Public College and University Consolidations and the Implications for Equity

Lessons from Georgia, Texas, and Wisconsin

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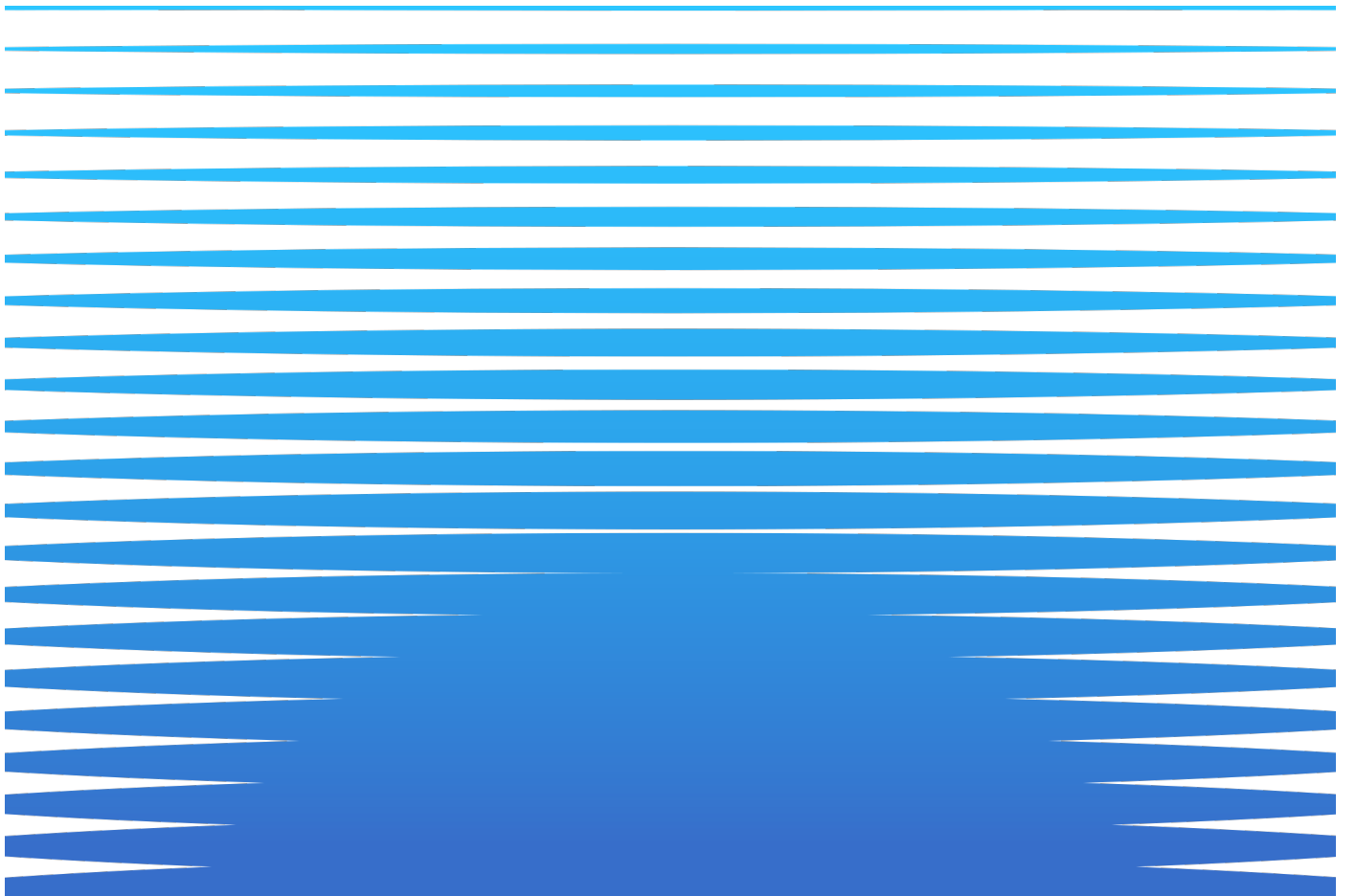Melody Andrews
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Introduction

Across American higher education, institutional consolidations are on the rise. In particular, multiple state systems have proposed or completed mergers of regional universities and/or community colleges with the stated goal of increasing efficiency. The conditions prompting these consolidations have been mounting for years—among them a long-term downward trend in state support for higher education and demographic shifts away from traditional-aged college students, especially in rural areas where numerous public institutions are located. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting recession contributing to even greater uncertainty in institutional enrollments and finances, the consolidation trend seems likely to accelerate.[1] At the same time, these pandemic conditions have intensified the need for affordable, high-quality postsecondary education, especially among lower-income, underrepresented minority, and adult learners.

Yet despite the high-profile nature of some recent successful and failed consolidations, there is remarkably little in-depth analysis of their conditions, dynamics, and consequences—especially their impact on equitable access to and success in higher education.

To begin to fill this gap, we have conducted in-depth investigations of three recent examples of state-system-led institutional consolidation efforts: in Georgia, Wisconsin, and Texas.[2] In separately presented case studies, we discuss the origins, motivations, initiation, implementation, and outcomes of these completed consolidation efforts. In each case, in addition to evaluating whether the stated goals were accomplished, we focus particular attention on the implications of the consolidation process and outcomes for racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity.

This summary discusses cross-cutting themes and lessons drawn from the three case studies. We begin with some contextual background on higher education consolidation, highlighting the key questions (particularly around equity) that remain unanswered and that our study begins to address. We then briefly describe the universe of state-system-led consolidation efforts we were able to identify through a public domain search, our methodology for selecting the three cases on which we focused, and brief descriptions of the consolidations in Georgia, Texas, and Wisconsin.

The main section of the paper identifies and briefly discusses nine key insights and lessons from the case studies, organized in three categories. While these findings may be of interest to various

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[1] "Consolidation: A Solution for Higher Education?" *The Wall Street Journal Risk & Compliance Journal Deloitte*, April 26, 2021, https://deloitte.wsj.com/riskandcompliance/2021/04/26/consolidation-a-solution-for-higher-education/.

[2] Catharine Bond Hill and Jane Radecki, "A Texas Merger: The Creation of University of Texas Rio Grande Valley," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315851; Sosanya Jones, "A Georgia Case Study: A Look at the University System Consolidations with an Eye Towards Race, Ethnicity, and Equity," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315852; Roger C. Schonfeld and Jane Radecki, "Consolidating the University of Wisconsin Colleges: The Reorganization of the University of Wisconsin System," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315853.

audiences, they are most relevant for system leaders and state policymakers who may be considering institutional consolidation in their own jurisdictions. Specifically:

Motivation
- A mismatch between existing capacity and demographic-driven demand is a key underlying motivation for consolidation.
- Local and state politics shape the specific proposals.
- Consolidations are easier to carry out when they are framed around growth than when they are acts of retrenchment.

Implementation
- Without an explicit focus on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity at the planning stage, it is far from certain that minoritized students and other stakeholders will benefit from the consolidation, and unlikely that institutional and system leaders, policymakers, or the public will even know how they fare.
- It is important to consider the impact of consolidation on a variety of stakeholders through an equity lens, including current and prospective students (both first time in college and transfer), faculty, staff, and members of the communities in which the institutions are located.
- Going public with a decision to consolidate is more likely to lead to a completed consolidation than going public with a proposal to consolidate.

Outcomes
- Consolidating a two-year and a four-year institution and retaining both missions has certain advantages over consolidating institutions of the same type.
- Consolidations remain "in process" for longer than anticipated and in some cases longer than is even realized by most observers.
- Consolidations can increase productivity but rarely decrease costs.

Background on Higher Education Consolidations

Consolidations in US higher education have a long history, with some of the nation's most well-known institutions having formed as the result of a consolidation of previously independent institutions that had to adapt to an evolving sociopolitical landscape. Indeed, as the authors of *Strategic Mergers in Higher Education* describe, "Most public university systems in the United States today are the result of gathering and consolidating of institutions that preexisted the creation of the system under a single oversight body, usually at the state level."[3] Notwithstanding the centrality of institutional combinations to the history of US higher

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[3] Ricardo Azziz, Guilbert C. Hentschke, Lloyd A. Jacobs, and Bonita C. Jacobs, "Pursuing Sustainability, Breadth, and Excellence through Scale," in *Strategic Mergers in Higher Education*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 11.

education, scholarly literature on university consolidation is notably sparse. The existing literature and journalistic coverage do, however, provide some insight into the processes, politics, and racial and socioeconomic equity issues surrounding higher education consolidations.

What Are Consolidations?

There is not a generally accepted definition of higher education consolidation. In fact, there is not a generally accepted term, with "merger," "acquisition," or "reorganization" also appearing in both academic and popular writing on the subject, apparently intended to mean more or less the same thing. In this study we use consolidation as an umbrella term to refer to the joining of institutional operations, leadership and governance, or resources that were previously managed independently by separate institutions.[4]

Consolidations can take different forms. On the more-limited end of the spectrum, these include shared operational functions and facilities.[5] More comprehensive consolidations include combined leadership (i.e., previously separate institutions begin to be managed by a single president), combined accreditation, and the complete combination of leadership and programs (often resulting in one of the previous institutions ceasing operations as a separate entity). It is the last of these—the complete combination of previously separate institutions—which we sometimes call a "merger," and which is featured in our three case studies. Institutions of all types have participated in consolidations with one another. Not-for-profit, for-profit, and public institutions have consolidated with other institutions of the same type or of one of the other types. Primarily two-year and four-year institutions, and principally research-focused and teaching-focused institutions, have all combined with one another.

The particular focus of this project is the consolidation of public institutions within a state system of higher education, which has its own long history. Indeed, some state systems themselves are the products of previous rounds of consolidation. For example, the University of Wisconsin System—whose more recent consolidation effort is the focus of one of our case studies—was formed in 1974 when the University of Wisconsin System consolidated with the Wisconsin State University System in order to "contain the growing costs of two systems; give

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[4] It is worth noting that we use different terminology from Azziz et al, who prefer "mergers" as the umbrella term and "consolidations" as a subset: "In higher education, mergers are the amalgamation or union of two or more separate institutions to operate under the control of a single governing body." While "[i]n mergers, at least one, if not both, of the institutions surrenders its legally and culturally independent identity," the subset "consolidation is preferably used to refer to 'mergers of equals.'" Ricardo Azziz, Guilbert C. Hentschke, Lloyd A. Jacobs, and Bonita C. Jacobs, "Pursuing Sustainability, Breadth, and Excellence through Scale," in *Strategic Mergers in Higher Education*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 8. As explained in the main text, we view consolidations as a broader category of combinations that include shared functions by otherwise independent institutions, in addition to mergers in which independence is surrendered.

[5] "Shared services" utilized by geographically proximate institutions is an example of this sort of limited consolidation, in which only some functions are combined, while most institutional decision-making and programming remain separate. The Five Colleges Consortium in Central Massachusetts is a long-standing model of this strategy. See Five Colleges Consortium. https://www.fivecolleges.edu/. Another more recent example is the shared technology infrastructure of University of Akron and Lorrain County Community College. See Luis Proenza and Roy Church, "Shared Services and Partnerships: The Keys to the Future of Higher Education," *Educause Review*, July 11, 2011, https://er.educause.edu/articles/2011/7/shared-services-and-partnerships-the-keys-to-the-future-of-higher-education.

order to the increasing higher education demands of the state; control program duplication; and provide for a united voice and single UW budget."[6] These past consolidations help explain the complex relationships, organizational structures, differential access to resources, and layering of authority in today's state systems. New rounds of consolidation are sometimes prompted by a need to address conditions created by a previous consolidation.

Consolidation Trends and Rationales

As noted above, US higher education has gone through periods of consolidation over the course of its history; for the past decade it appears to be in the midst of such a period.[7] According to the consulting firm EY-Parthenon, for example, there were 94 total combinations from 2010 through 2019, compared to 32 combinations from 2000 through 2009, which represents almost a 200 percent increase.[8] More than 95 percent of the institutions involved had fewer than 5,000 students and more than 80 percent occurred between institutions within the same state.[9] Focusing specifically on state system-led consolidations, our investigation identified 22 state higher education systems with publicly available information on consolidation or merger attempts that occurred since 2007. At least half of these efforts have been completed in some form. (See Appendix for the list and details.)

The reasons behind this uptick in consolidations are complex and intersecting, and the circumstances surrounding particular consolidations are idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, various commentators have pointed to several broader trends that have undermined enrollment and revenue and prompted consideration of consolidation as a response.[10] These include declining numbers of traditional-aged college students—nationally and in particular in Northeastern and Midwestern states—for large numbers of institutions;[11] the sharp decline and incomplete recovery in state higher education funding following the Great Recession;[12] and stagnant wages for the vast majority of Americans.[13] To an institution or system facing these challenges to sustainability, "a merger, partnership, or acquisition between higher education institutions

[6] "UW System to Mark 30th Anniversary," University of Wisconsin, October 9, 2001, https://news.wisc.edu/uw-system-to-mark-30th-anniversary/.

[7] Rick Seltzer, "The Growing Role of Mergers in Higher Ed," *Inside Higher Ed*, June 21, 2018, https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/media/Excerpt_IHESpecialReport_Growing-Role-of-Mergers-in-Higher-Ed_0.pdf.

[8] Cited in David Tobenkin, "College at a Crossroads: Closures and Mergers," *Trusteeship* 28, no. 3, May/June 2020, https://agb.org/trusteeship-article/college-at-a-crossroads-closures-and-mergers/.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Seth Reynolds et al., "Strength in Numbers: Strategies for Collaborating in a New Era for Higher Education," Parthenon-EY Education Practice, 2016, https://cdn.ey.com/parthenon/pdf/perspectives/P-EY_Strength-in-Numbers-Collaboration-Strategies_Paper_Final_082016.pdf.

[11] See, for example, Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimor: John Hopkins University Press, 2018).

[12] State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, "State Higher Education Finance: FY 2020," 2021, https://shef.sheeo.org/report/.

[13] Seth Reynolds et al., "Strength in Numbers: Strategies for Collaborating in a New Era for Higher Education", Parthenon-EY Education Practice, 2016, https://cdn.ey.com/parthenon/pdf/perspectives/P-EY_Strength-in-Numbers-Collaboration-Strategies_Paper_Final_082016.pdf.

could appear appealing… [by offering the prospect of] a larger enrollment base, better diversified programs (expanded and complementary offering, online expansion, etc.), improved facilities, larger geographic reach, and improved efficiencies through economies of scale with administrative, operational, and IT-related functions."[14]

> The consolidation process itself can be fraught with tension, laying bare or exacerbating fault lines in campus, alumni, and regional communities.

Of course, the theory of consolidation benefits does not always play out in practice. Executing a successful consolidation is logistically and politically challenging—so much so that contemplated or announced mergers fall through with some frequency.[15] Some have also questioned the purported financial benefits of completed mergers, especially if separate campuses are maintained by the consolidated institution.[16] And the consolidation process itself can be fraught with tension, laying bare or exacerbating fault lines in campus, alumni, and regional communities.[17]

Equity Implications

While the whole subject of higher education consolidations is understudied, there is a particularly notable gap in research on the racial and socioeconomic equity implications of consolidations. There are at least four ways in which consolidations may differentially impact students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of color, as well as lower-income individuals and families.

First, consolidation may affect student access and success, through the elimination or opening of pathways to institutions or academic programs and changes in budget or staffing for student support. Students of color, lower-income students, and others who have been underserved by higher education are at particular risk of being left out during the course of these structural and programmatic changes, especially if cost-saving is on the agenda.[18] On the other hand, with focused attention, such redesigns have the potential to improve programs and processes that were failing those students before the consolidation.

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[14] Ying Huang et al., "Consolidation Or Closure: The Future Of U.S. Higher Education?" *S&P Global Ratings*, March 14, 2019, https://www.spglobal.com/ratings/en/research/articles/190314-consolidation-or-closure-the-future-of-u-s-higher-education-10884217.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Lee Gardner, "More States Are Looking at Consolidating Their Public Colleges. Does It Work?" T*he Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 30, 2020, https://www.chronicle.com/article/more-states-are-looking-at-consolidating-their-public-colleges-does-it-work.

[17] See, for example, Harrison Cann, "PASSHE Integration Plan Faces Fierce Opposition," *City & State Pennsylvania*. June 11, 2021. https://www.cityandstatepa.com/content/passhe-integration-plan-faces-fierce-opposition

[18] See, for example, Sara Garcia, "Gaps in College Spending Shortchange Students of Color," Center for American Progress, April 5, 2018, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2018/04/05/448761/gaps-college-spending-shortchange-students-color/.

Second, the personnel changes and redundancies that typically accompany consolidations likely pose the greatest risk for faculty and staff of color, as well as those who earn lower wages. The legacy of discrimination and unequal access to opportunity mean that such individuals are likely to be in roles with fewer job protections than white and higher-paid peers and to have less seniority in their positions.[19] Furthermore, efforts to reconcile standards around promotion and tenure across consolidating departments may disadvantage faculty from the less-selective, less-resourced, or less-research-focused institution, who again, for a variety of reasons, including systemic racism, are more likely to be people of color.

Third, the impact on communities in which consolidated institutions are located may differ by race and socioeconomic status. Increasing urbanization has meant that the many rural colleges and regional public universities are most at risk of declining enrollment, and therefore potential targets for consolidation.[20] This same trend may also mean that the institution plays an outsized role in the cultural and economic life of those communities, and a change in the institution's status will have both labor market and emotional repercussions. While all rural communities tend to be facing economic struggles, the racial and ethnic make-up of these communities varies by region: in the Northeast and Midwest, they may be predominantly white; in the South they may be predominantly Black; in the West and Southwest they may be predominantly Hispanic or Native American.[21]

> Consolidations, especially of public institutions, always involve significant political maneuvering and may become political flashpoints for communities associated with the institutions, which are often segregated by both income and race.

Finally, consolidations, especially of public institutions, always involve significant political maneuvering and may become political flashpoints for communities associated with the institutions, which are often segregated by both income and race. In American politics, race and the legacy of centuries of discrimination are never far below the surface, and efforts to consolidate higher education institutions can quickly bring them to the fore.

All four of these implications are especially prominent when a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) is involved in a consolidation. MSIs are federally recognized colleges and universities which serve a significant percentage of racially minoritized students and were often founded

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[19] Alvin Evans and Edna Breinig Chun, eds., "Are the Walls Really Down? Behavioral and Organizational Barriers to Faculty and Staff Diversity," *ASHE Higher Education Report* 33, no 1 (2007): 1-139; Emma Whitford, "Who Holds Professional Positions in Higher Ed, and Who Gets Paid?" *Inside Higher Ed*, May 6, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/06/report-details-gaps-women-and-minority-professionals-higher-ed.

[20] Jon Marcus, "Number of Rural Students Planning on Going to College Plummets," *Hechinger Report*, December 18, 2020, https://hechingerreport.org/number-of-rural-students-planning-on-going-to-college-plummets/; Alyssa Ratledge et al., "COVID-19 and Rural Higher Education," MDRC, September 2020, https://www.mdrc.org/publication/covid-19-and-rural-higher-education.

[21] Alyssa Ratledge, "Recognizing Diversity in Rural America," MDRC. December 2020; https://www.mdrc.org/publication/recognizing-diversity-rural-america; US Department of Agriculture, "Racial and Ethnic Diversity is Increasing in Rural America," https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44331/10597_page7.pdf?v=41055; Daniel T. Lichter, Domenico Parisi, and Michael C. Taquino, "White Integration or Segregation? The Racial and Ethnic Transformation of Rural and Small Town America," *City & Community* 17, no. 3 (September 2018): 702–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12314.

with a mission to do so.[22] Approximately five million college students attend MSIs and they account for a disproportionate share of graduates of color, especially in STEM areas. However, these institutions are severely underfunded in comparison to predominantly white institutions.[23] Resulting budgetary challenges have put many of these institutions at risk of closure, and some have identified consolidation as a potential solution for sustaining them.[24] At the same time, others have raised concerns about the kinds of disparate impacts on students, faculty, staff, and communities described above, in addition to the specific fear of losing the missions and cultural identities unique and core to these institutions, which have supported their success in retaining and graduating students of color.[25]

Consequences of Consolidation

For all the debate and journalistic coverage of higher education consolidation, there is limited evidence on the actual consequences of these institutional changes for students, faculty, staff, and communities. We were able to identify only one empirically rigorous analysis of student outcomes in the wake of consolidation, focused on the University System of Georgia (USG). This study employed a difference-in-differences statistical design to compare student retention and graduation outcomes at consolidating and comparison institutions for cohorts enrolling just before and just after consolidation. According to this analysis, the USG consolidations in aggregate were associated with an 8 percent decline in first-year dropout and a 29 percent increase in four-year bachelor's graduation rate.[26] As detailed in our Georgia case study, however, there is quite a bit of nuance underlying these encouraging top-line results, with variation across the consolidating institutions and demographic groups, as well as some uncertainty about the causal link between consolidation and improved student outcomes when other student success efforts were underway simultaneously.

One important challenge to empirical study of the consequences of consolidation is the fact that institutional consolidation muddles the data sources that are often relied upon to do that analysis. Reconstructing the longitudinal data of pre-existing and merged institutions in the

[22] See United States Department of Education, "Lists of Postsecondary Institutions Enrolling Populations with Significant Percentages of Undergraduate Minority Students," https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html. MSIs include Historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISIs).

[23] See, for example, US House Committee on Education and Labor, "Investing in Economic Mobility: The Important Role of HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs in Closing Racial and Wealth Gaps in Higher Education," September 2019, https://edlabor.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Ed_and_Labor_HBCU_TCU_and_MSI_Report_FINAL.pdf; Viviann Anguiano and Marissa Alayna Navarro, "Hispanic Serving Institutions Need $1 Billion More in Federal Funding," Center for American Progress, December 8, 2020, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/news/2020/12/08/492883/hispanic-serving-institutions-need-1-billion-federal-funding/.

[24] See, for example, Harry L. Williams, "It's Time to Talk Sustainability," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 5, 2018, https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/07/05/why-more-hbcus-need-consider-merging-opinion.

[25] See, for example, Reginald Stuart, "For Many, HBCU Mergers and Closures Are Not an Option," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, August 15, 2018, https://diverseeducation.com/article/123006/; Marybeth Gasman. "In Fear of Mergers: Looking to the Future of HBCUs," *The Evolllution*, December 12, 2015, https://evolllution.com/managing-institution/higher_ed_business/in-fear-of-mergers-looking-to-the-future-of-hbcus-2/.

[26] Lauren Russell, "Better Outcomes Without Increased Costs? Effects of Georgia's University System Consolidations," *Economics of Education Review* 68 (February 2019): 122–35, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2018.12.006.

Education Department's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, for example, takes significant effort and understanding of the nuances of the data collection process.[27] For public institution consolidations, states are not consistent in the clarity or detail of their own data reporting.[28] Furthermore, as we learned during the course of our case studies, the implementation of a consolidation is typically a years-long process, which means defining the point at which a consolidation "occurs" is highly imprecise. Add to the mix the fact that demographics, enrollments, and policies are changing in ways unrelated to the consolidation simultaneously, and it becomes clear why isolating the impact of "consolidation" is so challenging.

Case Studies

Recognizing the challenge of large-scale empirical analysis and the importance of planning and implementation to the trajectory and effects of consolidation, this project seeks to begin to fill the gap in understanding the equity implications of consolidation through a case study approach. As public institutions serve the vast majority of undergraduate students and students of color, and in light of the significant activity in public-system-led consolidation over the past 15 years, we focused our attention on that sector.

As noted above, our team identified 22 state higher education systems with publicly available information (as of December 2020) on consolidation or merger attempts that occurred since 2007 (See Appendix). With a goal of narrowing this list down to three systems, we conducted desk research to gather information on the following characteristics of each of the 22 examples: the nature and purpose of the consolidation; whether the consolidation or merger was completed; the institution types involved in the consolidation attempt (four-year institutions, two-year institutions, or both); geographic region; and institutional demographics. Using this information, we narrowed down the list to completed consolidations that involved at least one four-year institution. These two criteria left five consolidations for consideration. Prioritizing geographic diversity and the involvement of MSIs in the consolidation effort, we selected the University System of Georgia, the University of Texas System, and the University of Wisconsin System.[29]

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[27] For example, it is not possible to tell in the IPEDS data system which of the pre-existing institutions involved in our case study of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley consolidation are represented under which names and institutional IDs in which years before and during the consolidation process. By cross-referencing Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Almanacs, we were able to determine that IPEDS was reporting Texas Southmost College (TSC) and UT Brownsville (UTB) combined enrollments under the ID for TSC until 2014 and was including only UT Pan American's enrollment under the ID for UTRGV. In 2015, the records for UTRGV began to include both UTB and UTPA, and TSC reflected only the community college's enrollment.

[28] We could find no detailed public records, for example, of enrollment and student outcomes for the Wisconsin two-year colleges that were merged into the regional public universities.

[29] We chose not to study the University of Maine System or the Vermont State Colleges.

University System of Georgia[30]

Between 2013 and 2018, the University System of Georgia (USG) completed 9 institutional consolidations, reducing the number of institutions in the system from 35 to 26. After first announcing the consolidation initiative in 2011, the Georgia Board of Regents approved four rounds of consolidation in 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018. The 2011 announcement included six goals the board would use to assess potential consolidations:

1. Increase opportunities to raise student education attainment levels.
2. Improve geographic accessibility, regional identity, and compatibility of cultural fit
3. Avoid duplication of academic programs while optimizing access to instruction.
4. Create significant cost efficiency in service delivery, degree offerings, and enrollment
5. Enhance regional economic development through enhanced degree programs, community partnerships, and improved student completion
6. Streamline administrative services while maintaining or improving service level and quality.[31]

While most of the consolidations were among four-year institutions, one combined a research university (Georgia State University) with a two-year college (Georgia Perimeter College). One of the consolidations also involved the merger of a predominantly white institution (Darton State College) into an HBCU (Albany State University), with the latter retaining its name and branding. Notably, the USG consolidations did not reduce system spending on the consolidated institutions; while some of the consolidations eventually resulted in cost-savings, the freed-up funding continued to be allocated to the combined institution to redirect toward other needs.

Perhaps because there were so many of them that took place over several years, the USG consolidations are the most studied set of consolidations we have identified. As mentioned above, they are also the subject of the only rigorous empirical analysis of the consequences of consolidation we have discovered, showing a significant increase in student retention associated with the consolidations.

University of Texas System[32]

In 2012, the University of Texas System (UT System) began the consolidation of two South Texas universities, University of Texas Brownsville (UTB) and University of Texas Pan American (UTPA), into a single institution, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV).

The South Texas region is the lowest-income region of Texas and has a predominantly Hispanic population. Texas higher education has a long history of discrimination against Hispanics,

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[30] For sources and far more detail, see Sosanya Jones, "A Georgia Case Study: A Look at the University System Consolidations with an Eye Towards Race, Ethnicity, and Equity," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315852.

[31] University System of Georgia, "Regents Approve Principles for Consolidation of Institutions," November 8, 2011, https://www.usg.edu/news/release/regents_approve_principles_for_consolidation_of_institutions.

[32] For sources and far more detail, see Catharine Bond Hill and Jane Radecki, "A Texas Merger: The Creation of University of Texas Rio Grande Valley," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315851.

especially Mexican Americans, as well as other underrepresented groups. Few higher education institutions were located in the border region, and they were underfunded compared to other regions of the state. Following a federal Office of Civil Rights investigation and suits by the NAACP and the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund in the 1970s and 1980s, Texas implemented a set of legislative initiatives designed to improve higher educational opportunities along the border.

As one of these initiatives, the state legislature brought UTPA and UTB, which had previously been unaffiliated with the UT System, into the system, in 1989 and 1991respectively. This gave them access to additional resources, as well as the prestige of affiliation. During the same period, an agreement was reached between UTB and Texas Southmost College (TSC), a two-year college co-located with UTB with a separate, locally elected board and local funding. The agreement included shared administration (including a single president), shared facilities, a joint commitment to open admissions, and a transfer pathways program, allowing for students to start at TSC and then seamlessly complete their degree at UTB.

This relationship between UTB and TSC began to break down during the Great Recession. After several years of increasingly contentious disputes over resource allocation, new TSC board members were elected in 2011 with an agenda to reestablish local control. TSC's board took a hard line on resolving the financial disagreements, prompting the UT System to dissolve the relationship. Without the resources, facilities, and transfer students from TSC, UTB became unsustainable financially, putting large numbers of predominantly Hispanic and low-income students at risk. This motivated the UT System Board of Regents to propose the merger of UTB and UTPA as a way to save UTB. At the same time, due to a wrinkle in state law, both UTB and UTPA, as pre-existing institutions that later joined the UT System, did not have access to an important UT System endowment; consolidating and becoming a "new" UT institution would allow access to that source of capital funds, resolving a long-standing frustration. A third important factor motivating the consolidation was that the combined university would have the infrastructure to support a new medical school in the region. The multiple concurrent changes in status and governance took several years to untangle, but by 2015 the institutions had merged and by 2016, UTRGV had its own accreditation and the formal relationship with TSC had ended.

Compared to the combined enrollment of UTB and UTPA before the merger, enrollment at UTRGV has increased every year, and the institution continues to serve a predominantly Hispanic student population. By contrast, TSC suffered a 54 percent decline in enrollment following the 2011 dissociation from UTB, although it had begun to recover beginning in 2016.

University of Wisconsin System[33]

In 2017, the then-chancellor of the University of Wisconsin System announced a reorganization that would dismantle the single unit UW-Extension and Colleges, merge the 13 two-year college campuses with nearby system comprehensive four-year universities, and merge Extension with

[33] For sources and far more detail, see Roger C. Schonfeld and Jane Radecki, "Consolidating the University of Wisconsin Colleges: The Reorganization of the University of Wisconsin System," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315853.

the flagship UW-Madison. With accreditor's approval coming just a year later, Wisconsin carried out a substantial reorganization of its whole system within a very short time.

The two key motivators for this set of consolidations were budgetary limitations and demographic shifts within the state. Since the Great Recession, the System had managed through repeated cuts in state appropriations (representing a nearly 23 percent reduction from peak to trough), along with restrictions on tuition increases. With regard to demographic changes, the 13 two-year colleges, which were small to begin with, had experienced a 32 percent decline in enrollment from 2010 to 2017 as their local pools of potential students shrank. Given all that, from the System's perspective, it could not financially sustain more than a dozen independent institutions that collectively served fewer students than most of its individual four-year institutions. Consolidating campus and central administration was expected to make the two-year campuses more financially viable.

Yet, the System also saw the opportunity to improve program design and streamline transfer through the consolidations, repositioning the two-year colleges as affordable access points for a broader range of academic offerings and seamless pathways to bachelor's degrees. While the consolidations were finalized (2018) too recently (and close to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic) to see trends in student enrollment or outcomes, there has been progress on this kind of program alignment. At the same time, it is not yet clear whether administrative savings will be realized and whether the changes in governance and program offerings associated with the consolidations will overcome the budgetary and demographic challenges still facing the System's two-year campuses.

Key Insights and Lessons

One observation about these three cases is that each depends on a unique set of circumstances, in a unique geographical and historical context, with unique actors involved. These particularities shaped the consolidation efforts; they were each highly path dependent. To derive the full benefit of this research, we encourage readers to delve into the nuances of each of the three detailed case studies. That said, several cross-cutting themes emerged from our analysis of these unique situations. Other insights gleaned from one or two of the cases may also be relevant to institutional and system leaders, policymakers, and researchers interested in consolidation. We discuss those insights and lessons here, organized into three categories: those that relate to motivations for the consolidation, those that relate to implementation, and those that relate to outcomes.

Motivations

A Mismatch between Existing Capacity and Demographic-Driven Demand

Teaching-focused public colleges and universities offer many benefits, but in the end, their purpose is to provide a service—educating state residents. Changes in the level, rate, or potential demand may leave an institution's offerings out of balance with demand for them. When that

imbalance reaches a certain threshold, policymakers begin to question whether they should reorganize to better align the public higher education capacity with demand for higher education.

In our three case studies, demographic shifts within the state that reduced or increased demand for incumbent higher education offerings were frequently the underlying motivation for considering a consolidation. In both Georgia and Wisconsin, population shifts had left the catchment areas of a number of rural institutions with fewer potential students than in years past and the projection was that the trend would worsen, not improve. Furthermore, it was difficult for those institutions to attract students to come to those areas from elsewhere. Finally, especially in the case of the Wisconsin two-year colleges, loss of revenue from both declining state appropriations and declining enrollment had limited programmatic offerings, perhaps exacerbating the schools' challenges in attracting students. In both cases, consolidation was seen by system leaders as an opportunity to reduce administrative and other overhead expenditures in areas of population decline. It also presented a chance to revitalize program offerings in those regions through the new combined institution.

Interestingly, the Texas case presents almost the inverse situation. The Rio Grande Valley had historically been under resourced and underserved, a legacy of de jure and de facto discrimination against people of Mexican ancestry in the state and the region. Combining UTB and UTPA into UTRGV unlocked a pool of capital that was not available to the separate institutions, while at the same time providing the new university with sufficient operational capacity and research infrastructure to support a strongly desired medical school for the region. So again, consolidation was viewed as a means to match higher education resources to demography—though in this case, it was adding capacity to serve a region with previously unmet and growing demand, instead of reducing capacity in an area of declining demand.

> [Consolidation] was presented as a strategy to adapt the nature of the public higher education offerings, not just the amount, to better fit the needs of those in the region.

It is noteworthy that adjusting the number of "seats" is only part of the demographic-driven demand story in each case. In each case, consolidations were justified in part by the desire to offer new or different programs than the pre-existing institution was able to offer. In other words, it was presented as a strategy to adapt the nature of the public higher education offerings, not just the amount, to better fit the needs of those in the region.

Local and State Politics Shape the Specific Proposals

While mismatches between capacity and demand for higher education in different regions of the state were often a key motivating factor for considering consolidation in our cases, the actual consolidation plans that emerged were significantly shaped by the idiosyncrasies of local and state politics. As with any distribution of state resources, the reallocation of higher education funding was subject to negotiations among state-level politicians representing different parts of the state and different interests. The consolidation plan would have to align with the agenda of

the governor, other executive branch officials, and key legislators with authority over the state system. The system leaders and board members themselves were political appointees, and so had their own calculations to make. And in many cases, the institutions involved were not only deeply entangled with local and state politicians from their region but were recipients of local funding and a source of local employment and pride. All of these factors interacted to create constraints and necessitate compromises in what was proposed.

For example, in Wisconsin, the small towns where the two-year campuses are located lean Republican, and Republicans were, at the time, in control of state government. While closing some of the two-year campuses that were severely under-enrolled was considered as an alternative strategy, that approach was rejected, in part to maintain and gain political allies in those regions. This political dynamic also shaped the decision to give responsibility for each of the two-year campuses to a chancellor in the region, located at a nearby four-year university, rather than a chancellor in the state capital responsible for all of the two-year campuses.

Similarly, in Texas, the proximate cause for considering the consolidation of UTB and UTPA in 2011 was a change in leadership of the locally elected Texas Southmost College Board, which wanted to reestablish local control and cut off the relationship with the UT system. The board acted on this priority by rejecting a plan to settle a long-simmering dispute between TSC's board and the UT System over resource allocation between the co-located TSC and UTB. Part of the UT System's rationale for the UTB-UTPA merger was to mitigate the risk that UTB would not be able to survive without the shared resources and steady flow of transfer students from TSC.

> It is critically important to recognize the ways in which these state and local politics intersect with race and socioeconomic status. These factors come into play both in the initial motivations for consolidation and how the proposals are shaped in the political negotiations that follow.

It is critically important to recognize the ways in which these state and local politics intersect with race and socioeconomic status. These factors come into play both in the initial motivations for consolidation and how the proposals are shaped in the political negotiations that follow. For example, the UTRGV consolidation, as well as the original integration of UTB and UTPA into the University of Texas system in the early 1990s, were motivated by concerns that the state-wide higher education system was not adequately serving the predominantly Hispanic residents of the state's poorest region. Of course, the status quo prompting these efforts was itself the result of centuries of official and unofficial discrimination. In Georgia, by contrast, the Regents were careful not to cast the principles of consolidation or the particular consolidation proposals in terms of racial equity. Yet many of the consolidations involved predominantly white institutions in rural areas, and opposition to these efforts sometimes took on racist overtones. This ugly tendency was intensified in the one Georgia consolidation involving an HBCU, where objections from faculty, students, alumni, and local supporters of Darton State College included objection to the "lower prestige" of the Albany State name and HBCU designation, even though Albany State had a higher ranking, more resources, and stronger enrollment. (With stakeholders

learning about the consolidation only after it was official, this kind of ugly rhetoric did not derail the consolidation but did impact its implementation.)

Growth is Easier Than Retrenchment

Consolidations are easier to carry out when they are targeted to growth than when they are acts of retrenchment. While these three cases are all examples of completed consolidations, other efforts have ground to a halt when they were presented primarily as ways of winding down struggling institutions, as opposed to strengthening higher education offerings in the state.[34] The substance of the consolidation effort matters as much as the framing--claiming to expand programming or increase support for underserved students while closing facilities or slashing budgets will be transparent.

> Other [consolidation] efforts have ground to a halt when they were presented primarily as ways of winding down struggling institutions, as opposed to strengthening higher education offerings in the state.

Each of our cases illustrates this principle in different ways. The consolidation of UTB and UTPA into UTRGV in Texas allowed the combined institution to access a pool of UT System capital funds to which the separate institutions were not entitled. Combining the institutions also gave UTRGV the infrastructure to support a new medical school that was strongly desired in the region. It is also the case that an impending crisis with the break-up of TSC and UTB would have had highly negative effects on students and institutions; the status quo wasn't really an option.

In Georgia, the principles the board of regents laid out to guide consolidation focused on improving student services, program offerings, and economic development, with efficiency only as a means to those ends. As system leaders said at the time and as turned out to be the case, savings from reduced administrative costs remained in the combined institutions' budgets, to be used to enhance their offerings.

The University of Wisconsin System faced a much grimmer economic and demographic scenario than either Georgia or Texas. And yet the system chancellor emphasized the strategic nature of the mergers, a key feature of which was the prospect of providing a wider range of programs to the communities served by the two-year colleges, including straighter pathways to bachelor's degrees, through their association with the regional universities.

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[34] Natalie Schwartz, "U of Alaska Scraps Plans to Merge 2 Campuses," *Higher Ed Dive*, August 7, 2020, https://www.highereddive.com/news/u-of-alaska-scraps-plans-to-merge-2-campuses/583172/.

Implementation

Incorporate Equity into Planning

Without an explicit focus on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity at the planning stage, it is far from certain that minoritized students and other stakeholders will benefit from the consolidation, and unlikely that institutional and system leaders, policymakers, or the public will even know how they fare. One aspect of this observation has to do with intention and prioritization—(only) what gets targeted and measured gets done. But there is also a more technical aspect. As noted above, we found it difficult, as outside researchers, to tease out the before and after of enrollment, student outcomes, and finances. Part of the reason for this is that comparing aggregate statistics on different populations over time can yield misleading inferences. But we also heard from both institutional and system administrators in our case study sites that combining institutional data and program operations were the most challenging components of implementing the consolidations. Information that was not specifically attended to was sometimes not recoverable. Without targeting and tracking equity goals and supports, any gains in terms of diversity or outcome gaps may not happen, or gains or setbacks may go under the radar.

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Furthermore, specialized affinity programs and scholarships and specialized services tailored for minoritized populations prior to consolidation can easily be forgotten or deprioritized when reorganizing institutions through consolidating. For example, at the time of the Kennesaw State-Southern Polytechnic consolidation in the Georgia System, Southern Polytechnic routinely ranked number one or number two in the country for African Americans pursuing a bachelor's degree in engineering related fields. Some stakeholders we interviewed expressed concern that the cultural environment that nurtured a robust African American student body at Southern Polytechnic would not be cultivated after the merger with Kennesaw. Specifically, specialized programs that many considered critical to the success of minoritized students in engineering were absorbed but not necessarily tracked or monitored, leaving a gap in knowledge about whether these programs continued to yield their benefits.

Consider Impact on All Stakeholders

A lot of the attention in the consolidation context is on the current and prospective students of the institutions involved. But higher education institutions are the sites of many personal and economic connections, and all of the people involved in those relationships will be affected; many will want to weigh in on or participate in the implementation of the consolidation. In

addition to current and prospective students (both first time in college and transfer), consolidations affect faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the communities in which the institutions are located.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the impact on and involvement of these stakeholders through an equity lens. There will be differences in racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds both within and across these groups of stakeholders. Alumni may have different identities from current and prospective students, due to changing admissions practices and the breaking down of barriers to equitable enrollment over time. Faculty are far more likely to be white and from upper income backgrounds than staff, especially hourly or contractor staff. As noted previously, there may be similar differentiation within ranks of faculty and staff, often linked to seniority in a systematic way. Losing sight of groups of stakeholders or the differences within stakeholder groups can have highly inequitable consequences.

Although the particular circumstances were idiosyncratic, the multiple institutional and community entanglements involved in the consolidation that led to UTRGV illustrates this point well. Comparing UTRGV to its predecessors UTB and UTPA, there are many indicia of success. But the creation of UTRGV was wound up with the dissolution of the UTB/TSC relationship that had served the students of Brownsville for 20 years. And TSC and its constituents did not fare nearly as well, with a 54 percent decline in enrollment. Students who started at TSC could no longer seamlessly transfer to a bachelor's degree program, but instead had to apply for transfer, and were not guaranteed admissions or that all credits would transfer. Students in the region were now able to directly enter a four-year bachelor's degree program at UTRGV, but no longer with open admissions and with a higher tuition than at the two-year program. The separation of TSC and UTB also led to hundreds of layoffs, centered on TSC, but also affecting UTB employees who focused on the partnership with TSC.[35] Although the disagreements between the TSC board and the UT System appeared irreconcilable in 2011, it may be that neither party fully considered the impact the governance break-up would have on the region's students as a whole.

Go Public with a Decision

Going public with a decision to consolidate is more likely to lead to a completed consolidation than going public with a proposal to consolidate. In all three of our cases, the system leaders announced plans to consolidate with limited public engagement beforehand. The Wisconsin and Georgia examples present extreme versions of this approach, with both systems giving limited notice to only a select few individuals at the affected institutions months or sometimes weeks before the public announcement. Remarkably, the University System of Georgia did this four times over a five-year period. This is in contrast to other system-led efforts that started with an announcement that consolidations were under consideration and were either derailed or remain bogged down after years of sometimes public negotiations.[36]

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[35] Beth Cortez-Neavel, "In Brownsville, Two Colleges Split and a Community Suffers," *Texas Observer*, May 23, 2013, https://www.texasobserver.org/in-brownsville-two-colleges-split-and-a-community-suffers/.

[36] See, for example, Erica Moser, "Opponents of Community College Consolidation Seek Legislative Intervention," *The Day*, March 9, 2021, https://www.theday.com/article/20210309/NWS01/210309428 (Connecticut); Natalie Schwartz, "U of Alaska Scraps Plans

This strategy certainly did not forestall criticism—indeed, the approach itself generated its own criticism from faculty, students, and alumni. Some of the tensions and resentment of the process lingered on for years, as detailed in the Georgia case study. But the consolidations went through, and so the critics were fighting a rearguard battle, focused on how they would be implemented and not whether they would happen. Of course, the efficacy of this strategy depended on the system leaders understanding the politics of the situation and cultivating support before the public announcement or immediately after from key actors who had the authority or clout to block the effort.

> From the perspective of pursuing equitable higher education opportunity and outcomes, it is essential for leaders to have a plan for implementation that includes input and attention to groups who may have concerns about being left behind or marginalized by the consolidation.

One important caveat to this approach is that it raises the priority for system leaders of pursuing the first two strategies in this section, planning for equity and considering the impact on all stakeholders. From the perspective of simply "getting the deal done," stakeholders from minoritized groups or those of lower socioeconomic status—who often lack political power—may not be viewed as important constituents to engage before the decision or to include in shaping the implementation. But from the perspective of pursuing equitable higher education opportunity and outcomes, it is essential for leaders to have a plan for implementation that includes input and attention to groups who may have concerns about being left behind or marginalized by the consolidation.

Outcomes

Advantages of Cross-Sector Consolidations

Each of our cases suggest, in different ways, that consolidating a two-year and a four-year institution and retaining both distinct missions has certain advantages over consolidating institutions of the same type. Such two-year/four-year mergers may yield fewer faculty redundancies and conflicting policies that need to be resolved than consolidating two institutions in the same sector, while also streamlining pathways for students.

This was part of the rationale for the Wisconsin mergers between two-year colleges and regional universities. The concept was to maintain the robust student services offered by the two-year colleges, while expanding the programmatic scope of their educational offerings to better match

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to Merge 2 Campuses," *Higher Ed Dive*, August 7, 2020, https://www.highereddive.com/news/u-of-alaska-scraps-plans-to-merge-2-campuses/583172; Min Xian, "PASSHE Vote to Merge Six State Universities into Two Nears Despite Pushback," *WITF.org*, July 14, 2021, https://www.witf.org/2021/07/14/passhe-vote-to-merge-six-state-universities-into-two-nears-despite-pushback/.

with changing needs for education in their communities, including providing better access to bachelor's degree programs directly and through streamlined transfer.

Similarly, in the merger between Georgia State University (GSU) and Georgia Perimeter College, the president sought to carve out a space within the newly consolidated GSU that was uniquely Perimeter, with Perimeter faculty, students, and tenure guidelines. At the same time, Perimeter students gained access to streamlined transfer pathways between the associate's and bachelor's programs, and GSU was able to share its robust student success infrastructure with Perimeter. The three-year associate's degree graduation rate for Perimeter students improved from 7 percent in 2015, the year before the consolidation, to 22 percent in 2020, a 15-point improvement. During the same time, the graduation rates for Black, Hispanic, and Pell students improved by 18, 19, and 17 points, respectively.

The 20-year relationship between TSC and UTB in Texas provides another example of the value of this kind of consolidation for students. And the dissolution of that relationship due to irreconcilable differences among the governing bodies of the two institutions may have had a negative impact on some students: the open admissions pathway through TSC and UTB was eliminated, while admissions to UTRGV became more selective and the transfer pathway less automatic for those starting at TSC.

Consolidations Remain "In Process" for a Long Time

It may be difficult to understand the outcomes associated with a consolidation in the short-term, in part because consolidations remain "in process" for longer than expected. In the Texas example, it took about four years to disentangle TSC and UTB, and it is taking even longer for TSC to regroup and implement a new strategic direction. In Georgia, participants in the consolidations emphasized the challenge of aligning technology systems, standards, branding, and athletics. Clashing campus cultures can also complicate the process, leading to more delays in each of those efforts, and lingering long after the "official" consolidation is complete. As noted above, there were tensions in the consolidation of Albany State and Darton State College relating to some Darton stakeholders' resentment of Albany State's HBCU designation. These individuals were able to slow down various processes related to the implementation by non-participation or disruption, forcing a postponement of accreditation approval. At both Albany State and Kennesaw State in Georgia, members of the campus community report simmering disputes and rivalries between those associated with different pre-consolidation institutions even now, half a decade later.

Consolidations Can Increase Productivity but Rarely Decrease Costs

Although our three cases represent a limited sample of all higher education (or even public system) consolidations, they consistently showed that policymakers and system leaders should have measured expectations about the impact of consolidation on institutional finances. In each case, we found that the implementation of consolidation itself is a costly process--integrating or reconciling technology systems, administrative processes, branding, faculty and staff buyouts all require significant direct expenses and personnel time at both the system and institution level.

> Policymakers and system leaders should have measured expectations about the impact of consolidation on institutional finances.

Beyond these upfront costs, the cost savings from administrative streamlining and elimination of duplication were rarely substantial. This kind of administrative cost reduction was an objective of the Wisconsin mergers, but the savings turned out to be modest. The decision to maintain separate facilities, often quite far apart, is a key reason for this finding: separate, distant facilities require separate faculty and staff.

It is worth noting that in both Texas and Georgia, unlike Wisconsin, reducing expenditures was not a stated goal. To the contrary, leaders in Georgia committed to reinvesting any savings from efficiencies back into the combined institutions, and one of the goals for creating UTRGV was to enable the new institution to access *more* UT capital resources and facilitate the creation of an (expensive) medical school. And there is evidence in both cases that these strategic reallocations and investments in consolidated institutions increased higher education productivity even though they did not reduce costs. As noted above, the Georgia consolidations were associated with an 8 percent decline in first-year dropout and a 29 percent increase in four-year bachelor's graduation rate. And UTRGV has seen improvement in enrollment, research spending, and student success outcomes compared to the aggregated results for UTB and UTPA before the merger.

Approaching a consolidation effort with the goal of productivity, rather than cost savings, in mind is especially important from an equity perspective.[37] Minoritized students systematically benefit less from state higher education spending than white students and are far less likely to earn a degree.[38] Reducing expenditures on its own will not help to close the attainment gap and is likely to exacerbate it. So even if using consolidation as a strategy for cost-saving were feasible (which is questionable), it may not be desirable. On the other hand, consolidation is a more promising strategy to improve programming and support for minoritized students at the same cost (as in some of the Georgia examples, especially GSU-Perimeter), or to enable strategic investments that will benefit those students and their broader community (as in Texas).

Conclusion

With higher education consolidations on the rise, this study has closely examined three recent examples of public-system-led consolidation, with a particular focus on the ways that racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity have been implicated in the causes, implementation, and consequences of those efforts. While each case presents its own unique circumstances and lessons, this summary report has drawn insights from across the diverse contexts that should

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[37] See Martin Kurzweil, "Productivity and Student Success" Ithaka S+R, August 10, 2015, https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/productivity-and-student-success/.

[38] See, for example, Sara Garcia, "Gaps in College Spending Shortchange Students of Color," Center for American Progress, April 5, 2018, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2018/04/05/448761/gaps-college-spending-shortchange-students-color/.

inform system and institutional leaders, policymakers, researchers, and other interested parties as they approach other instances of consolidation. We conclude by highlighting one thread that connects each of the case studies and all of these insights: in the complex swirl of politics, negotiations, and practical tasks relating to consolidation, it is all too easy for those with power to lose sight of the interests of minoritized students and other stakeholders who have been poorly served by higher education for far too long, and who risk being marginalized further by a reorganization. Conscientiously centering equity throughout the process, from consideration through implementation, and targeting and tracking the results for minoritized populations, is the antidote.

Appendix

In this study we use consolidation as an umbrella term to refer to the joining of institutional operations, leadership and governance, or resources that were previously managed independently by separate institutions. This includes shared operational functions and facilities, as well as more comprehensive combinations such as combined leadership (i.e., previously separate institutions begin to be managed by a single president), combined accreditation, and the complete combination of leadership and programs (often resulting in one of the previous institutions ceasing operations as a separate entity). In the context of a public system of higher education, this might involve the consolidation of two or more institutions that are part of the system or the consolidation of a non-system institution and a system institution. This appendix describes the 22 consolidation attempts since 2007 that were associated with a public system of higher education in the US.

Table 1: List of 22 US Public System Consolidation Efforts Since 2007

System	Year(s) Initiated	What Was Proposed and What Took Place?	Completed?
University of Alaska System	2019	In 2019 the University of Alaska regents voted to move toward consolidating the university system. The consolidation efforts were motivated by finances, budget cuts,[39] and reduced state funding. The University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau each operate under their own institutional accreditations, and the plan in 2019 was to try and consolidate the universities into one accredited institution that would have multiple campuses in multiple locations.[40] However, after large amounts of pushback from both faculty and students,[41] "the University of Alaska board of regents (in the fall of 2019) has voted to suspend consideration of merging the system's three separately accredited universities, at least until the campus in Fairbanks secures its accreditation, in 2021."[42] Had this merger gone through the system would have attempted to combine institutions under a single accreditation system.	No, effort failed
University of Arkansas System	Consolidation Effort #1 & 2: 2016	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In May 2016, the Pulaski Technical College Board of Trustees met to consider the proposed merger into the University of Arkansas system. The technical college had been suffering from financial problems and severe low enrollment.[43] Those at Pulaski were hopeful that merging with the University of Arkansas system, and the brand that was associated with the system, could help increase enrollment and fill a necessary supportive financial role. The change of governance was approved by the Higher Learning Commission in 2017.[44] The University System's addition of Pulaski Technical College became official on February 1, 2017, making Pulaski the sixth official member of the system. This was a merger of an independent institution into a university system. **Consolidation Effort #2:** In April 2016, merger discussions began with the Rich Mountain Community College Board of Trustees and their approval of the request to join the University of Arkansas system. The University of Arkansas System Board	Consolidation Effort #1 & 2 (2016): Yes

[39] Jane S. Shaw, "University of Alaska Considers Consolidation After Budget Cuts," The Heartland Institute, September 23, 2019, https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/university-of-alaska-consolidates-campuses-after-budget-cuts.

[40] Tegan Hanlon, "UA Regents Voted to Move Toward Consolidating the University System. What Happens Now?," *Anchorage Daily News*, August 3, 2019, https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/education/2019/08/03/ua-regents-voted-to-move-toward-consolidating-the-university-system-what-happens-now/.

[41] Matt Buxton, "UA Regents Pull the Plug on Consolidation, Suspend System-Wide Program Review," *The Midnight Sun*, October 7, 2019, https://midnightsunak.com/2019/10/07/ua-regents-pull-the-plug-on-consolidation-suspend-system-wide-program-review/.

[42] Katherine Mangan, "Alaska Board Suspends Consideration of Controversial Merger," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 7, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/article/alaska-board-suspends-consideration-of-controversial-merger/.

[43] Elizabeth Armstrong and Elicia Dover, "Pulaski Tech Considers Merger Into UA System," *KATV*, May 9, 2016, https://katv.com/news/local/pulaski-tech-considers-merger-into-ua-system.

[44] Nate Hinkel, "Pulaski Tech Officially Joins UA System," University of Arkansas System, February 1, 2017, https://www.uasys.edu/news/pulaski-tech-officially-joins-ua-system/.

		of Trustees approved the request for a merger in May 2016, and on July 29, 2016, formal approval for the merger was granted by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board.[45] On February 1, 2017, the merger became official and Rich Mountain Community College became the seventh two-year college within the University of Arkansas System. [46] Rich Mountain Community College underwent a change of governance by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association as a result of this move.[47] This merger offered Rich Mountain expanded program options to the community college through transfer and articulation program agreements with the University of Arkansas's four-year institutions.	
Arkansas State University System	Consolidation Effort #1: 2015

Consolidation Effort #2: 2019

Consolidation Effort #3: 2019 | **Consolidation Effort #1:** In 2015, Mid-South Community College in West Memphis became part of the ASU system. The school's vice chancellor of institutional advancement, Diane Hampton, noted that, "Rather than financial concerns, the impetus for that merger was better access to education, workforce training and economic development."[48] The boards of trustees for both institutions approved the merger. Once it had joined the ASU system, the institution changed its name to Arkansas State University Mid-South. This institution was later accredited by the Higher Learning Commission.[49]

Consolidation Effort #2:
In February of 2019 it was announced that the free-standing community college, College of the Ouachitas in Arkansas, would become part of the Arkansas State University System in 2020.[50] In December of 2019 an accrediting agency approved the merger and as of January 1, 2020,[51] the college is known as Arkansas State University Three Rivers.[52] | Consolidation Effort #1 (2015): Yes

Consolidation Effort #2 (2019): Yes

Consolidation Effort #3 (2019): Yes |

[45] Nate Hinkel, "UA System Adds UA-Rich Mountain in Merger," University of Arkansas System, February 16, 2017, https://www.uasys.edu/news/ua-system-adds-ua-rich-mountain-in-merger/.

[46] "Campuses & Units," University of Arkansas System, 2020, https://www.uasys.edu/campuses-units/.

[47] Nate Hinkel, "UA System Adds UA-Rich Mountain in Merger," University of Arkansas System, February 16, 2017, https://www.uasys.edu/news/ua-system-adds-ua-rich-mountain-in-merger/.

[48] Aziza Musa, "Two Colleges Look at UA System Possibilities," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, March 28, 2016, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/mar/28/two-colleges-looking-at-ua-system-possi/.

[49] "Statement of Accreditation Status," Higher Learning Commission, August 17, 2021, https://www.hlcommission.org/component/directory/?Itemid=&Action=ShowBasic&instid=2092.

[50] Doug Lederman, "College of Ouachitas to Join Arkansas State System," *Inside Higher Ed*, February 22, 2019, https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2019/02/22/college-ouachitas-join-arkansas-state-system; Emily Walkenhorst, "ASU System Approves Plan to Add School," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, February 21, 2019, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/feb/21/asu-system-approves-plan-to-add-school--1/.

[51] "College of The Ouachitas, ASU Boards Approve Merger," Arkansas State University, February 20, 2019, https://www.astate.edu/news/college-of-the-ouachitas-asu-boards-approve-merger.

[52] Emily Walkenhorst, "Vote OKs Malvern College's Merger With ASU System," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, December 13, 2019, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/dec/13/vote-oks-malvern-college-s-merger-with--1/; "ASU System Overview," Arkansas State University System, 2021, https://www.asusystem.edu/about/.

		Consolidation Effort #3: In November 2019, the board of the public liberal arts college Henderson State approved a plan to become part of the Arkansas State University (ASU) System.[53] Henderson State University had been struggling financially and the merger was viewed as an act of preservation. In December 2019, the ASU System Board of Trustees approved the merger, and it was signed into law by the governor in February 2021, making Henderson State University the ASU System's seventh member and second four-year institution.[54] Henderson, like all campuses that are part of the Arkansas system, will remain a separately accredited institution. In November 2020, the Higher Learning Commission approved a Change of Control application and the continuation of Henderson's accreditation as a future member of the ASU System."[55]	
University of Colorado System	2004	In 2004, the University of Colorado Board of Regents discussed and approved the decision to consolidate the University of Colorado Denver's Downtown Campus and the Anschutz Medical Campus. In 2007, the board approved and named the consolidated institutions the University of Colorado Denver.[56] It appears as though the consolidation effort was completed in 2009.[57]	Yes
Connecticut State Colleges & Universities	2017	In 2017 the president of Connecticut State Colleges and Universities introduced a plan to merge its 12 community colleges into a single institution of more than 80,000 students with one, shared accreditation.[58] The stated goals of the proposed consolidation included improving financial sustainability, aligning academic practices and offerings, and promoting student success.[59] The Connecticut System presented the plan to the New England Commission of Higher Education for approval in 2019, with hopes of rolling this plan out in 2023. However, the Commission asked for more information, including responses to a series of objections by faculty members.[60] "Despite escalating resistance from faculty unions who question whether the complicated merger will work,	Ongoing

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[53] Elin Johnson, "A Public College Merger in Arkansaw," *Inside Higher Ed*, October 28, 2019, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/28/henderson-state-seeking-merger-arkansas-state-system.

[54] "Henderson State University Officially Joins ASU System," Henderson State University, February 1, 2021, https://www.hsu.edu/news/2021/feb/01/henderson-state-university-officially-joins-asu-sy/.

[55] "Higher Learning Commission Approval Moves Henderson Closer to ASU System Affiliation," Henderson State University, November 10, 2020, https://www.hsu.edu/news/2020/nov/10/hlc-approval-moves-henderson-closer-asu-system-aff/.

[56]"Regents Satisfied with Consolidation Assessment, Halt Study," University of Colorado Faculty and Staff Newsletter, June 24, 2009, https://www.cusys.edu/newsletter/2009/06-24/consolidation.html.

[57] "CU Denver Timeline," University of Colorado Denver, 2021, https://www.ucdenver.edu/about-cu-denver/our-history.

[58] Linda Conner Lambeck, "Community College Consolidation Moves to Next Phase," *CT Post*, December 14, 2017, https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Regents-vote-to-consolidate-community-college-12430872.php.

[59] "Education Quality, Affordability, Equity, & Accessibility," *CSCU Students First,* 2020, https://www.ct.edu/sf.

[60] David Quigley, "NECHE Letter July 2019," New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), July 12, 2019, https://www.ct.edu/files/pdfs/NECHE%20letter%20July%202019.pdf; Lee Gardner, "More States Are Looking at Consolidating Their Public Colleges. Does It Work?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 30, 2020, https://www.chronicle.com/article/more-states-are-looking-at-consolidating-their-public-colleges-does-it-work.

		or even makes sense,"[61] plans are still moving ahead with the proposed consolidation. At the most recent meeting in July 2020, the New England Commission of Higher Education accepted all of the latest updates from the Connecticut State Colleges and University System and voted to take no further action on items of concern raised through public comment.[62] The 12 community colleges that will merge into one accredited college will be named Connecticut State Community College and according to Mark Ojakian, the president of the system, the college is still on track to be operational in 2023.[63] In February 2021, the board of regents reported a large deficit of $58 million which was shared between the system's four state universities and the 12 community colleges—a total of $22 million for the colleges and $36 million for the universities,[64] much of which was driven by the pandemic. The board continues to take steps towards the merger, such as making presidents for the community colleges all CEOs, despite significant pushback from the faculty union. The board chair, Matt Fleury, stated in one of the latest meetings that "the goal of the merger, called 'Students First', was an effort to avoid raising tuition, to increase retention and graduation rates, and to improve student equity."[65] If this proposed merger does not take place, it is estimated that the system will lose an additional $43 million.	
State University System of Florida	Consolidation Effort #1: 2018 Consolidation Effort #2: 2020	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In March 2018, the governor signed legislation[66] requiring the University of South Florida Tampa, USF St. Petersburg, and USF Sarasota Manatee to consolidate accreditations under one umbrella.[67] In June 2020, the University of South Florida received accreditor's approval for the consolidation.[68] Under this umbrella, "the separate campuses will be able to maintain their own identities once consolidation is complete, and share in extra state money the	Consolidation Effort #1 (2018): Yes Consolidation Effort #2 (2020): No

[61] "Connecticut Still Seeking to Merge Colleges Despite Concerns," NBC Connecticut, January 5, 2020, https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/connecticut-still-seeking-to-merge-colleges-despite-concerns/2205689/.

[62] Madeline St. Amour, "Despite Pandemic, Opposition, Connecticut Merger Goes On," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 24, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/24/connecticut-community-college-merger-remains-track-despite-pandemic-and-continued.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Emilia Otte, "As State Schools Move Toward Merger, Faculty and Legislators Raise Tough Questions on Finances," *The Connecticut Examiner*, March 26, 2021, https://ctexaminer.com/2021/03/26/as-state-schools-move-toward-merger-faculty-and-legislators-raise-tough-questions-on-finances/.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Rodrigues and Avila, "House Bill 423," Pub. L. No. CS/CS/HB 423: Higher Education (2018), https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2018/00423.

[67] "USF Consolidation," University of South Florida Board of Trustees, 2020, https://www.usf.edu/board-of-trustees/usf-consolidation/.

[68] "Accrediting Agency Approved University of South Florida Consolidation," University of South Florida, June 12, 2020, https://www.usf.edu/news/2020/accrediting-agency-approves-usf-consolidation.aspx.

		main campus earns as a preeminent university."[69] As of July 1, 2020 the University of South Florida has been officially operating under a single accreditation for the Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee campuses.[70] **Consolidation Effort #2:** In February 2020, a key Florida House committee, the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee,[71] backed a consolidation plan that would have stripped New College of Florida and Florida Polytechnic University of their independent status and then merged the two institutions with the University of Florida.[72] The proposal "caught university leaders by surprise, quickly fueling fierce opposition from state lawmakers in Sarasota and Manatee counties as well as students and faculty who study and work at the state colleges."[73] While "the proposal would have addressed some lawmakers' concerns that the cost per degree at Florida Polytechnic and New College was significantly higher than at the University of Florida, driving up public higher education costs for the state,"[74] in March 2020, the bill was scrapped before it reached the floor.[75] Legislators, and college leadership, are preparing for the possibility of the bill resurfacing in a later session.	
University System of Georgia	Four rounds of mergers beginning in 2013 and ending 2018	Between 2013 and 2018, the University System of Georgia (USG) completed nine institutional consolidations, reducing the number of institutions in the system from 35 to 26. After first announcing the consolidation initiative in 2011, the Georgia Board of Regents approved four rounds of consolidation in 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018. See our case study for more detail.[76]	Consolidation Effort #1 (2013): Yes Consolidation Effort #2 (2015): Yes Consolidation Effort #3 (2017): Yes Consolidation Effort #4 (2018):

[69] Mark Schreiner, "UAF Consolidation Approved, Placing Three Campuses Under One Umbrella," *WUSF Public Media*, June 15, 2020, https://wusfnews.wusf.usf.edu/university-beat/2020-06-15/usf-consolidation-approved-placing-three-campuses-under-one-umbrella.

[70] "University of South Florida Consolidates Its Three Campuses into One Accredited Institution," University of South Florida, July 1, 2020, https://www.usf.edu/news/2020/usf-consolidation-takes-effect.aspx.

[71] Peter Schorsch, "Radical Proposal Would Fold Florida Poly into UF, Merge New College with FSU," *Florida Politics*, February 11, 2020, https://floridapolitics.com/archives/318776-house-plan-would-fold-florida-poly-and-new-college-into-uf-fsu/.

[72] "University Merger Plan Headed for Florida House Vote," *The Palm Beach Post*, February 26, 2020, sec. State, https://www.palmbeachpost.com/story/news/state/2020/02/26/university-merger-plan-headed-for-florida-house-vote/112241888/.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Emma Whitford, "Florida Merger Bill Shelved, but for How Long?," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 19, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/19/lawmakers-plan-merge-florida-public-universities-lingers-even-after-defeat-year.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Sosanya Jones, "A Georgia Case Study: A Look at the University System Consolidations with an Eye Towards Race, Ethnicity, and Equity," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315852.

			Yes
University of Illinois System	2017	Following through on discussions that began in 1998,[77] and took on more formality in November 2017,[78] in July 2018 the University of Illinois Board of Trustees approved a plan to merge the private John Marshall Law School and the University of Illinois at Chicago, which would make John Marshall the only public law school in Chicago.[79] In the fall of 2019, John Marshall Law School was officially established at the University of Illinois at Chicago.[80]	Yes
Louisiana State University System	2012 initiated, reinitiated in 2019	In October 2011 a consulting firm was hired to look at the possibility of merging Louisiana State University-Shreveport (a medical school) and Louisiana Tech University "into a single research-based entity that would collaborate closely with the LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport."[81] LSU-Shreveport falls under the LSU system, but Louisiana Tech University falls under the University of Louisiana System. In 2012 the consulting firm released a report suggesting that LSU-Shreveport should merge with Louisiana Tech University and that this merger should exist under the University of Louisiana System.[82] The LSU Chancellor said the proposed merger caught him by surprise.[83] Not long after the new 2019 bill was proposed, the merger was tabled because "the measure was shaping up to be a contentious issue among higher education leaders in Shreveport, Ruston and Baton Rouge" and "the votes simply were not there to advance the legislation."[84]	No

[77] Patrice M. Jones and Cindy Schreuder, "UIC Considers Merging With John Marshall," *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1999, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1999-06-29-9906290263-story.html.

[78] Rick Seltzer, "Law School May Join U Illinois at Chicago," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 22, 2017, https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/11/22/law-school-may-join-u-illinois-chicago.

[79] Rick Seltzer, "Good Time to Add a Law School? One University Says Yes," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 20, 2018, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/20/illinois-chicago-will-acquire-law-school-despite-trends-legal-education.

[80] "UIC John Marshall Law School Makes History, Becomes Chicago's First and Only Public Law School," *UIC Today*, September 16, 2019, https://today.uic.edu/uic-john-marshall-law-school-makes-history-becomes-chicagos-first-and-only-public-law-school; "About UIC John Marshall Law School," UIC John Marshall Law School, 2020, https://jmls.uic.edu/about/.

[81] Jan Moller, "Study Will Explore Merging Louisiana Tech, LSU-Shreveport Universities," *NOLA.com*, October 13, 2011, https://www.nola.com/news/education/article_3dee5bd7-8fd6-5654-9b9e-026a4a079370.html.

[82] Rachel Warren, "Consulting Firm, Board of Regents Recommend LSUS Merge with La Tech," *LSU Reveille*, May 7, 2012, https://www.lsureveille.com/news/consulting-firm-board-of-regents-recommend-lsus-merge-with-la-tech/article_96d5c64c-5aed-5f2e-bfa4-5754c84f3f3d.html.

[83] "LSUS Chancellor Strongly Opposes Proposed Merger of His School with LaTech," *WAFB9*, April 2, 2019, https://www.wafb.com/2019/04/04/lsus-chancellor-strongly-opposes-proposed-merger-his-school-with-latech/.

[84] Matt Stanley, "Proposed LSU Shreveport-Louisiana Tech Merger Tabled for Now," KSLA News 12, May 7, 2019, https://www.ksla.com/2019/05/07/house-committee-set-debate-proposed-lsu-shreveport-louisiana-tech-merger/; Greg Hilburn, "Shreveport May Get Law School; LA Tech Won't Get LSUS," *Shreveport Times*, May 7, 2019, https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/2019/05/07/shreveport-may-get-law-school-la-tech-wont-get-lsus/1128935001/.

University of Maine System	2015 - 2020	Facing budget deficits and declining enrollment,[85] in 2015 the University of Maine System developed a plan to become one university with seven campuses instead of seven universities within one state system.[86] The key step in the plan was to accredit its institutions jointly instead of individually.[87] The reason for this move was simple; as Chancellor James Page stated, "Maine can no longer afford the system we have now. Maine cannot afford a system weighed down by far too much administration."[88] The system was faced with tight budgets and declining enrollment. In January 2020, the University of Maine System Board of Trustees formally approved the proposal to seek a single, systemwide accreditation.[89] Months later in June 2020 the New England Commission of Higher Education voted to accredit the whole University of Maine System rather than evaluating each of its seven universities individually.[90] This was a historic vote as it makes Maine's public university system the very first in the US to receive this collective accreditation—a change that the system had been considering making since 1968. As of April 2021, the system was still in the process of implementing the accreditation consolidation.[91]	Ongoing
University System of Maryland	2011	In mid-2011, the joint chairman of the Maryland General Assembly invited the University System of Maryland to study the concept of merging the University of Maryland Baltimore and the University of Maryland, College Park. In December 2011, the USM Board of Regents recommended a strategic alliance between the two institutions, but not a merger.[92] After several years of non-action, the strategic alliance concept	No

[85] Ry Rivard, "Maine Central Planning," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 27, 2015, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/27/maine-system-looks-further-centralize-its-staff-budget-and-academic-programs.

[86] Kellie Woodhouse, "Flexibility or an End Run?" *Inside Higher Ed*, May 6, 2015, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/06/university-maine-system-considering-umbrella-accreditation-its-7-campuses.

[87] Kery Murakami, "Maine Moves Ahead With Unified Accreditation," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 28, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/28/maine-university-system-moves-ahead-unified-accreditation.

[88] Noel K. Gallagher, "UMaine System to Consolidate Administration, Keep 7 Campuses and Presidents," *Portland Press Herald*, January 26, 2015, https://www.pressherald.com/2015/01/26/usm-gets-80-applicants-for-presidency.

[89] Eesha Pendharkar, "University of Maine System to Seek One Accreditation For All Campuses," *Bangor Daily News*, January 27, 2020, https://bangordailynews.com/2020/01/27/news/bangor/university-of-maine-system-trustees-approve-unified-accreditation/.

[90] "Joint Release: New England Commission of Higher Education Votes To Accredit University of Maine System," Maine's Public Universities, University of Maine System, June 26, 2020, https://www.maine.edu/blog/2020/06/26/joint-release-new-england-commission-of-higher-education-votes-to-accredit-university-of-maine-system/; Charles Eichacker, "Maine Universities Will Now Share an Accreditation, An Idea They've Had Since 1968," *Bangor Daily News*, June 26, 2020, https://bangordailynews.com/2020/06/26/news/bangor/maine-universities-will-now-share-an-accreditation-an-idea-theyve-had-since-1968/.

[91] "University of Maine System Unified Accreditation Progress Report," University of Maine System, April 12, 2021, https://www.maine.edu/unified-accreditation/wp-content/uploads/sites/158/2021/04/UMS-NECHE-spring-2021-progress-report-final.pdf.

[92] "USM Board of Regents Endorses Creation of University of Maryland Strategic Alliance," Board of Regents University of System of Maryland, 2020, https://www.usmd.edu/regents/UMCP-UMBMergerStudy/.

		reemerged in 2016.[93] We have found no further update since 2016.	
University of Massachusetts System	2018	After unsuccessfully pursuing a merger with Lasell College, in the spring of 2018 Mount Ida College ceased operations and its assets were acquired by the University of Massachusetts Amherst.[94] After the deal was completed, it still proved controversial, sparking objections by stakeholders at UMass Boston, who believed the new Boston-area hub would create unnecessary competition within the UMass system.[95]	Yes
University of New Hampshire System	Consolidation Effort #1: 2010 Consolidation Effort #2: 2021	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In 2010 the University of New Hampshire and Franklin Pierce Law Center agreed to merge,[96] "Under the plan, the state's only law school would remain in Concord for the foreseeable future but would be renamed the University of New Hampshire School of Law, pending approval by the American Bar Association and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges."[97] In May 2019, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Law School officially changed its name to be known as the University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law.[98] **Consolidation Effort #2:** In early 2021 the governor of New Hampshire included a proposal in the executive summary of his budget for the 2022 – 2023 fiscal year,[99] announcing his intention to combine the state's 13 four-year and two-year public colleges into one unified system. As of August 2021, this proposal is still under consideration by the relevant House committee, which has slowed the process down from the governor's initial aggressive timeline.[100]	Consolidation Effort #1 (2010): Yes Consolidation Effort #2 (2021): Ongoing
University of North Carolina System	2013	In 2013, following a proposal by the governor for a $135 million cut in funding for the University of North Carolina System, lawmakers were considering the possibility of consolidating two	No

[93] "Opinion: A Tale of Two Universities or One Big One - Revisiting UMD Merger," *MarylandReporter.Com*, March 1, 2016, https://marylandreporter.com/2016/03/01/opinion-a-tale-of-two-universities-or-one-big-one-revisiting-umd-merger/.

[94] Lisa Creamer and Fred Thys, "Mount Ida College To Close; UMass Amherst To Acquire Its Campus In Newton," *WBUR*, April 6, 2018, https://www.wbur.org/edify/2018/04/06/mount-ida-closing-umass-deal.

[95] Crystal Haynes, "UMass Boston Students Call Mount Ida Merger a 'Slap in The Face,'" *Boston 25 News*, April 10, 2018, https://www.boston25news.com/news/umass-boston-students-call-mount-ida-merger-a-slap-in-the-face/730299867/.

[96] Elie Mystal, "Franklin Pierce Law Center In Talks to Merge with University of New Hampshire," *Above the Law*, March 16, 2010, https://abovethelaw.com/2010/03/franklin-pierce-law-center-in-talks-to-merge-with-university-of-new-hampshire/.

[97] Holly Ramer, "Trustees Back Merger of UNH, Law School," *Boston.Com*, March 17, 2010, http://archive.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2010/03/17/trustees_back_merger_of_unh_law_school/.

[98] Caitlin Andrews, "UNH Law Changes Name to Bolster Franklin Pierce Connection," *Concord Monitor*, May 21, 2019, https://www.concordmonitor.com/UNH-Law-brings-Franklin-Pierce-name-change-25711322.

[99] Christopher T. Sununu, "Governor's Executive Budget Summary: Budget for Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2022-2023" (State Department of New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services, February 2021), https://das.nh.gov/budget/Budget2022-2023/Executive-Summary-FY22-23.pdf..

[100] Michael Kitch, "Pace of Proposed USNH-CCSNH Merger Questioned," *NH Business Review*, March 22, 2021, https://www.nhbr.com/pace-of-proposed-usnh-ccsnh-merger-questioned/.

		System universities.[101] The plan was tabled, however, and since 2013 there has been no further consolidation discussion.	
University of North Texas System	Consolidation Effort #1: 2001 Consolidation Effort #2:2012	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In 2001, a state representative filed a House Bill that aimed to incorporate the University of Texas-Arlington, University of Texas-Dallas, and University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center into the University of North Texas system.[102] It was proposed that the consolidated university would be renamed the University of North Texas at Arlington. The bill was not acted upon and there has been no further official consideration of this plan. **Consolidation Effort #2:** Years later, in August 2012, the University of North Texas System Board of Regents was expected to consider a proposal exploring the possibility of combining its Fort Worth based Health Science Center with the main campus in Denton.[103] However, there has been no further news of this proposal, and University of North Texas and the University of North Texas Health Science Center remain separate entities.	Consolidation Effort #1 (2001): No Consolidation Effort #2 (2012): No
University System of Ohio	2020	In August of 2020, the University of Akron and Cleveland State University, both public institutions in the University System of Ohio, announced that they will begin to explore a merger between their two law schools, the University of Akron School of Law and the Cleveland Marshall College of Law.[104] The two universities have formed a joint working group to consider this "strategic partnership" and what it would look like, the timeline, and the feasibility.[105]	Ongoing
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education	2020	The Pennsylvania State System is planning to merge six different universities into two: This is in response to a decade of enrollment drops and financial pressures: "Five of the 14 four-year campuses that make up the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education were in dire financial straits even before the pandemic, due to a decade of slumping enrollment — [After sustaining] a nearly 20-percent drop systemwide from 2010 to	Ongoing

[101] Leigh Kelley, "Apodaca: Merger Possible, But Not Closures for UNC System Schools," *BlueRidgeNow.Com*, March 29, 2013, https://www.blueridgenow.com/article/NC/20130329/News/606023451/HT; Cullen Browder, "UNC System Could Lose Campuses," *WRAL.Com*, March 21, 2013, https://www.wral.com/unc-system-could-lose-campuses/12252716/.

[102] Crystal LaFlash, "Campus Targeted for UNT System," *The Shorthorn*, March 15, 2001, https://www.theshorthorn.com/news/campus-targeted-for-unt-system/article_9cafac14-c2c0-52ba-ad76-2fb36ac37f13.html.

[103] Steve Jacob, "UNT Eyes Merging Main Campus, Fort Worth Health Science Center," *D Magazine*, August 14, 2012, https://www.dmagazine.com/healthcare-business/2012/08/unt-eyes-merging-main-campus-fort-worth-health-science-center/.

[104] Emma Whitford, "Ohio Law Schools Explore Merger," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 28, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/08/28/ohio-law-schools-explore-merger.

[105] "University of Akron and Cleveland State University to Explore Creating Unified Law School," The University of Akron University Communications and Marketing, August 27, 2020, https://www.uakron.edu/im/news/university-of-akron-and-cleveland-state-university-to-explore-creating-unified-law-school/.

		2019,"[106] the chancellor hoped to find a more sustainable organizational structure.[107] Following a year of often contentious public debate, in July 2021 the PASSHE Board of Governors voted unanimously to consolidate six universities into two. California University of Pennsylvania, Clarion University, and Edinboro University would merge into a single university (in the western part of the state) and Lock Haven University, Bloomsburg University, and Mansfield University would merge into a single university (in the northeastern part of the state).[108] This vote now puts in motion a multiyear consolidation process, expected to be completed by 2024.[109]	
University of Texas System	Consolidation Effort #1: 2012 Consolidation Effort #2: 2019	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In 2012, the University of Texas System (UT System) began the consolidation of two South Texas universities, University of Texas Brownsville (UTB) and University of Texas Pan American (UTPA), into a single institution, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The process was completed in 2015. See University of Texas System case study for more detail.[110] **Consolidation Effort #2:** In December 2019, the UT System announced that it was moving forward with a plan to consolidate the UT Health Science Center at Tyler into UT Tyler as an administrative unit of the university.[111]	Consolidation Effort #1(2012): Yes Consolidation Effort #2 (2019): Yes
Texas A&M University System	Consolidation Effort #1: 2013 Consolidation Effort #2: 2016	**Consolidation Effort #1:** In 2013, the Texas A&M University System announced that the previously free-standing Texas A&M Health Science Center would be reorganized as a unit within the university.[112]	Consolidation Effort #1 (2013): Yes

[106] Lee Gardner, "More States Are Looking at Consolidating Their Public Colleges. Does It Work?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 30, 2020, https://www.chronicle.com/article/more-states-are-looking-at-consolidating-their-public-colleges-does-it-work.

[107] Lee Gardner, "After a Tough Decade, Pennsylvania's Public Colleges Open the Door to Mergers," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 16, 2020, https://www.chronicle.com/article/after-a-tough-decade-pennsylvanias-public-colleges-open-the-door-to-mergers.

[108] The original plan in July of 2020 was to integrate three pairs of universities, not two. In that proposed plan the merged would have composed of (1) California University of Pennsylvania with Clarion University, (2) Edinboro University with Slippery Rock University, and (3) Lock Haven University with Mansfield University of Pennsylvania. Lindsay McKenzie, "Rethinking the Pennsylvania State System," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 17, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/17/pennsylvania-university-system-proposes-plan-redesign.

[109] Emma Whitford, "Pennsylvania Board Votes 'Yes' on Consolidation," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 15, 2021, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/07/15/pennsylvania-system-approves-plan-merge-six-universities.

[110] Catharine Bond Hill and Jane Radecki, "A Texas Merger: The Creation of University of Texas Rio Grande Valley," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315851.

[111] Cory McCoy, "UT System To Move Forward With Merger of UT Tyler and Health Science Center," *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, December 9, 2019, shttps://tylerpaper.com/news/local/ut-system-to-move-forward-with-merger-of-ut-tyler-and-health-science-center/article_eafcc81e-1ac1-11ea-8469-1b566647a8c6.html.

[112] Shane Hinckley, "Texas A&M Health Science Center Moves Under Administration Of Texas A&M University," *Texas A&M Today*, July 12, 2013, https://today.tamu.edu/2013/07/12/texas-am-health-science-center-moves-under-administration-of-texas-am-university/.

		Consolidation Effort #2: In 2016, the system chancellor proposed consolidating Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi and Texas A&M University - Kingsville.[113] However, after significant opposition,[114] the plan was abandoned.[115]	Consolidation Effort #2 (2016): No
Texas Tech University System	2020	In February 2020, Midwestern State University (MSU) was invited to become the fifth university in the Texas Tech University system.[116] At that time, MSU was one of the only four independent public universities left in the state. In August 2020, the MSU Board of Regents authorized the consolidation,[117] and in June 2021, it was signed into law by the governor.[118] MSU will officially become a member of the Texas Tech University system at the beginning of fiscal year 2022.[119] This also means that the MSU Board of Regents will cease to exist after September 1, 2021. The university will move to be governed by nine board members and one student representative.	Ongoing
Vermont State Colleges	Consolidation Effort #1: 2016 Consolidation Effort #2: 2021	**Consolidation Effort #1:** Following multiple years of the system operating at a loss,[120] in September 2016, the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees approved a combined administration for Johnson State College and Lyndon State College, to take effect in July 2017.[121] The campuses would begin operating as Northern Vermont University-Johnson and Northern Vermont University-Lyndon. **Consolidation Effort #2:** In the wake of the enrollment and financial challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic,[122] in February 2021, VSCS decided to merge three residential colleges under one accreditation. Under this plan Castleton University,	Consolidation Effort #1 (2016): Yes Consolidation Effort #2 (2021): Ongoing

[113] Matthew Watkins, "Texas A&M System Discussing Merger of Universities in Kingsville and Corpus Christi," *The Texas Tribune*, November 10, 2016, https://www.texastribune.org/2016/11/10/texas-m-system-may-merge-universities-kingsville-a/.

[114] Many alumni and students said that they did not want to lose their individual universities identities. Matthew Watkins, "A&M Chancellor: Merger of Kingsville and Corpus Christi Schools in Not Viable," *The Texas Tribune*, November 16, 2016, https://myaggienation.com/am_news/a-m-chancellor-merger-of-kingsville-and-corpus-christi-schools/article_ccb20877-1c97-5a05-947c-4dd9584c73e5.html.

[115] "Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp: Merger of Universities In Corpus Christi and Kingsville No Longer Viable," The Texas A&M University System, November 16, 2016, https://www.tamus.edu/texas-am-system-chancellor-john-sharp-merger-of-universities-in-corpus-christi-and-kingsville-no-longer-viable/.

[116] "MSU Texas Considers Invitation to Join Texas Tech University Systems," *Texoma's*, February 14, 2020, https://www.texomashomepage.com/news/local-news/msu-texas-considers-invitation-to-join-texas-tech-university-systems/.

[117] Julie Gaynor, "Board of Regents Reviews, Approves MOU With the Texas Tech University System," MSU Texas, August 6, 2020, https://news.msutexas.edu/2020/08/msu-texas-board-of-regents-update.php.

[118] Julie Gaynor, "Gov. Abbott Signs HB 1522 Designating Membership Effective Sept. 1," MSU Texas, June 8, 2021, https://news.msutexas.edu/2021/05/governor-signs-bill-making-midwestern-state-5th-member-of-ttu-system.php.

[119] Michael Grace, "What to Know: MSU Texas and Texas Tech Merger," *News Channel 6 Now*, June 9, 2021, https://www.newschannel6now.com/2021/06/09/what-know-msu-texas-texas-tech-merger/.

[120] Rick Seltzer, "Vermont's Merger Map," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 27, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/07/27/vermont-pushes-combine-public-colleges-administrations.

[121] Cory Dawson, "Johnson, Lyndon State Colleges to Merge," *Burlington Free Press*, September 20, 2016, https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/2016/09/29/johnson-lyndon-merge/91227036/.

[122] Bidisha Das, "Three Vermont Schools Merge to Stay Afloat During Pandemic," *The College Post*, February 22, 2021, https://thecollegepost.com/vermont-schools-merger/.

		Northern Vermont University, and Vermont Technical College will all be unified as Vermont State University under a single accreditation which will take effect in the 2023-2024 academic year. The Community College of Vermont will remain a separate institution.[123]	
University of Wisconsin System	2017	In 2017, the then-chancellor of the University of Wisconsin System announced a reorganization that would dismantle the single unit UW-Extension and Colleges, merge the 13 two-year college campuses with nearby system comprehensive four-year universities, and merge Extension with the flagship UW-Madison. The consolidations were completed with accreditor's approval in 2018. See University of Wisconsin System case study for more detail.[124]	Yes

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[123] Rick Seltzer, "Vermont State Colleges Board Advances Merger Plan," *Inside Higher Ed*, February 23, 2021, https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2021/02/23/vermont-state-colleges-board-advances-merger-plan.

[124] Roger C. Schonfeld and Jane Radecki, "Consolidating the University of Wisconsin Colleges: The Reorganization of the University of Wisconsin System," Ithaka S+R, August 30, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315853.