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The Center for California Studies is a unit of California State University, Sacramento, that focuses on governance issues and is dependent on state funds received for administering four fellowship programs. The Center exists in a borderland between academe and state government; public policy think tanks and interdisciplinary studies; and graduate education and career training. This article outlines its origins, mission and structure, context and constituencies, and lessons learned (and still to be learned).

The Center for California Studies: Lessons from the Borderland

The Center for California Studies is a public education, public service, and research unit of California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). As such, it performs functions integral to the mission of California State University (CSU). That is, it fulfills a public service inherent in the responsibilities of a public university while also encouraging research and creative activities in support of the university's instructional mission.

The center is, from that perspective, a traditional university center. Unlike many such centers and institutes, however, it also maintains a strong multidisciplinary focus. It sponsors conferences on the economic benefits and costs of illegal immigration, as well as on understanding California through detective novels. It also undertakes research projects at the behest of the state legislature, as well as organizing panels on Native American art.

The center's funding and its origins as a functioning operation, however, are not based on traditional public policy studies or nontraditional interdisciplinary projects. Rather, it prospers because of its administration of four professional fellowship programs, two of which were created long before the center was even a dream.

Thus, the center exists in a borderland between academe and state government; between public policy-oriented think tanks and interdisciplinary studies; between graduate education and career training. Historians and novelists have long recognized borderlands as being particularly evocative, places where the rules, norms, expectations, and structures of two or more cultures meet, sometimes in great synergistic creativity and sometimes in frustrating conflict and misunderstanding.

This article outlines the origins of the Center for California Studies, its basic mission and structure, the context and constituencies for its projects, and the lessons learned (and still to be learned).

Origins

The center's innate contradictions can be attributed to its origins, which were shaped by three very disparate individuals who had national impact.

Jesse M. Unruh, the legendary Speaker of the state Assembly in the 1960s, transformed California's legislature into a professional, full-time institution. Unruh was critical in the creation of a strong, expert, and independent staff, an early component of which was the creation of the Assembly Fellowship Program in 1957. In 1972, the Senate Fellowship (later called the Associates Program) was created. Both programs were funded through the legislature's own budget.

If Unruh seemed larger than life, Paul Gann was often viewed as less than his fame. Gann gained national celebrity through his partnership with Howard Jarvis and his association with the Proposition 13 tax revolt of 1978. He spent the remainder of his life trying to live up to his Proposition 13 fame. In 1984, he launched a successful initiative that cut the legislature's budget by ten percent, and the Fellows Programs were quickly on the chopping block.

As president of CSUS, Donald R. Gerth was determined to make the university's location in the state capital a key part of its identity, mission, and role in the statewide system. Consequently, when asked to take over the Fellows Programs, Gerth said "yes" with celerity. Program funding was shifted from the legislature's budget to a separate line item within the CSU budget. The programs' academic component was revitalized and an Executive Fellowship Program created. All three programs were housed in the Center for California Studies, which heretofore consisted largely of a file cabinet and a few faculty dreams. In 1990, in the aftermath of the passage of Proposition 140, which imposed not only term limits but a 40 percent reduction in the legislature's budget; funds for clerical and administrative staff for the legislative programs were fully shifted to the university.

Structure and Mission

The center is a university center of CSUS, and its executive director reports directly to, and serves at the pleasure of, the university president. It is funded largely through its own line item in the state budget, although approximately ten percent of its annual budget of \$2.4 million comes from nonstate sources. It also provides an administrative home to other centers, including the Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution and the Institute for Research on Women and Families. The center has two advisory bodies, the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) and the Campus Advisory Board (CAB). Members of the SAC are drawn from across the state and represent the various political, governmental, educational, and cultural constituencies of the center. The CAB is comprised of faculty and staff from CSUS and charged with maintaining links between the center and the campus community.

The borderland experience of the center extends into its relationship with the university bureaucracy and structure. CSU is not a research university, and it has comparatively little experience with stand-alone centers and institutes. The disadvantage is the tensions created by being neither an academic nor a support unit in a system that habitually recognizes only those two types of entities. Staff hiring has been compli-

cated by a compensation scheme and personnel procedures that do not recognize adequate pay for people who are neither faculty nor administrators, so that budget processes are cumbersome even with a dedicated line item in the state budget.

The advantage, of course, is the ability to exploit the center's ambiguous status. Calls for the center to offer classes can be deflected by explaining that it is a noncurricular entity, while policies aimed at administrative or support units can be adjusted by referring to the graduate student level of participants in the Fellows Programs. Efforts to shift center funds to other university needs can be negotiated by invoking the independence of the center's line item in California's budget.

All center projects fall into one of four basic areas: capital fellow programs, government affairs, civic education and California studies. These areas were determined at the center's beginning (i.e., a conviction that understanding California government and politics necessitates understanding its history, geography, culture, and peoples); its dependence on the Fellows Programs and relations with state government; and the broad teaching mission of CSU.

Capitol Fellows Programs

The Capital Fellows Programs include the Jesse M. Unruh Assembly Fellowship, the Executive Fellowship, the Judicial Administration Fellowship, and the Senate Associates Programs. These are nationally recognized postgraduate programs offering opportunities to engage in public service and prepare for future careers while actively contributing to the development and implementation of public policy in California. Former fellows include a justice of the California Supreme Court, numerous members of the United States Congress and the state legislature, corporate executives, and local government and community leaders. In 1997-98 there were 18 assembly fellows, 18 executive fellows, 5 judicial administration fellows, 18 senate associates and one federal-state relations fellow, for a total of 60 participants.

The goals of the programs are to help train California's future government, community, and private sector leaders, provide a practical, experiential graduate education, and benefit the people and government of California through the work of the fellows.

Fellows are paid as university employees while working as full-time members of a legislative or executive branch, or in a judicial office. Fellows are given assignments with significant professional responsibilities and challenges (e.g., in 1996-97, the assembly staffer analyzing the budgets of the University of California and CSU was an assembly fellow). Fellows start their eleven-month fellowship with an intensive four-week orientation conducted by the CSUS faculty and thereafter are required to attend weekly graduate seminars. Acceptance to each of the programs is based on merit. Because the center makes a considerable effort to ensure outreach to all of the state's diverse communities, the programs have reflected, and continue to reflect, California's diversity.

Government Affairs

Government affairs includes projects that the center undertakes at the request of California state and local governments. The center is cognizant of its responsibility to help provide access to university resources to the people and governments that support the university, which it accomplishes by coordinating access to the applied research resources of the university, as well as providing training to policy-makers and their staffs.

Recent projects in this area include assisting in new member orientation programs for the state assembly; cosponsoring, with the California State Associate of Counties,

a biennial New Supervisors Institute; organizing training programs for senior executive branch staff; and administering the CSU Faculty Research Fellows Program. The latter links the policy research needs of policy-makers with the policy research resources of CSU. Requests for research projects come from the assembly, senate, and governor. The center drafts an appropriate request for proposals (RFPs), which is distributed throughout the 23 campuses of CSU. Typically, Faculty Research Fellow projects are three to six months' applied research efforts with budgets of \$10,000. Recent reports have included analyses of the census undercount issue, the length of hospital stay for mastectomy patients, and open enrollment in K-12 Schools.

Civic Education

A function of CSU in general, and of the center in particular, is fostering civic literacy; that is, facilitating the public's understanding and knowledge of governance issues and reducing the growth of civic cynicism and apathy through education. The center fulfills this mandate through traditional conferences and symposia as well as through nontraditional methods such as community-based simulation exercises and interactive curriculum materials and events such as LegiSchool and EUREKA!

LegiSchool is, perhaps, the most successful of the center's civic education projects. It is an issues-oriented, high school civics curriculum designed to engage students in discussions about problems facing the state, encourage critical thinking skills, and promote the knowledge necessary for effective citizenship. LegiSchool has two primary projects: video curriculum materials and Town Hall meetings.

Video curriculum material consists of a unique tape library. Each library "package" contains videotaped footage of the hearings and floor debates on particular bills before the legislature, along with press clippings, reports, and a teacher's guide.

The Town Hall meetings are a series of interactive televised meetings in which state government officials and high school students meet face to face to discuss current issues and legislation. Each meeting is broadcast live from the State Capitol on the California channel and allows students in schools from around the state to participate via telephone. To assist both teachers and students, comprehensive study packets are available for classroom use. An estimated 10,000 California high school students per year participate in LegiSchool. EUREKA!—California's Budget Balancer—is a computerized simulation of the state budget process designed to educate community leaders, students, and citizens about the practical, constitutional, and political realities of balancing a \$41 billion state budget. EUREKA! is based on the actual 1994-95 California budget, complete with a \$3.5 billion deficit and more than 200 expenditure and revenue options developed by the legislature and the governor. Participants are drawn from a cross-section of local communities and divided into work groups, each with a laptop computer. All groups are charged with developing a balanced budget proposal that is then submitted to the entire EUREKA! session. Groups must explain how they balanced the budget and, as with the real California budget, achieve a two-thirds vote to adopt their budget proposal.

California Studies

Unlike many university-based research and public policy institutes, the center has maintained an interdisciplinary focus and shunned a concentration on a single discipline or policy concern. Center activities frequently involve and are enriched by historians and poets, biologists and artists, business executives, and community activists.

The center promotes the interdisciplinary field of California Studies by fostering public and scholarly dialogues, developing curricular support, and maintaining collaborative ties with historical societies, museums, policy institutes, public associations, and regional study centers. It also sponsors an annual "Envisioning California Conference" featuring panels on governance issues, arts and literature, and the land and peoples of California. In addition, it promotes California Studies through its Legislative Oral History Program; California Election Data Archive (the state's only database of local candidate and ballot measure election results); California Cases Project (designed to produce California-based cases suitable for undergraduate use); and the annual California Journalism Awards and conference (which recognizes, rewards, and encourages excellence in the reporting of California government and politics).

Borderland Contexts and Constituencies

The center's borderland existence dictates its context and constituencies. For example, as noted, it receives more than ninety percent of its funding directly from the state budget. Legislators and constitutional officers and their staffs sometimes regard the center's line item as less of a funding stream than a deed of ownership. The center, however, is a university entity. Its staff are employees of CSUS, and it is physically located on the CSUS campus. The CSUS community naturally regards the center as a university, and thus primarily academic, entity that should be particularly responsive to its needs and demands.

Both views are correct. The center could not exist without the support of both of its primary constituencies. Moreover, the center has several other constituencies. Although based at CSUS, it has responsibilities to California State University as a whole. Accordingly, the center makes a particular effort to include CSU faculty from throughout the system in its activities. As a result of the launching of the LINKS conferences in 1993, the center has developed a national constituency. The LINKS conference was created as a forum at which state universities located in state capitals could meet and discuss the opportunities, challenges, and perils created by their proximity to state governments. The center's interdisciplinary focus has given it a constituency among the state's California studies community. Similarly, its partnership with the California State Association of Counties has created a new local government constituency. Each of these constituencies creates opportunities and demands for the center. Recently, for example, it was asked to create and house a research institute on county government. Similarly, the organizers of an effort by CSU and the community colleges to develop California studies courses and course materials have looked to the center for support.

The borderland context of the center's activities is hardly lonely. California has more institutions of higher education than any other state, as well as one of the largest and most complex governmental structures. Not surprisingly, the state also has a large number of centers and institutes.

Many university-based centers and institutes have a comparatively narrow focus, determined by geography (e.g., Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles) or subject matter (e.g., CSU's Institute for Education Reform). Centers and institutes with a broader mandate include the Institute of Government Studies at Berkeley, the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Southern California, and the California Policy Research Center of the University of California.

Non-university based resources include the Senate Office of Research (its Assembly counterpart fell victim to partisan squabbles), the California Research Bureau, an arm of the State Library, and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. The Legislative Analyst not only serves as the legislature's budget analyst but also does some policy research.

California also has a number of privately funded centers and institutes, the biggest of which is the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). Endowed with over \$100 million by William Hewlett (of Hewlett-Packard), PPIC is a cross between Rand and the Brookings Institution.

The center's policy toward these other centers and institutes is simple: cooperation whenever possible and cordial relations when cooperation is not possible. This policy is motivated by altruism and self interest: the dictates of collegiality require comity. Moreover, although the center enjoys a special relationship with state government, many of these other centers and institutes have far greater resources. Consequently, the center has worked to develop cooperative relations with a number of counterparts.

Lessons

Every project, every fellows class, every conference brings new lessons or reminders of old lessons yet to be mastered. The experience of the center, however, underscores three lessons in particular: "no good deed goes unpunished"; "responsiveness is not servility"; and "relevance and scholarship are not synonymous."

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

One of the nastier laws of organizational behavior is that success breeds more work. An organization with a reputation for accomplishing goals and completing tasks will become a magnet for other projects, regardless of the relevance of those projects to the organization's mission, resources, or needs. Inevitably, the good deeds of a successful unit will bring more projects, and just as inevitably, accepting those projects will undermine the very ability of the unit to be successful.

Because of its past successes and its square peg/round hole status in CSU, the center attracts new projects as well as other square peg/round hole proposals. To illustrate, the center has been asked to run training programs for journalists assigned to cover Sacramento, organize training sessions for provincial legislators from Thailand, house a student-run press wire service, administer fellows programs for numerous professional associations and organizations, and house and finance research centers that deal with direct democracy, civic education, and survey research.

The temptation is to agree to these and other proposals, seduced by the implied flattery and motivated by loyalty to the university and the requestors. Indeed, many of them have been meritorious and held great promise for the center. But the danger, which the center has not always avoided, is a dissipation of resources and a dilution of purpose.

All proposals received by a center or institute should be carefully reviewed against a clear set of criteria. Those criteria should include, at a minimum, whether the proposed project is consistent with the center's core mission; whether adequate resources are available to ensure that the project can be undertaken without harm to existing work; whether it advances strategic goals; and whether it is compatible with the needs and interests of the center or institute's primary constituencies. The latter factor, of course, leads to the second lesson, "responsiveness is not servility."

Responsiveness Is Not Servility

Any center or institute operating in the borderland of academe and government will face challenges to its independence and integrity. It is not a question of “if” but “when,” and, more importantly, “how to respond.”

The problem is especially potent if a center or institute receives significant funding from a single source or the state government. Funders, especially government agencies not accustomed to the protocols of academic grants and contracts, may well regard the center or institute as an extension of its own staff and not be particularly inclined to accept protests of independence. The solution is to have a strong, clear framework that allows both sides to identify and understand core values. In addition, the framework must be accompanied by a willingness to walk away from a project, even at the price of losing funding.

The center has dealt with two such challenges in recent years. A powerful state government official suggested changing the name of a fellows program. Center staff gave the suggestion careful consideration and responded with a polite rejection, which, unfortunately, was never communicated to the official. The miscommunication was perceived as a deliberate insult, and the official threatened to cut the center’s funding unless the name change was adopted. The situation was assessed as a very real threat to center funding, but not a situation involving a core value or principle (i.e., the proposed name change would not negatively impact the integrity of the program or the independence of the center). Hence, the center agreed. The following year, another official used the previous name change as a precedent for demanding that another fellow program change its name. This time, the proposal also insisted that the procedures by which fellows were selected and placed be altered. In this case, the demands were deemed unacceptable. First, the new name implied a major political and structural change in the fellows program. Second, the alteration in selection procedures would have stripped the center of a meaningful role in the process, thus transforming a joint partnership into a political subsidiary relationship and the fellows program into a partisan farm team. The center was successful in resisting these demands because it was able to articulate logical and consistent principles.

Relevance and Scholarship are Not Synonymous

The third and final lesson is again rooted in the conflicts of the borderland. The center’s mission is, in part, to link the resources of the university to the needs of state government. Initially, the conflicts focused on language and timing. Academics were to produce work using the argot of scholars, not that of policy-makers and politicians, and faculty often consider requests to edit jargon as demands to dumb down content. Moreover, faculty wished to respond to requests for research projects using the traditional calendar of quarters and semesters rather than the political calendar of committee hearings and floor sessions. These have been problems, but eminently solvable ones. The language disagreements were addressed by reminding authors that jargon does not equate with intelligence or quality, and those of timing have largely, though not completely, been accomplished by including strict timelines in RFPs.

A more intransigent problem has been that the university system generally does not consider research as meritorious unless it is published in a referred journal. To illustrate, a department chair told a CSU faculty member who completed an excellent Faculty Fellow Research report that it would not be included in her tenure file because it

was done for a legislative committee. The provincialism of many academic reward systems can obviously discourage faculty from participating in center projects.

An unexpected source of tension has been the conflict between commissioned research and scholarly inquiry. The two are not inevitably incompatible, but the values inherent in the latter can be. Academe values and exalts the ideal of the lone scholar laboring in pursuit of the truth. The ideal research funding is a grant with no strings attached other than a command to go forth and think. The enemy is an administrator with the temerity to insist on a certain course of inquiry or an end product in violation of one of the canons of academic freedom. Difficulties occur when research or project funds are made available to a faculty member, not to underwrite individual research but to deliver a specific product in a specific time. The cultural clash starts when faculty members perceive the contract as a grant while the center perceives it as unfulfilled, to the embarrassment of the center and the irritation of the policy-maker. Requests for completion dates have been rejected as unwarranted interference, while efforts to redefine an RFP have been cloaked in the vocabulary of academic freedom.

There is no easy answer to this problem, but a good start, and one that the center is still learning, is to provide all parties with a written agreement that clearly articulates the expectations of all involved.

Conclusion

In the last decade and a half, the Center for California Studies has grown from a department-based dream to a major university center. The initial phase of this development, which determined the nature, structure, context, and constituencies of the center, was driven by the take-over by CSUS of the legislature's fellows programs and the subsequent creation of an executive branch program. Between 1988 and 1992, the center's first full-time directors sought to strengthen its interdisciplinary nature. Since 1993, it has striven to maintain its interdisciplinary focus while also developing its capital links. The center exists in a borderland and would not have it any other way—it is only in the borderlands that the great resources of universities can be effectively and efficiently brought to use by policy-makers and politicians, for the benefit of both. Moreover, as public universities are forced to raise ever greater portions of their budgets from nontax sources and as demographics bring into the constituencies of both state government and the university populations that universities have not always responded to effectively, borderland entities will become more important in building and maintaining links between the "people's university," the people's governments, and the people.