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Do Adaptive Initiatives Erode Christian Colleges' Strong Mission Orientation?

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Abstract

This study initiates a conversation as to whether or not adaptive initiatives contribute to, or erode Christian colleges' strong mission orientation. It confirms that Christian colleges have actively launched academic initiatives outside of their traditional undergraduate, residential focus. Christian colleges have been hard pressed to stay true to their mission statements within the current economic and social environment that encourages them to function adaptively. Future research in this area is necessary because there is institutional risk associated with adaptive activity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that inappropriate use of adaptive initiatives can threaten institutional mission attainment. There is also evidence of faculty and administrative disharmony over this issue, which can disrupt decision making and institutional culture.

Brief Literature Review

Overview

This paper will initiate a conversation as to whether or not adaptive initiatives contribute to, or erode Christian colleges' strong mission orientation. Christian colleges have been hard pressed to stay true to their mission statements within an economic and social environment that often encourages them to function adaptively (Astin & Lee, 1972; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). This research looks to confirm the extent of academic activity that extends outside of the traditional undergraduate realm of Christian colleges.

Why is this conversation important? Mission statements are what orient an organization's activities, culture, and structure, and are therefore critical to its long-term success (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Kuh, 1993; Selingo, 2000; Sporn, 1999). Mission focused institutions have often been associated with interpretive initiatives, which are illustrated by decisions and actions that are derived from preserving or accomplishing the mission and have little to do with external marketplace driven growth activity (Buffington, 1990; Chaffee, 1984; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992).

However, for the last twenty five years Christian colleges have been hard pressed to stay true to their mission statements given an economic and social environment that often forces them to adapt to the external marketplace to stay viable (Astin & Lee, 1972; Benne, 2001; Bonvillian & Murphy, 1996; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). This creates the so called adaptive initiatives discussed in this paper. The amount of marketplace pressure reached the point that in many cases schools of this type believed that growth was necessary for survival (Buffington, 1990; Chaffee, 1984; Hamlin & Hungerford, 1988-1989; Morriss-Olson, 1995; Tempel, 1985).

This situation creates difficulties for CCCU schools because there is evidence that the inappropriate use of certain market sensitive, adaptive marketing activities can threaten the attainment of an institution's mission (Alexander, 2000; Buffington, Hossler, & Bean, 1987; Chaffee; Morriss-Olson; Winston, 2000). There is also increasing evidence of faculty and administrative disharmony over this issue (Bash, 2003; Martin, 1969; Morriss-Olson; Riesman, 1981). Kuh and Whitt (1988) and Kuh and Schuh (1991) assert that disharmony of this type causes disruption in the institutional culture, and thus in the decision making processes of these institutions, which would be particularly harmful for mission focused institutions. To summarize, institutions that are naturally interpretive, yet are driven to behave in an adaptive manner, are bound to have some internal tension over the choice of strategy. The tension arises because of the perception that when CCCU schools place an emphasis on growth and adaptation to changing market conditions, this might pose some risk to their mission, which they often consider to give them a unique reason for being (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2004). The fact that many schools have undertaken a variety of these strategies without understanding the long-term impact of their actions is perhaps the most telling reason to investigate these activities.

Background

The characteristics of small liberal arts colleges suggest why tension exists over the use of adaptive activities. Bonvillian and Murphy (1996) cite three broad characteristics of small liberal arts colleges: 1) They serve a distinctive educational purpose, often mixing in historical ideals; 2) they emphasize teaching excellence and education, often with a moral and spiritual dimension; and 3) they often have limited enrollment pull due to their regional scope. Their specialized purpose, focus on quality, and limited scope contribute to a higher cost structure versus state schools. As a result, small private schools tend to be more expensive than state

schools, according to the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (2001). Furthermore, Russo and Coomes (2000) show that small liberal arts schools rely heavily on tuition funding, which makes enrollment growth an attractive solution to economic survival since it is not likely that these schools could justify raising tuition enough to cover rising costs. Finkelstein and Pfnister (1984) and Martin (1984) conclude that independent liberal arts colleges are continually pressured to adapt to new conditions, caused by the pull of societal and governmental influence and the quest for survival. The tension is highlighted by Astin and Lee (1972), who note the unique intimacy and sense of community present in small colleges, and the risk of losing that if they start to become mini-universities.

In response to the changing environment, Buffington, Hossler, and Bean (1987) indicate that many small liberal arts colleges have embraced new business theories and adaptive practices. The introduction of strategic management (for example Chaffee, 1984; Kotler & Fox, 1985; Kotler & Murphy, 1981) and enrollment management (Hossler & Bean, 1990) into the language and practice of higher education illustrate this trend. Examples of practices incorporated within higher education that are viewed as consistent with an adaptive approach (Chaffee, 1983, 1984; Buffington, Hossler, and Bean, 1987) include: 1) Hiring marketing consultants to research market opportunities and help “sell” the school, 2) adding a large number of new academic programs, 3) adding new programs to audiences outside of the traditional age student that change the complexion of a school’s culture (for example adult degree completion programs), 4) adding popular career oriented programs to make up for declining interest in the liberal arts, 5) establishing branch campuses or facilities, 6) adding new programs that are mere label changes, only involving minor content changes; and 7) utilizing faculty to teach courses outside of their traditional expertise. These types of activities often grow out of a push to

adaptively grow to survive (Alexander, 2000; Buffington, Hossler, and Bean, 1987; Chaffee, 1984; Morriss-Olson, 1995, and Winston, 2000), which can cause natural tension with loyalty to the original academic mission of an institution. It is not surprising that church-related higher education institutions are not certain which marketing strategies to choose.

Theory Base for the Research

An understanding of two theoretical frameworks is required to appreciate the impact of this paper. The theory base for this research revolves around the adaptive and interpretive planning models (Keller, 1983; Keeley, 1988; Chaffee 1984, 1985), and Ansoff's product/market growth matrix (Ansoff, 1957).

The Adaptive Planning Model

Under the adaptive model, the institution looks externally for direction. Chaffee (1984) defines this paradigm as "attuning the organization to changes in market demands and reorienting the organization as needed in order to maintain or increase the flow of resources from the market to the organization" (p. 212). Employing the concept of competitive advantage and developing a "marketing orientation … in which everyone sees his or her job as sensing, serving, and satisfying markets" (Kotler & Murphy, 1981, p. 486-87) are both central to this model.

The Interpretive Planning Model

Under the interpretive model, the institution looks internally for direction. Three related ideas come together within the interpretive concept. First, the visionary for the institution establishes the compelling mission and reason for being. Second, the compelling mission attracts likeminded individuals (Chaffee, 1984; Keeley, 1988; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). Lastly, symbols, values, and culture are used by the institutional leadership to manage meaning, thus providing a motivating cause around which organizational participants can rally (Chaffee

1983, 1984; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Gamson & Associates, 1984; Kuh & Schuh, 1991; Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Laramee, 1987; Rice & Austin, 1988).

Product/Market Growth Matrix as the Theoretical Marketing Framework

The product/market growth matrix (Ansoff, 1957) outlines a variety of growth-oriented marketing strategies. This model fits with this topic because of its ability to categorize the marketing strategies which an organization might choose given their preference for adaptive versus interpretive approach. The model outlines four alternative growth strategies based on the potential combinations of existing or new markets, mixed with present or new products. [1] The validity of this approach is enhanced by a variant of this model having already been used by Kotler and Murphy (1981) and Kotler and Fox (1985) within the context of higher education planning and strategy development.

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[1] The four growth strategies of Ansoff's product/market growth matrix are penetration (existing markets and present products), product development (existing markets and new products), market development (new markets and present products), and diversification (new markets and new products). Examples of actions consistent with a penetration strategy include increasing market share and increasing product usage through increased frequency of purchase or amount used. Product development strategy examples are refining the product features, developing products designed to replace existing products, and totally new products that capitalize on the existing distribution system; all for the same market. Market development strategy examples redirect the existing product line to new markets. This can include geographic expansion, where the operation is duplicated or a marketing partnership is created to reach previously unavailable markets, and the development of new market segments through repositioning or similar marketing exercise. Diversification strategy is the development of new products, potentially in unrelated businesses, for new markets. This often requires new skills, knowledge, and facilities. (Aaker, 1988; Kotler, Cunningham, and Turner, 2001).

Adaptive institutions look to be sensitive to the changing needs of the marketplace, and adapt their academic offerings accordingly (Chaffee, 1984, 1985; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). Therefore, it is hypothesized that adaptive institutions will significantly prefer the product development, market development, and diversification options in Ansoff's model. Conversely, the penetration option will likely be less desirable since it advocates following the same course, and adaptive institutions place a high value on growth and change.

An interpretive organization wants its actions to be driven by its unique mission statement. Decisions will be evaluated on their effectiveness in enacting the values, culture, and outcomes inherent in the organization's mission (e.g. Chaffee, 1984, 1985; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). Innovative and new academic products may be introduced, but only after a thorough investigation shows that the "product mission" (Ansoff, P 144) of each new item enacts the organization's mission and values, not merely because the market would be willing to purchase them. Penetration strategies involve sticking with the same "product-mission" (Ansoff, P 144), which simply means that each product continues to carry out the "job that the product is intended to perform" (Ansoff, P 144). Interpretive institutions design educational "products" in such a way that they fulfill the mission of the institution. For example, a school formed around the vision of integrating education and faith in the world might develop an extensive service or ministry related co-op educational experience as a required part of the curriculum. Interpretive institutions tend make an implicit assumption that their specially designed educational programs are inherently correctly focused, even if the market suggests that they have become outdated or are out of favor. Based on this definition, penetration strategies should be preferred the most by an interpretive institution, since in Ansoff's language they involve utilizing the same products to reach likeminded people. Product development strategies

involving some measure of innovation might have secondary preference since they involve offering “new and different characteristics such as will improve the performance of the mission” (Ansoff, P144). Both strategies could be consistent with an interpretive approach, providing the source of the inspiration to pursue them was a more perfect enactment of the mission and values of the institution. Conversely, market development and diversification strategies will be less desirable because they involve different missions and significant change.

Table 1

Ansoff's Product/Market Matrix Applied to CCCU Schools
Selected Examples of Adaptive and Interpretive Actions within each Quadrant
(I) means interpretive; (A) means adaptive

Product Line \ Markets	Same	New
Same	1. Penetration (Adaptive or Interpretive) • Increase volume – same people take more courses/degrees (A/I) • New customers for same product: ○ Increase market share in same area (A/I) ○ New campus that duplicates everything in another area (A/I) ○ Increase donor base (A/I) ○ Change admission standards (A)	3. Market Development (Adaptive) • Adapt product to new mission • Off site mini campuses • Classes held in businesses/organizations • On-line programs • Non-traditional learners • Business/organizational certificates • Degree completion programs • Changed required courses • Active recruitment of commuter students
New	2. Product Development (Adaptive or Interpretive) • Changes to perform the mission better: ○ Added/improved facilities (I) ○ Evening/weekend class times (I) ○ New courses/programs/schools (I) ○ On-line degree programs (I) • Changes based reading the marketplace: ○ Added/improved facilities (A) ○ Evening/weekend class times (A) ○ New courses/programs/schools (A) ○ On-line degree programs (A) ○ Adding new applied programs (A) ○ Built up athletic programs (A) ○ Created multiple majors from existing courses ○ Changed/added non-academic programs	4. Diversification (Adaptive) • Vertical diversification (start a high school) • Horizontal diversification ○ Become educational management consultants ○ A liberal arts school starts a law school, a non-residential mini campus, adult degree completion program, or graduate programs ○ New majors that change the mission • Lateral diversification (start a manufacturing business)

Methodology

Sample

A random sample of 40 Christian Coalition of Colleges and Universities (CCCU) schools was chosen to compare current information against 1991-1992 school year data. The CCCU schools embody the type of intentionally mission focused, church-related institutions of higher education on which this research is focused. These 40 schools were chosen from the 84 schools that were members of the CCCU during the 1991-1992 timeframe. This means that 47% of the potential schools were used in the random sample. Twenty one schools have been added since then, meaning that the sample of 40 schools represents 38% of the current population.

It is fair to assume that this sample is reasonably representative of the CCCU population. CCCU institutions have many similarities, in that they are intentionally Christ centered and have the common characteristics of: 1) Seeking to transform lives by combining scholarship with biblical truth and service, 2) having broad curricula grounded in the arts and sciences, 3) hiring Christians for all faculty and administrative positions, 4) being fully regionally accredited, and 5) generally offering either liberal arts or comprehensive education within a four year framework (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2004). The time period was chosen to reflect a long-term trend by these organizations, and took advantage of readily available baseline information that offered a consistent reporting methodology. In addition, the mean enrolment of the sample of schools in 1991 ($M = 1119.6$, $SD = 697$) was shown to be statistically equivalent to the CCCU population ($M = 1158$, $SD = 738.4$), $z(40) = -0.33$, $p = .3710$ (one-tailed). This relationship held up for the 2003 sample measurements ($M = 1964$, SD 1490), $t(40) = -0.36$, $p = .3664$ (one-tailed). These evidences suggest that it is reasonable to assume that the sample is representative of the population as a whole.

Data Sources

Data was collected from three sources, the Peterson's Guide to Colleges and Universities, the Peterson's Internet based database of schools, and the current Internet sites of each school. Data reflecting any change from 1991 to 2003 was drawn from Peterson's to maintain maximum data integrity. The web sites of individual schools were used to collect data for variables 10 and 11, and to verify data for variables 3 through 6.

Design and Procedure

The combined work of Chaffee (1984), Buffington, Hossler, and Bean (1987), and Morriss-Olson (1995) yielded a partial list of sixteen institutional variables that can be tracked via public sources. These variables are a measure of adaptive market behavior, and thus serve as reasonable indicators of the extent that mission oriented CCCU institutions are participating in adaptive activities. The variables are defined as follows:

1. Percent change in undergraduate enrollment.
2. Change in graduate enrollment as percent of total enrollment.
3. Percent of CCCU schools having an accelerated degree completion program.

   An institution may typically change delivery modes, times, curriculum, and intake requirements in order to satisfy a new type of customer (Winston, 2000).
4. Percent of CCCU schools offering complete degrees via distance learning.

   Methodologies include utilizing email, telephone, interactive video, videotapes, and the Internet. Some programs may also require an on campus component.
5. Percent of CCCU schools offering distance-learning courses.

   These courses are not intended to lead to a degree.

6. Percent of CCCU schools offering adult continuing education courses.

   Courses are typically professional development or continuing education requirements for professions, corporate seminars, or courses specially designed for the local adult student.

7. Percent of CCCU schools offering certificate programs.

   Programs typically involve a specially designed skill or knowledge category, and are often related to becoming certified in a professional career field.

8. Change in percent of full time faculty at CCCU schools.
9. Percent of CCCU faculty having the appropriate terminal degree.
10. Percent of CCCU schools having multiple educational sites or adding acreage.
11. Average number of off campus sites at CCCU schools.
12. Change in the student faculty ratio over time at CCCU schools.

    The calculation divides the reported enrollment by the reported faculty count.

13. Percent change in the number of undergraduate majors offered.
14. Turnover ratio for undergraduate majors offered at CCCU schools.

    This ratio indicates how much of the academic product line, in terms of the majors offered, has been changed at CCCU schools over this time period. The number of new majors is divided by the number of majors that were unchanged.

15. Percent change in the number of graduate degrees offered.
16. Percent change in the number of CCCU intercollegiate teams.

Findings

Variable One - Growth in Undergraduate Enrollment at CCCU Schools

Undergraduate enrollment at CCCU schools grew 50.5% from 1991 to 2003, while graduate enrollment grew 94.8%, for a combined growth of 55.5%. Only two schools decreased

undergraduate enrollment, and three schools grew at less than five percent. The histogram in Appendix A indicates that growth rates for the remaining institutions were spread out evenly in the higher growth ranges. For perspective, CCCU schools grew 24%, during 1990 through 1996 versus 5% for all private four-year schools and 4% for public four-year schools (Reisberg, 1999). During 1997 through 2003, CCCU schools grew 27% versus 8% for four-year institutions overall (Winters, 2004). These comparative statistics indicate that the CCCU schools as a group chose to pursue growth significantly above the norm for higher education in general.

Variable Two – Growth in Graduate Enrollment as Percent of Total Enrollment

Average undergraduate enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment, for the whole sample, declined from 88.6% to 85.8%. The average proportion of undergraduate enrollment to total enrollment declined significantly from 91.8% to 89.2%, paired $t(40) = 1.9887$, $p = .0269$ (one-tailed).

Variable Three – Percent of CCCU Schools Having an Accelerated Degree Completion Program

Ninety-three percent have an accelerated adult degree completion program.

Variable Four – Percent of CCCU Schools Offering Complete Degrees via Distance-Learning

Twenty percent offer a complete degree via distance learning methodology.

Variable Five – Percent of CCCU Schools Offering Distance-Learning Courses

Forty-eight percent offer some courses via distance learning methodology.

Variable Six – Percent of CCCU Schools Offering Adult Continuing Education Courses

Seventy-eight percent of CCCU schools offer adult continuing education courses.

Variable Seven – Percent of CCCU Schools Offering Certificate Programs

Forty percent of CCCU schools offer a variety of certificate programs.

Variable Eight – Percent of Full-Time Faculty at CCCU Schools

The percent of full time faculty utilized at CCCU schools declined significantly from 64% to 59.3%, paired $t(40) = 1.836$, $p = .0371$ (one-tailed).

Variable Nine – Percent of CCCU Faculty Having the Appropriate Terminal Degree

Fifty-two percent of CCCU faculty members have their appropriate terminal degree.

Variable Ten –Percent of CCCU Schools Having Multiple Educational Sites or Adding Acreage

Forty-eight percent of CCCU schools have multiple educational sites, ranging from 2 campuses to 70 locations. All schools with off-campus sites also had accelerated degree completion programs. 30% of the schools added acreage to their home campus, likely to support growth activity. 15% of the schools sold acreage, and it is equally likely that this was also to provide funding to support their operations.

Variable Eleven – Average Number of Off-Campus Sites at CCCU Schools

The average number of off-campus sites, for CCCU schools having off-campus sites, is 8.3. Excluding one school, with an extraordinary 70 sites, would yield a more representative figure of 5.1 sites per school.

Variable Twelve – Change in the Student Faculty Ratio at CCCU Schools

Twenty-one CCCU schools increased their student to faculty ratio, 15 schools lowered it, and three remained the same. The overall change for the sample was not significant, $t(40) = -1.67$, $p = .0514$ (one-tailed).

Variable Thirteen – Percent Change in the Number of Undergraduate Majors Offered

The CCCU schools increased the number of majors offered by 31.8%. See Appendix B.

Variable Fourteen – Turnover Ratio for Majors Offered at CCCU Schools

The proportion of new to unchanged majors was 0.81. In other words, there were almost as many new majors as there were previously existing majors for these schools.

Variable Fifteen – Percent Change in the Number of Graduate Degrees Offered

CCCU schools increased the number of graduate degrees offered by 91%.

Variable Sixteen – Percent Change in the Number of CCCU Intercollegiate Teams

CCCU schools increased the number of intercollegiate teams offered by 24.6%.

Discussion

The CCCU schools sampled exhibit a variety of activities that are associated with adaptive behavior. It is reasonable to assume that the CCCU population will exhibit the same patterns due to the expected representative nature of the sample. Since the specific motivations cannot be understood without extensive research, it should be noted that it is possible that some of these activities might not actually be driven by adaptive motives. At issue is the high level of adaptive activity evident within strongly mission oriented institutions such as the CCCU schools (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2004). The inherent tension between adaptive activity and mission orientation interpretive mindset is appreciated more thoroughly by looking at previous research (Chaffee, 1984; Buffington, Hossler, and Bean, 1987; Morriss-Olson, 1995; and Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992), which indicates that adaptive and interpretive should often be utilized in combination with each other. Therefore, decisions on marketing strategies must reflect an understanding of how to balance the two approaches successfully rather than using either one exclusively. Discussion of the data obtained from this analysis can be organized into three categories. The first category relates to activity derived from having a market orientation. The second category relates to activities that threaten or at least disturb the culture of

an institution, which is an important aspect of an interpretive approach. The third category relates to activities that increase efficiency, which is thought to be a byproduct of an adaptive approach.

Activity Derived From Having a Market Orientation

Significant enrollment growth is typically driven by the use of market research and enrollment management (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Maguire Associates, 2001) to adaptively meet the needs of the market. Similarly, the existence of many new majors, new graduate programs, accelerated degree completion programs at locations convenient to the students, adult continuing education and certificate programs, distance learning courses, and the deletion of unattractive majors, are all adaptive market activities. These tactics are usually used to attract and reach students that were not part of the original mission and vision of the school.

Activities That Threaten or Disturb the Culture of an Institution

The characteristics of an institution that define its culture for undergraduate students are different than those for graduate students (Kuh & Whitt, 1988), since graduate students are older. Although the proportion of undergraduates to graduates for CCCU schools is declining, the amount of decline is small and the degree to which this has impacted the culture of these schools overall is not clear. However, the decline in the ratio of full-time faculty relative to part-time faculty is organizationally significant in that CCCU schools place an emphasis on student interaction with excellent teachers (Bonvillian and Murphy, 1996). Full time faculty members are also thought to be the culture carriers of a school. Both of these advantages may be at risk if too many part-time faculty members are added. Not only do most Christian schools have an accelerated degree completion program, 53% of those had off-campus sites, at an average of 8.3 sites per school. Not only do these schools have to deal with adult students who are very

different from their traditional students (Winston, 2000), but they must deal with the cultural issues inherent in having multiple campuses (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Activities That Increase Efficiency

Hiring more part-time faculty and more faculty members without a terminal degree are efficiency moves typically connected with adaptive approaches (Chaffee, 1984; Buffington, Hossler, and Bean, 1987). CCCU schools as a whole increased their part-time faculty usage significantly, with 26 schools taking advantage of the lower cost instruction. The current level of 52.1% full time faculty compares unfavorably to the typical CCCU school target of 70% (D. J. Jameson, personal communication, March 9, 2004).

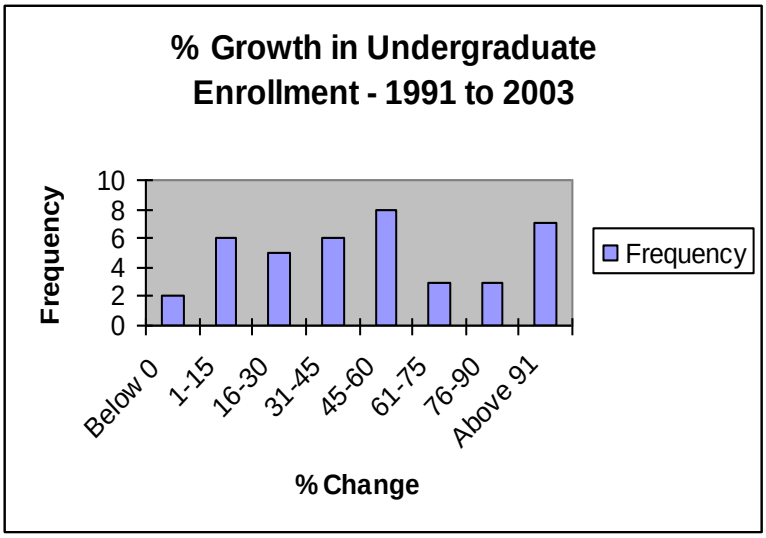
How Can This Topic Advance the Literature?

Like it or not, academia is changing because the society around it is changing. An argument could certainly be made that CCCU schools, in response to some of those changes, are choosing marketing strategies and tactics that are at odds with their interpretive, mission focused heritage. The literature and studies existing today focus solely on the planning models chosen, and do not make any connections to the marketing strategies that institutions actually use. Likewise, the suggestion made by previous authors of disharmony between faculty and administrators over the choice of planning orientation and marketing strategy is disconcerting as well. Similarly, as the role of marketing activities increases in higher education, the potential for impact on the culture and values of these institutions also increases. This adds risk, since institutional culture and values are two of the core foundations for uniqueness of a mission driven, CCCU institution. These three concerns provide opportunities for future research. Given their potential for significant impact on CCCU institutions, the linkage between preferences that

faculty and administrators have for a particular planning model and the institutional marketing strategies actually used should be studied.

Appendix A

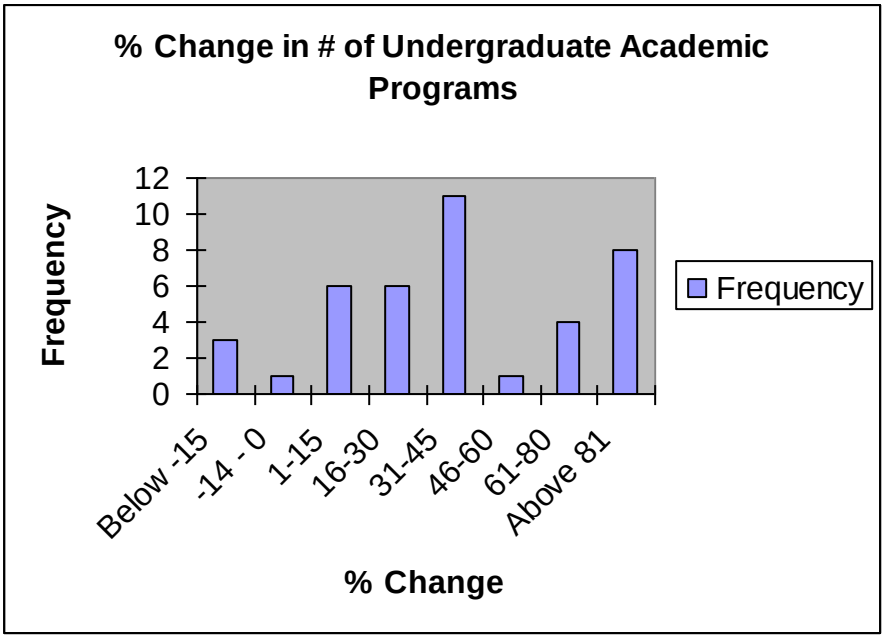
CCCU Schools



% Change	*Frequency*
Below 0	2
1-15	6
16-30	5
31-45	6
45-60	8
61-75	3
76-90	3
Above 91	7

Appendix B

CCCU Schools



% Change	*Frequency*
Below -15	3
-14 - 0	1
1-15	6
16-30	6
31-45	11
46-60	1
61-80	4
Above 81	8

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