents may not agree on state priorities, taxes, or projected state revenue. In addition, each branch identifies with its perception of voter wishes and values. For instance, the executive may believe strongly that the public values low taxes and low spending whereas the legislature may believe the public values low-cost, widely-available higher education, even if taxes need to be raised to finance such a system. The budget process is highly politicized. Coming to consensus over policy vehicles such as taxes and education characterizes the struggle between groups with deep ideological beliefs and highlights the accompanying policy strategies that emerge.

Conceptual Framework

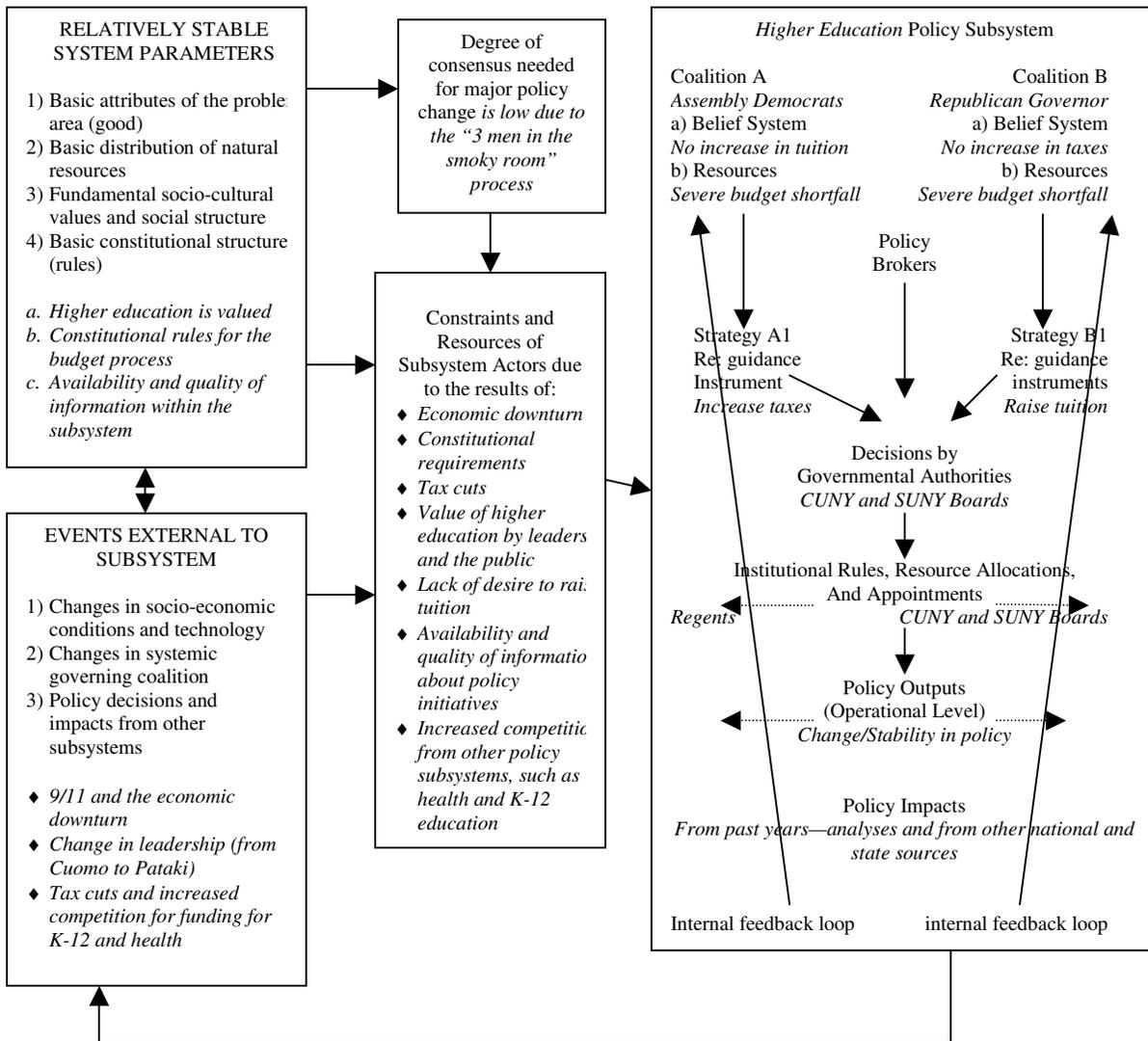
Traditional policy studies take a policy and document the steps that policy goes through before it is implemented (Anderson, 1997; Goedegebuure et al., 1994; Goedegebuure & Vught, 1994; Gornitzka, Kyvik, & Stensaker, 2002; Sabatier, 2003; Sutton, 1999). However, because I wish to “gain greater basic understanding of political behavior and the governmental process” (Anderson, 1997, p. 13) to include the behavior of actors in their attempt to influence policy, I chose Paul Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (2003) which looks at group formations, through what Sabatier terms the “policy subsystem,” those “actors from a variety of public and private organizations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue” (1986a, p. 40). The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) also takes into account the environment or context where actors and groups conduct policymaking activities.

The ACF focuses on the formation of coalitions which develop over time within a specific policy environment. The ACF allows for the policymaking environment’s constitutional constraints, socio-cultural values, and natural resources that rarely change. Also considered are the major socio-economic changes, changes in public opinion, and shifts in groups, coalitions, leadership, and policy outcomes from other environments, such as tax laws that affect the policymaking system (a state or a nation).

The environmental factors act upon a “policy subsystem” (in this case higher education policy subsystem within New York State’s overall policy system) comprised of an aggregation of actors (governmental and private organizations, interest group leaders, agency officials, legislators, even journalists), who form advocacy coalitions. The advocacy coalitions share a “set of normative and causal beliefs and engage in a non-trivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time” (Sabatier, 1998, p. 103).

The coalitions adopt strategies and use tools, such as information, in an attempt to alter policy outcomes/outputs. Sabatier has formulated hypotheses about the various elements of the ACF such as how coalitions change, how policy changes, and how policy is “learned.” The ACF allows for a focus on policy actors of a policy subsystem and their use of information within and between these formed coalitions. Figure 1 illustrates Sabatier’s framework and the variables which might affect a policy subsystem, as well as the entire framework’s application to the New York higher education context.

Figure 1: The ACF and its application to the New York Context



As I describe the elements of the ACF, I will add my observations about how the ACF organizes New York’s confusing and complicated higher education policy environment.

The variable on the top left is the “relatively stable parameter” which includes the policymaking environment’s constitutional constraints, socio-cultural values, and natural resources. These conditions rarely change. Also on the left are the “external (system) events,” which do change and most certainly influence the policy actors. These conditions include major changes in socio-economic areas, changes in public opinion, and alliance shifts between and amongst groups, coalitions, and leadership. Policy outcomes from other environments, such as tax laws may lead to a decrease in state revenue and less money for spending on programs.

Stable Parameters

The italicized portions in Figure 1 are the observations about New York using the ACF as a guide. The stable parameters in New York include higher education's value, the constitutional structure of the budget process, and the availability of information (a resource) within the higher education subsystem. The State Education Department (SED) has a higher education office with the responsibility to collect information about all higher education institutions in the state. It has a website with information that is accessible to the public. This office acts as a centralized source of information for those involved in higher education policymaking. SED's board, the Board of Regents, is elected by the legislature, according to the Constitution. Because the Assembly is dominated by Democrats, the Assembly's nominees are almost always appointed without Republican votes or participation. For this reason, the Regents and the SED appear to be aligned with the Democrats. The Republicans consider SED an unreliable, partisan body that honors requests for information based on political machinations. Actors within higher education do not focus much on trying to change stable elements like the Regents and how they collect/disseminate information. Pataki has proposed reducing the power of the Regents in order to have the executive control K-12 and higher education. Education is the only area, aside from the elected offices of comptroller and attorney general, over which the governor does not have direct authority.

External Events

The external (to higher education) events listed are some of the more recent variables which affect higher education. The 2002-3 budget process reflected a "perfect storm" confluence of events: the post-9/11 economic downturn in New York, the national economic downturn, tax cuts resulting in less state revenue, and a growing need of funds for K-12 education and health programs.

Degree of Consensus

Actors within the higher education policy subsystem interpret what it means to make policy or pass a budget given the stable and external events and degree of consensus needed. In New York, the degree of consensus needed for major policy change is low, since only three individuals come together to create major policy change.

The Policy Subsystem and Coalitions

Actors come together to form usually between two to five advocacy coalitions within the policy subsystem (on the right in Figure 1). The advocacy coalitions come together "to coordinate their behavior and bring about changes in public policy" (Sabatier, 2003, p. 12). The higher education policy subsystem is where the actors and coalitions coagulate and attempt to influence policy outcomes. Information is utilized by the coalitions as they approach a policy issue and consider the most effective manner to affect change.

Coalition Beliefs and Alignment

Coalition members share beliefs at a primal level (to be discussed later), and are stable over periods of a decade or more. The stability arises from the beliefs the coalitions hold which influence the interactions within the policy subsystem. The interactions include how the coalitions approach desired changes in policy, how they use and interpret information, how they

pool resources, and how they “learn” over time and in essence change their values. Within coalitions, trust is pervasive and change is slow.

Coalitions align according to their beliefs. Coalition beliefs are held and shared at three levels: 1) the deep core level; 2) the policy core level; and 3) the secondary level. Table 1 shows the levels in more detail, with examples from New York.

Table 1: Coalition beliefs applied to New York

	Coalition A	Coalition B
	Governor Pataki	Speaker Silver
<p>Deep Core Belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Broadest levels ➤ Normative beliefs ➤ Long held ➤ Do not hardly ever change ➤ Resistant to change –like “religious conversion” (1999, p. 122) ➤ Usually the product of childhood socialization (2003, p. 12) 	<p>“New York State's first Republican-Conservative chief executive”¹</p> <p>Policy priority: Economic growth</p>	<p>“The new Democratic leaders of this generation”²</p> <p>Policy priority: educational access</p>
<p>Policy Core Belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Application of deep core beliefs in terms of priority of values ➤ Normative commitments, less rigidly held and can be influenced over time with accumulation of evidence ➤ Causal perceptions about higher education in general ➤ Influences strategy and policy instrument chosen to be used ➤ Strategies for realizing core values around higher education 	<p>“New York Leads the Nation in Cutting Taxes Under Governor Pataki <u>19</u> Different Taxes Cut <u>57</u> Times in <u>156</u> Different Ways”</p> <p>Basic policy mechanism: tax cuts</p>	<p>“The Assembly's focus is on education policy, private job creation and criminal justice reform”</p> <p>Basic policy mechanism: preservation of social programs</p>
<p>Secondary Core Belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Narrower beliefs ➤ Concern seriousness of the problem ➤ Policy preferences ➤ Evaluation of actors ➤ Options for policy ➤ More regarding rules and budgetary applications for programs ➤ Easier to change 	<p>“The Legislature has made the wrong choice -- a choice that will hurt families, seniors and small businesses and drive jobs out of New York. It is the wrong thing to do. Therefore, today I will veto their tax and spend plan because I know we can do better. The members of the Legislature now have an opportunity to rethink their choices and choose a better path.”</p> <p>Specific policy preference: raise tuition</p>	<p>“Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver today announced that they have reached an agreement on restorations to the proposed Executive Budget. The agreement would restore \$1.9 billion to the Governor's proposed budget, primarily in the areas of education, health care and higher education and keep state spending below the rate of inflation.”</p> <p>Specific policy preference: raise taxes</p>

Policy core—not deep core—beliefs are the fundamental glue of coalitions because these beliefs represent basic normative and empirical commitments within the domain of specialization of

¹ Examples for Coalition A are from the Governor Pataki's website: <http://www.state.ny.us/governor/>

² Examples for Coalition B are from the Assembly's website: <http://www.assembly.state.ny.us/>

policy elites. Because these beliefs are difficult to modify, they involve “empirical elements that may change over a period of time with the gradual accumulation of evidence” (Sabatier, 1999c, p. 122). The examples I have chosen—tax cuts versus a rise in tuition—reflect not just a deep split in beliefs, but also the result of economic reality which influences the policy choices of coalitions.

One important goal of this study is to identify and document the higher education actors and coalitions operating in the New York higher education policy subsystem. Table 2 lists the predominant higher education actors in New York. Their alignment into coalitions needs further verification (including beliefs). These actors are stable, because of their age. Within the higher education subsystem, these actors are acknowledged as predominant actors in the policymaking process.

Table 2: Public and Private Higher Education Organizations in New York State

Actor	Year Founded
State University of New York System (SUNY)	1948
City University of New York System (CUNY)	1847
Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU)	1956
Association of Proprietary Colleges (APC)	1978
New York Public Interest Research Groups (NYPIRG) (with 20 student chapters)	1973
Professional Staff Congress (PSC) (CUNY faculty union)	Requested
Governor (all with the state’s first constitution) Assembly Senate	1777
State Education Department’s Office of Higher Education	1784
Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC)	1974
New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT) (SUNY faculty union)	1972

Resources, Strategy, Guidance Instruments, and Policy Brokers

Coalitions—operating off the three-leveled belief system—expend resources, plan and execute strategy and choose certain instruments to utilize in order to achieve policy goals. For instance, a certain coalition may wish to influence a change in a governmental program but may not be able to because of its lack of resources, which may include money, expertise, its number of supporters, and its legal authority (Sabatier, 1988). The willingness to commit its scarce resources to the policy process depends on the perceived threats to the coalition’s core values or interests. The higher the level of conflict and perceived threat to its core, the greater the coalition’s incentive to commit resources to defend that core (Jenkins-Smith, 1990). Each coalition mobilizes information in analysis and adopts strategies such as “changes in rules, budgets, personnel, or information—as a means of altering the behavior of various governmental institutions in an effort to realize...policy objectives” (Sabatier, 1998, p. 104). Strategies may include testimony, election changes, personnel changes within bureaucracy, public opinion influence, demonstrations, and/or boycotts. The venues for these policy objectives and strategies include the courts, legislature, governors, administrative agencies, newspapers, and streets (Sabatier, 1999a). The choice of instrument and venue is “usually proportional to its benefits” (Sabatier, 1999a, p. 142). The new or changed policy will live in the policy subsystem where it will be considered by each coalition through the lens of its beliefs. Policy analysis will determine how the policy’s affects/reflects the core values of the coalition. The 2002-3 Executive Budget proposed to eliminate all the New York “opportunity programs” in order to

promote the belief of keeping state spending low. The Assembly proposed to reinstate the programs in order to promote its belief regarding the necessity of equal opportunity programs to help make college affordable and attainable. Pataki's ability to influence a large change was hampered when the Senate aligned with the Assembly to restore the proposed cuts. The Assembly and Senate amassed analyses about the harm the proposed cuts would cause and students and faculty aligned with the legislature through demonstrations. It was clear that because the cuts struck at the core value (accessible and affordable higher education) of many coalitions, a great amount of resources were expended to defend the core beliefs held about those opportunity programs.

Policy-oriented Learning

A much explored element of the ACF's policy subsystem is policy learning through the subsystem's internal feedback loops. Sabatier has expanded his focus on this with each iteration of the ACF. The basic supposition is that over longer periods of time, coalition policy objectives may change due to increased knowledge of "problem parameters and the factors affecting them...policy effectiveness, and changing perceptions of the probable impacts of alternative policies" (1999a, p. 123). Policy learning is a key ingredient in the policy change process; policy does not change without some learning within and across coalitions. Yet at the same time, the exogenous or contextual variables in this change process must be at play as well, which is why the ACF is such a valuable tool for organizing so many variables. Sabatier believes policy change may occur between and among coalitions, despite the fact that beliefs act as filtering devices for any and all information that may aid in the necessary learning process. Sabatier (1999a) also lays out possible scenarios under which policy learning can occur optimally and lead ultimately to policy change. If a major policy change occurs, the ACF would help with the examination of the conditions at play that led to policy learning and ultimately to change.

Role of Information

Traditional policy research assumed that the actor, "a single individual or a group functioning as a corporate actor [has] complete well-ordered preferences and complete information" and maximizes his/her self-interest (Ostrom, 1999, p. 44-5). The ACF assumes the actor is rational, but perception of the world and capacity to process information is "affected by cognitive biases and constraints" (Sabatier, 1999a, p. 130). The ACF's actors are not preoccupied with maximizing their material self-interest (p. 139). Coalitions will, however, safeguard their policy beliefs by using "formal policy analyses to buttress and elaborate those beliefs (or attack their opponents' views)" (1998, p. 104-5). These analyses involve the collection, dissemination, and utilization of information in order to craft the analysis.

Methodology

Since the goal of this study was to generate explanations about the use of information by coalitions, in a single dynamic policymaking context, the case study was the methodology of choice. The unit of analysis was a state system of higher education.

Data were collected by the Ford Foundation funded Alliance for Higher Education Policy Studies (<http://www.nyu.edu/iesp/aiheps>). The database includes papers, documents, literature, and interviews with higher education legislators; policy advisors; policy analysts; higher education government administrators, chancellors, presidents, and officials conducted in Spring

03 using a semi-structured interview protocol. N6, a qualitative software tool was used to code and organize data required by the ACF framework. The analysis covered the Pataki administration from the first proposed budget in 1995 through the eighth budget year ending December 2003. The higher education subsystem was broadly defined as the policy actors “who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue...and who regularly seek to influence policy in that domain” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 119). The public university systems were treated as a subset of the state higher education system and examined for evidence of policy involvement at the state level. In addition, the relevant context external to the higher education subsystem, including the state’s history, culture, economic status, and constitution, were considered since the ACF treats elements external to the higher education subsystem that affect the constraints and resources of the higher education actors as principal sources of policy change (Sabatier, 2003). My approach to analysis is based on Sabatier’s suggestion that analysis should start with a policy subsystem and should examine strategies employed by relevant actors at various levels of government as they negotiate the policy subsystem.

Preliminary Findings

Because the budget process is when the major decisions regarding funding (including financial aid) and institutional financing are made, the higher education actors and coalitions in New York invest the majority of their efforts during the annual budget process.

Policy Stability

One individual university president also believed that there had been no discernible change between the Cuomo (three-term governor prior to Pataki) and Pataki administration on any policy, and that there had been more continuity than change during the Pataki administration. I observed similarly on the surface level, especially in higher education financing. I also observed how liberally information was used during the policy process, perhaps lending to the ability to maintain the policy status quo and limit change.

The higher education policy subsystem in New York employs policy analysis generously. The coalitions are armed with analyses, facts, and figures which are particularly geared to predicting worst-case scenarios of various policy outcomes. Higher education officials at all levels speak fluently about enrollment, dropout, graduation, capital expenditures, faculty-student ratios, federal research grants, and New York institutions’ ranking among state, regional, national, and global peers. Each major actor has an information-producing machine, including analysis, usually functioning at sophisticated levels. The most information produced with the highest level of sophistication comes from the public systems (SUNY and CUNY), from the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU), from the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees and from the governor’s Division of the Budget. None of these actors uses the official State data; they question its integrity, and fiercely hold on to their information *sources* (the databases), although they put on their website and widely circulate their produced analyses. Actors have increased their capacity to collect and to analyze information. Conversely, the State’s similar capacity has been crippled by severe under-budgeting which has resulted in a severe staff reduction.

My sense is that in New York, database information is withheld and information requests are carefully screened in order to support political beliefs and desired policy outcomes. As the

financing of higher education became more contentious through the current Pataki administration, the actors armed themselves (committed resources, in Sabatier's terms) to "defend their core" by producing findings to buttress their beliefs and attack their opponents. For instance, CICU produced a masterful distillation of the Governor's proposed cuts to higher education which many actors used in their defense and attacks. The Report on the 2003-04 New York State Executive Budget was available on the CICU website and CICU circulated it liberally (Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, 2003). CICU had the capacity to produce such a sophisticated analysis because its executive director came from the Senate finance side of the Legislature and was keen to the necessary tools for defending the belief that Pataki's proposed cuts would devastate higher education overall and independent institutions in particular.

Each actor who produces and uses information confessed that the information used is biased because it comes from a source like SUNY or CUNY, whose best interest is to spin that information to show itself in a favorable light. But no one seemed concerned. Indeed, actors take information with "a grain of salt," they "consider the source," and they "take it at face value." This appears to show that actors seek information that supports their belief systems, regardless of the information's quality, source, or bias. The focus of these actors is to seek and to use information in order to maintain policy core beliefs—not to produce significant policy change.

Policy Change

This same president, though sure there had been more continuity than change, indicated that one major change had occurred: an economic development initiative. Indeed, during the Pataki administration, an economic development initiative has grown, identified and thoroughly discussed by all actors and coalitions and boasted about by the executive and the legislature. While coalitions battled over funding traditional programs, such as financial aid and opportunity programs, higher education-economic development initiatives were quietly funded with little fanfare. Under Governor Pataki, a series of state agencies were consolidated into a new organization called the Empire State Development Corporation. It has powerful authority to issue tax-exempt and non tax exempt bonds, override local planning and zoning codes, use eminent domain authority and, under the direction of the Governor, has made higher education-economic development initiatives a priority. In 1999, Governor Pataki also created the New York State Office of Science and Technology (NYSTAR), which has worked with great results to develop university-corporate partnerships in high technology and biotechnology (Ward, 2002).

The economic priorities of the governor have paid off. New York ranks in the top ten states for its "new economy" preparation. The ranking is based on 21 indicators from five categories that reflect the concept of "new economy" (Atkinson, 2002).

This initiative benefits higher education enormously, through programs at multiple levels of government aimed at partnering business with higher education. However, it is not clear how the higher education-economic development evolved. References were made to several white papers concerning the necessity of state-level economic development initiatives which had circulated among key actors early in the Pataki administration. While the economic initiative appears to have been driven by Pataki, there was clear consensus for it among all the coalitions; even the

Democrats have their own initiative. Policy change is possible with such alignment between coalitions (i.e., Democrats and Republicans). How that alignment occurred will be the focus of my dissertation research and will be compared to the stability of the financing. The ACF emphasizes the role of information in producing a change such as the higher education-economic development initiative and the preliminary findings suggest that the research papers, combined with the economic downturn, would have put the right variables into play to lead to such a change.

Policy Instrument

During the Pataki administration, new actors came to the stage. Because New York's Constitution vests enormous power with the executive office, the governor can make appointments that effectively eliminate the public's representatives from the policymaking process. This cripples democratic policymaking and leaves other state level actors shut out of an already closed policy process. Thus, the public institutions may reflect executive ideology but may not meet the higher education needs of the public. Governor Pataki had raised taxes and kept tuition low through his budget proposals. He had no ability, politically or constitutionally, to influence policy changes at the State Education Department. Therefore, he chose to influence higher education policy primarily through executive appointment to make change.

Appointments were his principal policy instrument. Because of his long tenure, he made numerous appointments of trustees and top-level administrators at the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY). The changes enacted by activist trustees with a conservative agenda included a general studies requirement at all SUNY colleges, the end of remedial education at CUNY, and system reorganization to produce a leaner organization of SUNY and CUNY's combined 83 campuses with over 800,000 students. The SUNY Chancellor, Robert L. King, is a Pataki friend and former trustee of a SUNY community college. They also worked together in the legislature. This quiet revolution at the system levels bypassed budget and legislative policy activities.

Appropriateness of the ACF for Studying New York State

The two examples of policy change and stability highlight the usefulness of the ACF for understanding policy actions at a macro (state) level. When conducting interviews using the AIHEPS framework, the focus was the structure of the higher education system and the lack of a true central coordinating and information-collecting entity. Therefore, the interviews explored whether the policymakers had considered creating a central information collection agency with some level of independence. Interestingly enough, the actors are content for the most part with the way information flows and they could not imagine it differently. It suits the way politics work in New York. The actors believe that the Assembly would never agree to change how the Regents operate the SED, even if the result would be better information for policy decisions.

The ACF focuses on the promotion of policy core beliefs. In New York, the promotion of policy core beliefs supercedes any sort of arrangement for higher education. Whether there was an independent information-collecting entity or not, each actor would still produce information or analyses because of the instinct to promote the core belief due to the politicized policy process.

So far it appears that the data aligns with Sabatier's hypotheses regarding information in the policy process, as well as his analysis of how actors and coalitions contribute to policy change or

stability through the use of information to defend policy core beliefs. Lastly, the ACF pointed me in the direction of policy instrument. This was a discovery—to realize the power of appointments and their role in policy change. So far, the ACF is useful for searching for examples of policy change and the role of information therein.

Conclusion

Policymakers realize they seek information from suppliers, such as the institutions, who spin the information to show themselves in the most favorable light. The system for producing and distributing information highlights a potentially serious problem where the agent may not “reveal such (critical) information to their principals if they know that the principals are likely to use this information against the interests of the agents” (Rothstein, 1988, p. 62). Because of New York’s political design, there is a lack of trust between information gatherers and information seekers. The worst case scenario could result in a cover up of performance problems at the public system level through the use of data manipulation. Under current circumstances, there is a surprising amount of trust between the public officials and the public higher education institutions. Public officials believe institutions act in the public’s best interest. New York must hope that such faith and trust is not put to the test or that underlying policy problems are not hidden underneath the information spin.

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