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Dimensions of Variance in the Proposed Typology of American Public Higher Education Systems

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ABSTRACT
The typology of public higher education systems is important because system-level characteristics shape institutional behavior, policy implementation, performance, and student outcomes in ways that institutional-level analyses often overlook. This article presents a theoretical framework for key dimensions of variance in the proposed typology of public higher education systems in America, including mission, governance authority, size and scale, institutional composition, funding models, and state social and economic context. It reflects patterns observed in system-level data spanning more than a hundred public higher education systems nationwide, recently compiled by the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH). This work represents an early stage of inquiry and is intended to serve as a foundation for additional research. The next phase of this work will apply the typology across systems to support deeper empirical analysis, benchmarking, and its use by system leaders, policy makers, and researchers.

Introduction

Public higher education systems are America's most powerful lever for advancing national attainment goals, driving innovation, and fostering civic engagement (Johnsen, 2024a, 2024b). To date, National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) has identified more than 100 public systems that collectively comprise more than 1,450 institutions and serve more than 16.2 million students (Khan, 2026). Public higher education systems share the common purpose of organizing multiple campuses to meet state needs for an educated population.

Yet, beneath their shared purpose lies rich variation. Each system of public higher education has been uniquely shaped by state history and policies, economy, culture, institutional histories and composition, governance structures, technological integration, student demographics, access and degree of data

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standardization, and funding models. For example, some systems, such as the University of California (UC), are homogeneous in terms of the collective mission of the institutions it includes (research-focused universities) and operate as a highly unified network of campuses with strong system-wide governance. Others, like the University of Arkansas System (UA), function with greater institutional autonomy while still adhering to overarching system policies established by a single governing board.

This article aims to advance current understanding of the nation's public higher education systems by highlighting a proposed typology of systems and identifying key dimensions of variation. A typology does not impose uniformity; rather, it enables comparative insight. By categorizing systems according to their structures and contexts, researchers and policymakers can discern patterns and variations that reveal how specific governance, funding, and mission arrangements affect outcomes. A systematic framework helps identify which features promote alignment with state priorities, support access and success, and enhance institutional performance. This phase of research lays the foundation for future exploration of factors that contribute to enhanced system performance, in support of important societal goals including increasing postsecondary attainment, reducing costs, and contributing to economic development.

What is a System?

In the most generic sense, a system is a set of interconnected parts that work together for a shared purpose. According to the NASH[2], a public higher education system meets these three criteria:

1. It comprises at least two institutions (campuses, colleges, or universities).
2. Each institution has substantial autonomy[3] and is led by a chief executive.
3. The system and its member institutions are governed[4] by a single board, with executive leadership provided by a system president or chancellor.

However, in practice, NASH adopts a broader interpretation, recognizing entities that do not strictly meet the three above mentioned criteria. This approach reflects the reality that what constitutes a system is far more complex, especially as systems across America evolve, merge, decentralize, and expand within their specific state contexts. Accordingly, NASH identifies[5] entities as systems in the following ways:

- Type 1: Governing board and CEO with multiple institutions, each separately accredited (e.g. State University of New York System, University of California)
- Type 2: Governing Board and CEO with multiple institutions, single accreditation (e.g. Washington State University, University of Maine)

[2] https://nash.edu/about-nash/

[3] The term "autonomy" varies in meaning across states and systems and is often the crux of debates about authority for budget allocation and executive appointments, faculty and staff governance, and institutional accreditation.

[4] Some multi-campus configurations are overseen by state coordinating boards**,** which set policy, planning, or funding frameworks but do not directly govern institutions. For example, the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission serves its leadership role through coordination, but governance authority lies with institutional boards and their executives. In other cases, such as Texas, an agency coordinates public higher education and governing responsibility rests with the several systems in that state. And in others, as in Georgia, the University System of Georgia has a central governing board with broad authority over all of its institutions.

[5] NASH Internal Research, forthcoming 2027

- Type 3: Coordinating Boards and State Agencies with multiple systems or institutions (e.g. Louisiana Board of Regents, Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission)
- Other: Associations, consortia, and/or hybrid entities that do not neatly fit into Types 1-3 above (e.g. Texas Association of Community Colleges, Michigan Community College Association)

While this classification provides a foundational framework for identifying system types, the primary focus of this essay is to delve deeper into the dimensions of variance- the unique characteristics that constitute a system's "DNA" and fundamentally shapes how it functions.

Typology of Public Higher Education Systems

A primary function of a typology is to identify, simplify, and order data, so that it may be described in comparable terms (Creswell et al., 1985). We use a similar approach to thoughtfully advance the understanding of public higher education systems by examining key characteristics that distinguish them. This study characterizes the components of the typology by building on prior literature (Creswell et al., 1985; Gagliardi & Lane, 2022; Johnstone, 1993; McGuinness, 1991, 1997, 2013, 2021), and by drawing from NASH's system-level database, that for the first time has brought together data for public higher education systems on one platform[6] (Khan, 2026).

This typology includes the following broad influencing factors:

- *System Level Dimensions* – characteristics that are inherent to the system itself such as governance model, mission and institutional composition, and funding allocation mechanisms.
- *State Level Contextual Factors* – external state-level factors and/or forces that have shaped the system structure, operations, and priorities such as legal authority, state history, state policy and economic factors, demographics, and geography.
- *External Stakeholder Influence* –actors outside the system including public, private, or community organizations that shape system priorities and strategies, such as governors, legislators, state business councils, industry partnerships, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations, and community advisory boards.

Dimensions of Public Higher Education Variance

Public higher education systems in the United States exhibit immense variance, reflecting differences in state history, economy, governance, mission, and state/federal policy environments. No single framework can fully capture their variation; rather, they constitute a mosaic of organizational forms shaped by state priorities and institutional legacies. Still, several dimensions consistently emerge across states, shaping how systems function, allocate authority, and deliver post-secondary education to diverse populations.

We have identified nine dimensions of variance[7] among public higher education systems:

[6] NASH has made system-level data available to the public through interactive dashboards (https://nash.edu/cda/systems-dashboards/)
[7] Appendix

1. Mission

A system's mission represents a major axis of definition and variation. Systems like the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC) are homogeneous in character, uniting multiple campuses with similar missions—research, doctoral and specialized professional education (e.g., medicine and law) in the case of UC; teaching and professional preparation in the case of CSU; and early undergraduate, vocational, and community service courses at CCC. This emphasis on distinct system-level missions is reflected in the California Master Plan for Higher Education, enacted in 1960, and amended over the years to reflect California's rapid population growth and its interest in providing both deep specialization and wide access.

By contrast, systems like the State University of New York (SUNY) integrate research universities, comprehensive colleges, and community colleges within a single system under one governance structure, thus embodying the principles of access, centralized governance, and collaboration across institutional types (e.g., community colleges in relation to research universities). The degree of mission differentiation within a system often reflects a state's broader educational philosophy: whether it prizes specialization or favors breadth. Systems also vary in the extent to which they centralize student success initiatives or frameworks or leave them to individual campus discretion. The University System of Georgia[8] and the Tennessee Board of Regents[9] exemplify corequisite remediation and structured pathways that encourage early momentum in credit accumulation and program selection (Denley, 2024). In Georgia, this was formalized through "Momentum Year" initiative that promotes early credit completion and purposeful major choice. This orientation often includes system-level credential innovation, such as the development of the "Nexus Degree" to meet specific workforce skill gaps.

2. Role Within the State

Systems differ in how they relate to the wider postsecondary landscape of their states. Some—like the University of Alaska System and the University of Hawaii System—operate as the sole systems in their states, encompassing the full range of public postsecondary education. Others coexist alongside multiple systems. For example, California, as noted above, has three distinct public systems and Texas has eight, forming an ecosystem of systems in those states. In states such as Illinois and Minnesota, large land-grant research universities operate in states with multiple public systems, whereas in single-system states like Alaska and Hawai'i, these federal and state mandates are integrated across a single system. These structural differences reflect whether a system was formed through a proactive "rational policy choice" or a reactive effort to "rationalize" growing institutions.

Proactive Policy Design: California established one of the earliest and most influential coordinated mass higher education systems. Its tripartite structure—comprising the University of California (UC), the State Colleges (now CSU), and the Community Colleges—was largely in place with distinct missions as early as the 1920s, with the first community college established

[8] https://curriculum.usg.edu/, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED607428.pdf
https://completecollege.org/resource/cca-highlights-corequisite-support-at-the-state-level/
[9] https://www.tbr.edu/policy-strategy/corequisite-learning-support

even earlier. The 1960 California Master Plan reinforced and protected this structure, codifying mission differentiation and thwarting legislative proposals to merge all segments under a single board.

Reactive Rationalization: Conversely, some systems reflect a reactive process of consolidation. The State University of New York (SUNY), established in 1948, is a prominent example of a post-World War II effort to bring order to a diverse collection of existing public and private institutions. This reflects broader national efforts to expand and coordinate higher education systems in the post-World War II period (Graham, 1984). Unlike California, which had established community colleges as early as 1920, SUNY did not include a community college sector until later. Taken together, these differences reveal how the role of a system is not only educational but also deeply political, reflecting each state's strategy for balancing mission, autonomy, access, and regional presence.

3. Authority and Governance Structure

The source of system authority varies greatly (Education Commission of the States, n.d.). Legal foundations range from constitutional provisions which confer relatively high autonomy (e.g., University of California and University of Minnesota) to statutory enactments that tether systems more closely to legislative oversight and control (e.g., Minnesota State University System and the Universities of Wisconsin).

Another distinction is whether a system has a governing board with direct authority over the institutions in the system (e.g., University System of Georgia and the Universities of Wisconsin*)* or a coordinating board with varying degrees of formal and informal authority with respect to strategic planning, budget approval, new program review, and financial aid program administration (e.g., Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission and the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education). Governing boards also differ in structure; some utilize "nested" models where institution-level boards of trustees perform limited functions under a single state board of governors, as seen in Florida[10], where twelve institution-level boards of trustees perform a set of prescribed and limited functions under the authority of a single state system board of governors. And then there are hybrid models such as Tennessee, which shifted universities to independent boards but kept community colleges centrally governed.

How governing board members are appointed is another feature of system governance. Most trustees and regents are gubernatorial appointees subject to some form of legislative review, reflecting a strong tie between the system and state government (McGuiness, 2016). Others, such as those in Colorado and Nevada, are elected by popular vote, reflecting a more populist tradition of higher education accountability. Additionally, many boards include ex-officio positions for governors or representatives from specific sectors, such as agriculture, reflecting their land-grant heritage. For example, the UC Board of Regents[11] includes the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the Assembly, Superintendent of Public Instruction, president and vice president of the Alumni Associations of UC and the UC President; and the Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents[12] includes the state's superintendent of public instruction and

[10] https://trustees.fsu.edu/, https://www.unf.edu/catalog/about/Board-Members.html
[11] https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/about/
[12] https://www.wisconsin.edu/regents

the president of the state's technical college system board as ex-officio members. Many boards also include student and faculty representatives, with a mix of voting rights.

Systems also vary in their degree of organizational integration, distinguishing between unified one-university entities and federated collections of campuses. In unified systems, such as the University of California and the California State University, the system is formally established as a single legal and financial entity—often acting as a single employer—with authority over academic programs and administrative functions across all campuses (Kerr, 2001; Douglass, 2000). This structure typically supports integrated shared governance at both the campus and systemwide levels, which facilitates coordinated policy development and the management of aggregate academic quality and coverage across the entire university (Blumenthal, 2024). These models also tend to centralize key functions, such as budgeting and the management of state funds, at the system-wide level.

Systems are also distinguished by how faculty unions and labor relations are structured. In many large systems, the system office acts as the "employer of record," centralizing collective bargaining for all constituent campuses. While this centralization may standardize faculty employment conditions across a diverse array of institutions, it may also lead to more formalized, bureaucratic contracts that impact institutional identity and agility. This tension is especially prevalent in heterogenous systems where faculty workloads and compensation vary across institutions in the systems.

Centralization of governance functions further distinguishes systems. Some, like UC, exhibit strong system-level leadership over academic policy, budgeting, and executive appointments, while others—such as the University System of Georgia—are hybrid models that combine centralized oversight with localized discretion. Still others adopt decentralized models, granting campuses significant operational independence under broad system oversight. In these configurations, the system office serves primarily in a coordinating, strategic, or oversight capacity rather than operating as a single, unified enterprise.

These varied governance configurations illustrate how states navigate and/or reconcile the ever-present tension between institutional autonomy and local/regional needs on one hand, and system authority and statewide responsibility on the other.

4. System Size and Scale

Systems can be categorized both by enrollment size and by the number of institutions they encompass. These dimensions often—but not always—go hand-in-hand. The number of institutions alone does not always correlate with complexity. A system with just a few institutions may still require substantial coordination in serving a wide geographic span, varied institutional missions, and highly diverse populations and cultures. Some systems serve large student populations through a small number of large institutions (e.g., Illinois) while others manage numerous small institutions serving highly dispersed populations (e.g., Alaska two of its 16 campuses are 1000 miles apart from each other).

For categorization purposes here, large-multi institution systems are those that include many institutions (10+) with diverse missions (research, teaching, technical) serving a large number of students. For example, although the mission of the California Community College System is

focused on community and technical education. It includes 116 colleges serving approximately1.9 million students covering a large and diverse geography of California. Likewise, SUNY, with 64 campuses, a broad mix of institutional missions, and 455,000 students, is a large multi-institution system.

Medium-sized systems (between 5 and 10 institutions) tend to focus on statewide access, often integrating community colleges. A good example would be the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education with 10 institutions and approximately 85,000 students. And finally, serving fewer students but playing critical roles in rural and underserved areas, are the small systems such as the University of Maine System with 7 institutions and approximately 30,000 students. While small, Maine includes regional comprehensive colleges and a research university. Likewise, University of Alaska and Hawaii systems are small in terms of their number of institutions and enrollment, but they include all three major institutional missions.

The size and scale of the system office itself is also another critical dimension of variation here. Systems often utilize benchmarked data to align their administrative footprint within the overall system structure. A notable example is the University of Alaska Board of Regents, which commissioned a study conducted by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems to evaluate its system office size relative to peer systems. This benchmarking enabled the board to ensure staffing levels were appropriate and objectively address institutional concerns regarding administrative costs.

5. Institutional Composition

Some systems include a mix of research universities, regional colleges and universities, and community colleges, while others focus exclusively on one institutional type. For example, the three systems in California are each comprised of similar institutions whereas SUNY includes research universities, regional colleges, and community colleges. Others, like the University of North Carolina System, are segmented by function, separating research-intensive from teaching-focused institutions. A few, like the University System of Maryland and the University of Maine System, are consolidated systems formed by merging previously independent institutions. There are also systems that originated from a single historic institution such as the University of Alaska System and the University of Illinois System.

The robustness of the transfer process/function is a key feature of a system's institutional composition, and the ability of students to "bank credits" as they move across institutions. In highly coordinated systems like California's, this function was developed over time through a combination of early legislation, later formalized through statewide policy frameworks such as the 1960 Master Plan (Douglass, 2000). This established expectations for transfer pathways between community colleges, the CSU, and research-intensive universities. The degree to which a system facilitates credit portability through articulation agreements, common course numbering and structured transfer pathways serves as a key indicator of its organizational integration and its responsiveness to student needs.

6. State Policy and Regulatory Oversight

The state policy environments in which systems operate constitute another factor that affects their structure, governance, functions and operational capacities. For example, does the state have a public goal or plan for public higher education? To what extent is the system coordinating with state agencies? Are the system's structure and its functions defined in state law? What level of authority has the system been granted for setting policies on admissions, tuition, bonding, collective bargaining, procurement, facilities, employee benefits, conduct of open meetings, personnel management, student financial aid programs, relations with the state's K-12 system, accreditation, and faculty workload and tenure? Does the state appropriation go to the system or directly to the campuses? Is the state appropriation based on a formula, on performance, or past appropriations?

The extent of state regulatory oversight profoundly affects how systems function and adapt. In some states, legislatures exercise direct control over operational and academic matters, while in others, constitutional or statutory autonomy limits state interference. For example, recent actions by the Wisconsin legislature, which mandated teaching workload requirements on faculty across the Universities of Wisconsin system (excluding the Madison and Milwaukee campuses), illustrate how legislative authority can extend deep into system governance and academic policy. Numerous states have also begun to regulate the curricula themselves, with particular scrutiny on required general education courses that include topics deemed to be objectionable by state politicians.

Similarly, states vary in the degree to which systems must obtain approval for key decisions ranging from tuition-setting and approval of collective bargaining agreements to approval of capital projects and debt issuance. In highly regulated environments, such oversight can constrain institutional flexibility but also ensure greater public accountability. Conversely, systems with broader discretion over financial, personnel, and academic matters may demonstrate greater agility but face heightened responsibility for outcomes. The balance between state control and system autonomy thus represents a critical contextual dimension in understanding the diversity of public higher education systems.

7. Funding Models

Funding models shape not only institutional capacity but also the affordability and accessibility of educational opportunity. Systems generally have three fiscal archetypes: state dependent systems, tuition-driven systems, and a revenue mix of state aid and tuition. Systems that rely heavily on state appropriations, such as Illinois, are affordable but vulnerable to politically driven funding cycles. Tuition-driven systems, including those in Colorado and New Hampshire, operate with minimal state aid, relying on student tuition and fees as their fiscal engines. Systems with a more balanced revenue mix, such as Massachusetts and Idaho, are able to offset fluctuations in state appropriations with tuition revenue.

Allocation methods reveal similar variation. Some states allocate appropriations directly to the campuses in the system, whereas other states allocate the funds to the system office, which in turn allots funds to the campuses. For example, SUNY system receives its allocation from the state and then distributes it to the campuses, whereas at the University of Arkansas system, it is bypassed in the appropriation process.

Systems also differ in their capacity to generate alternative revenue sources. Research-intensive systems leverage federal grants, medical center revenues, philanthropic gifts, public-private partnerships, and proceeds from technology transfer to supplement state appropriations and tuition revenue. This diversified portfolio not only buffers the system from fluctuations in state funding but also reinforces its role as an engine of discovery and economic development. By contrast, community college systems depend more heavily on locally rooted funding sources such as property taxes, workforce development contracts, and dual-enrollment fees. Their close alignment with regional employers and community organizations allows them to sustain responsiveness to labor market needs but limits opportunities for large-scale revenue diversification. Rural or smaller systems, including many regional comprehensive colleges and universities, often face structural barriers to expanding revenue generation. Geographic dispersion, limited philanthropic bases, and fewer research-intensive institutions can constrain their capacity to attract external investment or launch self-supporting programs. As a result, these systems tend to rely more heavily on state support and targeted federal or regional initiatives. These differences in fiscal capacity shape the resources available for student affordability and institutional investment, creating distinct financial environments across state systems.

Affordability policies mirror these structural distinctions. Some, such as CSU, administer system-wide aid programs integrated with state initiatives like the Cal Grant. Others leave aid to campus discretion, producing variability in student cost and access. In recent years, several systems—including those in Tennessee, Oregon, and Rhode Island—have advanced "Promise" programs that use last-dollar scholarships to reinforce statewide attainment goals.

8. Funding Allocation Mechanisms within the System

The mechanisms by which systems distribute funds to their constituent campuses vary considerably, reflecting differences in governance philosophy, fiscal capacity, and accountability expectations. Some systems employ stable "base-plus" models, in which institutions receive a guaranteed allocation supplemented by incremental adjustments for enrollment growth, cost inflation, or strategic priorities. The Universities of Wisconsin system, for instance, utilizes a base allocation approach that allows for periodic revisions tied to student demand and fixed costs, ensuring both predictability and responsiveness to changing conditions.

Other systems have embraced performance-based funding, linking resource allocation to measurable outcomes such as retention, graduation rates, student success metrics, and workforce alignment. The State University System of Florida exemplifies this model, rewarding campuses for progress toward system defined benchmarks.

Another approach—formula funding—distributes resources according to quantitative indicators, often based on enrollment levels, credit hours taught, or degrees awarded. The Texas State University System illustrates this practice, applying discipline-specific cost weights to ensure proportional distribution across diverse academic fields.

Finally, some systems operate under negotiated or discretionary funding frameworks in which allocations result from legislative negotiations or one-time appropriations reflecting political priorities. The University of Alaska System provides a salient example, engaging in annual

budget discussions shaped by the previous year's budget, the state's annual funding, tuition, geography, size, and economic conditions.

These mechanisms reveal critical government dynamics. In Florida's performance-based model, while campus presidents develop and propose budget cuts through local institutional boards, the system level Board of Governors retains final authority over allocations. This differs from states like Texas, where the coordinating bodies and system governing boards operate with differentiated roles in the budget allocation process.

Together, these models reveal the spectrum of financial structures in American higher education—from base funding to performance incentives and politically contingent negotiations—each balancing stability, accountability, and strategic flexibility in distinct ways, reflecting deeply rooted characteristics of the state's political culture.

9. Social and Economic Context

Public higher education systems are profoundly affected by the social and economic characteristics of their states. In states with a strong positive association between educational attainment and income – typically knowledge-based economies like California, Massachusetts and Washington - postsecondary education is perceived to be fundamental. Consequently, systems in these states often benefit from robust enrollment growth and broad financial and policy support from the state. In contrast, systems in states such as Alaska, the nature of resource-extraction economy results in low enrollment and high state-funding dependence, as the financial return on higher education is less apparent than in more diversified economies.

A related economic characteristic of the state which affects its systems can be assessed by the extent to which the state's economy can be described as a "new" or "knowledge" economy (Atkinson & Foote, 2020). Systems in states such as Massachusetts, California, and Utah are recognized as strong contributors to their state's economies. Conversely, systems in states where the economy is centered on resource extraction and controlled by outside agencies or investors, there is a struggle to demonstrate their value to the state's population. As a result, these systems face significant headwinds in terms of enrollment and state funding support.

Another way to assess the impact of the state on its systems is demographics. Simply put, are people coming into the state or are they leaving? Systems in some states, for example, are growing as a result of in-migration of population, whereas enrollment (and accompanying tuition revenue) in other state systems is declining, putting intense pressure on those systems to merge or even close campuses.

State context also shapes—and periodically reshapes—the governance structures through which systems operate. State-level oversight arrangements are not static; they evolve in response to shifting political priorities, fiscal conditions, and perceptions of higher education's value. For example, the California Postsecondary Education Commission once served as a statewide coordinating and advisory entity but was eliminated through gubernatorial action, illustrating how an entire layer of oversight can disappear. In other states, governance structures are actively contested or reconsidered, such as proposals in 2026 to restructure or eliminate coordinating bodies in Louisiana. Conversely, some states have expanded system-

level coordination, as seen in current consideration of increasing the authority granted to the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

These examples highlight that system typologies capture governance arrangements at a point in time, but those arrangements remain fluid and responsive to broader social, economic, and political forces.

Conclusion

All public higher education systems in America share the broad purpose of meeting their states' higher education and economic development needs; however, they are markedly diverse in size, governance, funding, and mission.

This article offers a typological framework to make sense of this variation. The proposed typology provides a foundation for ongoing inquiry and system-wide improvement, offering a structured way to examine what works and what does not, within and across systems, identifying how governance choices, funding models, and policy environments shape institutional performance and student outcomes. By mapping these relationships, the typology can inform comparative research, guide reform efforts, and ultimately provide the basis for assessing a system's value to its state—its contribution to workforce development, civic engagement, and social mobility. The NASH Systems Dashboards have already begun supporting this foundation for inquiry by transforming complex institutional data into actionable, system-level insights for benchmarking and decision-making. Benchmarking systems against one another on key dimensions such as governance efficiency, affordability, student success, and return on investment can help states and systems identify effective practices, adapt successful models to local contexts, and promote a culture of continuous learning and accountability.

It is important to note that private institutions are currently beyond the scope of this typology. While they are a significant component of the national higher education landscape, the focus of this framework is exclusively on public systems that are uniquely tethered to state policy, gubernatorial authority, and legislative oversight. By narrowing the scope to public entities, this typology more effectively captures the specific regulatory and political forces that define this prevailing organizational form.

The next phase of this work will operationalize the typology across all public systems to enable deeper empirical analysis, more robust benchmarking, and practical use for system leaders, policymakers, and researchers. This will enable a more holistic and precise understanding of both common and distinctive system features and will help in: (1) refining the typology, (2) better understanding the drivers of system similarities and differences, and (3) supporting systems as they discern the most effective practices to advance the shared mission of public higher education in America.

Appendix: Dimensions of Public Higher Education Variance

Dimension	Primary Variations	Representative Examples
1. Mission	• Single-mission systems • Multi-mission systems	Single: UC (research), CSU (teaching), CA Community Colleges (access/workforce) Multi: SUNY
2. Role Within the State	• Sole public system • One of multiple systems • Land-grant leadership role	Sole: Alaska, Hawai'i Multiple: California, Texas Land-grant: Illinois, Minnesota
3. Authority & Governance	• Constitutional vs. statutory authority • Governing vs. coordinating boards • Appointed vs. elected trustees • Centralized vs. decentralized control • Unified " One – University" vs Federated	Constitutional: UC, Minnesota Statutory: Wisconsin, Minnesota State Elected boards: Colorado, Nevada Hybrid: Georgia, Florida, Tennessee
4. Size & Scale	• Enrollment Size • Number of Institutions • System Office Scale	Large: CA Community Colleges (~1.9 m students) Medium: PASSHE (~85,000 students) Small: Maine (~30,000)
5. Institutional Composition	• Single institutional type • Mixed institutional types • Consolidated systems • Single-institution origins	Single type: California systems Mixed: SUNY, UNC Consolidated: Maryland, Maine Historic origin: Alaska, Illinois
6. State Policy & Regulation	• High vs. limited state oversight • System level vs. campus level appropriations	High oversight: Wisconsin System-level appropriation: SUNY Campus-level appropriation: Arkansas
7. Funding Model	• State-dependent • Balanced (state + tuition) • Tuition-driven • Revenue-diversified • Affordability Strategies (System vs Campus Aid, Promise Programs)	State-dependent: Illinois Balanced: Massachusetts, Idaho Tuition-driven: Colorado, New Hampshire Centralized System Aid: CSU (Cal Grant, Dream Act) Promise: Tennessee, Oregon, Rhode Island
8. Internal Allocation Method	• Base-plus • Performance-based • Formula-driven • Negotiated/discretionary	Base-plus: Wisconsin Performance: Florida Formula: Texas State Negotiated: Alaska
9. Social & Economic Context	• Knowledge-based economies • Resource-based economies • Demographics (In-migrations vs Decline)	Knowledge economy: CA, MA, WA Resource-based: Alaska

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