



Public Entrepreneurs and the Adoption of Broad-based Merit Aid Beyond the Southeastern United States

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Citation: Ingle, W. K. & Petroff, R. A. (2013). Public entrepreneurs and the adoption of broad-based merit aid beyond the Southeastern United States. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 21 (58) Retrieved [date], from <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1252>

Abstract: The concentration of broad-based merit aid adoption in the southeastern United States has been well noted in the literature. However, there are states that have adopted broad-based merit aid programs outside of the Southeast. Guided by multiple theoretical frameworks, including innovation diffusion theory (e.g., Gray, 1973, 1994; Rogers, 2003), Roberts and King's (1991) typology of public entrepreneurs, and Anderson's (2003) stages of the policymaking process, this qualitative study sought to answer the following questions. First, in the absence of regional diffusion pressures, what internal determinants are reported as accounting for the diffusion of broad-based merit aid programs outside of the Southeastern US? What types of public entrepreneurs were identified as playing key roles in establishing merit aid in states outside the southeastern US? During which stages of the policymaking process were they active? We found that merit aid was a means of addressing an array of public problems, including low college going rates at in-state public colleges and universities, and weak K-12 accountability. Consistent factors reported as facilitating merit aid creation included a strong, vocal public advocate (governors and a university system president) and a desire to strengthen state economies and diversify

workforces. A full range of public entrepreneurs played key roles in developing merit aid in the sampled states. Political and executive entrepreneurs were in the forefront of merit aid efforts, but our data suggest that a cast of supporting public entrepreneurs were integral to the eventual adoption of broad-based merit aid in the sampled states.

Keywords: political analysis; postsecondary education policy; public entrepreneurs; innovation; diffusion.

Emprendedores públicos y la adopción de sistemas de ayuda meritocráticos de base amplia más allá del sureste de Estados Unidos

Resumen: La concentración de la adopción de sistemas de ayuda meritocráticos de base amplia en el sureste de Estados Unidos ha sido bien discutida en la literatura. Sin embargo, hay estados que han adoptado programas de ayuda al mérito de base amplia parte más allá del sureste. Guiados por marcos teóricos múltiples, incluyendo la teoría de la innovación de difusión (por ejemplo, Gray, 1973, 1994, Rogers, 2003), Roberts y King (1991) tipología de emprendedores públicos y las etapas del proceso de formulación de políticas de Anderson (2003), este estudio cualitativo buscó responder a las siguientes preguntas. En primer lugar, cuando no existen presiones de difusión regional, cuales son los determinantes internos que explican la difusión de los programas de ayuda al mérito de base amplia más allá del sureste de EE.UU.? ¿Qué tipos de emprendedores públicos fueron identificados como jugando un papel clave en el establecimiento de ayudas mérito en estados más allá del sureste de EE.UU.? En qué etapas del proceso de formulación de políticas son activos? Encontramos que la ayuda meritocrática era un medio de hacer frente a una serie de problemas, incluyendo las bajas tasas de inscripción universitarios en universidades públicas y la debilidad de los sistemas de rendición de cuentas del sistema de educación básica. Factores que fueron sistemáticamente reportadas como facilitadores de la creación de ayudas meritocráticas incluyen una voz de defensa fuerte y pública (por ejemplo, gobernadores o presidente del sistema universitario) y el deseo de fortalecer las economías estatales y diversificar la fuerza de trabajo. Una gama completa de emprendedores públicos desempeñaron un papel clave en el desarrollo de ayudas méritocráticas en los estados incluidos en la muestra. Empresarios políticos y ejecutivos estaban en la vanguardia de los esfuerzos de ayuda por mérito, pero nuestros datos sugieren que un elenco de apoyo a los empresarios públicos eran parte integral de la eventual aprobación de la ayuda mérito de base amplia en los estados incluidos en la muestra.

Palabras clave: análisis político; política de educación superior; emprendedores públicos; innovación; difusión.

Os empreendedores públicos e sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla para além do sudeste dos Estados Unidos

Resumo: A concentração de sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla para além do sudeste dos Estados Unidos tem sido bem discutido na literatura. No entanto, há estados que adotaram programas de bolsas meritocráticas além da parte sudeste. Guiados por vários marcos teóricos, incluindo a teoria da difusão da inovação (por exemplo, Gray, 1973, 1994, Rogers, 2003), Roberts e King (1991) tipologia dos empreendedores públicos e estágios de formulação de políticas de Anderson (2003), este estudo qualitativo, procurou responder às seguintes perguntas. Primeiro, quando não há pressões de difusão regionais, quais são os determinantes internos que explicam a difusão de programas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla para além

do sudeste dos EUA? Quais são os tipos de empreendedores públicos foram identificadas como desempenhando um papel fundamental no estabelecimento de sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla além dos estados do Sudeste dos EUA? Em que fases do processo das política são ativos? Descobrimos que sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla foram um meio para resolver uma série de problemas, incluindo baixas taxas de matrícula na faculdade em universidades públicas e a fraqueza dos sistemas de responsabilização do sistema de educação básica. Fatores que foram consistentemente identificados como facilitadores na criação dos ajudas meritocráticos incluem uma voz forte e defesa pública (por exemplo, governadores ou presidentes de sistemas universitários) e do desejo de fortalecer as economias estaduais e diversificar o mercado de trabalho. Uma gama completa de empreendedores públicos desempenharam um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento de sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla nos estados incluídos na amostra. Empresários políticos e executivos estavam na vanguarda dos esforços de promover sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla, mas nossos dados sugerem que um elenco de apoio de empreendedores públicos eram parte integrante da eventual adoção de sistemas de bolsas meritocráticas de base ampla em nos estados incluídos na amostra.

Palavras-chave: análise política; política de ensino superior; empreendedores públicos; difusão da inovação.

Introduction

In 1992, Governor Zell Miller of Georgia proposed a state-funded financial assistance program known as the Georgia Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) Scholarship Program. The creation of Georgia HOPE and the leading role that Miller played have been widely acknowledged as the source of inspiration and innovation for the adoption of similar scholarships in other states (Doyle, 2006; Ness & Mistretta, 2009). These programs have been established as far south as Florida; north in Alaska; east in Massachusetts and west in Nevada (Dynarski, 2002, 2004; Heller & Marin, 2004; McLendon, Heller, & Young, 2005; Zhang & Ness, 2010). Their criteria and award amounts differ from state to state, but program participation seeks to reward K-12 academic performance with public scholarships for postsecondary education. Eligibility typically requires some combination of minimal grade point average (GPA) and/or college entrance (SAT/ACT) examination scores. States also have mandated a specified high school curriculum in order to prepare students for postsecondary education (See Table 1).

Although adopted in disparate US states (See Figure 1), the concentration of broad-based merit aid adoption in the Southeast has been well noted (e.g., Ness & Mistretta 2009). The impact of such policies in one or multiple states has been studied (e.g., Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar, 2006; Dynarski, 2002; Farrell & Kienzl, 2009; Heller & Marin, 2004; Hernandez-Julian, 2010; Ness & Tucker, 2008; Zhang & Ness, 2010), but few researchers have qualitatively examined the spread of merit aid programs outside the Southeast and the role of public entrepreneurs—individuals specializing in identifying public problems and finding solutions (Polsby, 1984). McLendon, Heller and Young (2005) have suggested that, “Integrating the entrepreneurship literature into the study of postsecondary policy diffusion could deepen our understanding of the causal mechanisms that lie behind diffusion processes” (p. 390).

In response to this call, we initiated this qualitative multi-state case study. Guided by innovation diffusion theory (e.g., Gray, 1973, 1994), Roberts and King’s (1991) typology of public entrepreneurs, and Anderson’s (2003) stages of the policymaking process, we sought to answer the following questions. First, in the absence of regional diffusion pressures, what internal determinants are reported as accounting for the spread of broad-based merit aid programs outside of the

Southeastern US? What types of public entrepreneurs were identified as playing key roles in establishing merit aid in these states? During which stages of the policymaking process were they active?

What follows is a brief discussion of the research and theories into the diffusion of innovations, calling attention to the dominant quantitative approach (event history analysis) and the recent application of qualitative case studies to the diffusion of policies and programs. We end by discussing the research of public entrepreneurs, their role in the diffusion of innovations, and the stages approach to understanding the complexities of the policymaking process.

Table 1

Merit Eligibility Requirements for Broad-based Merit Aid Programs in Sampled Non-Southeastern States

STATE	PROGRAM NAME	YEAR ENACTED	MINIMUM GPA REQUIREMENT AT ENACTMENT	MINIMUM TEST SCORE REQUIREMENT	CORE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENT
Alaska	UA Scholars	1998	No	No	No
	Alaska Performance Scholarship	2010	2.5	21	Yes
Massachusetts	John and Abigail Adams Scholarship	2004	No	Score in the Advanced category in either the Mathematics or the English language arts section of the grade 10 MCAS test and score in the Proficient or Advanced category on the second subject (Mathematics or English language arts); Combined MCAS score on these assessments that ranks in the top 25% in their school district	No
Michigan	Michigan Merit Award	1999	No	Score Level I or Level II on all four high school MEAP tests; or Score Level I or Level II on at least two high school MEAP tests and meet one of the following: 75th percentile or above on the ACT or SAT or earn qualifying scores on the ACT WorkKeys job skills assessment tests as determined by the Michigan Merit Award Board.	No
Nevada	(Governor Guinn) Millennium Scholarship Program*	1999	3.0	Passing scores on all sections of the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination	Yes

*Renamed in honor of Governor Guinn in 2005.

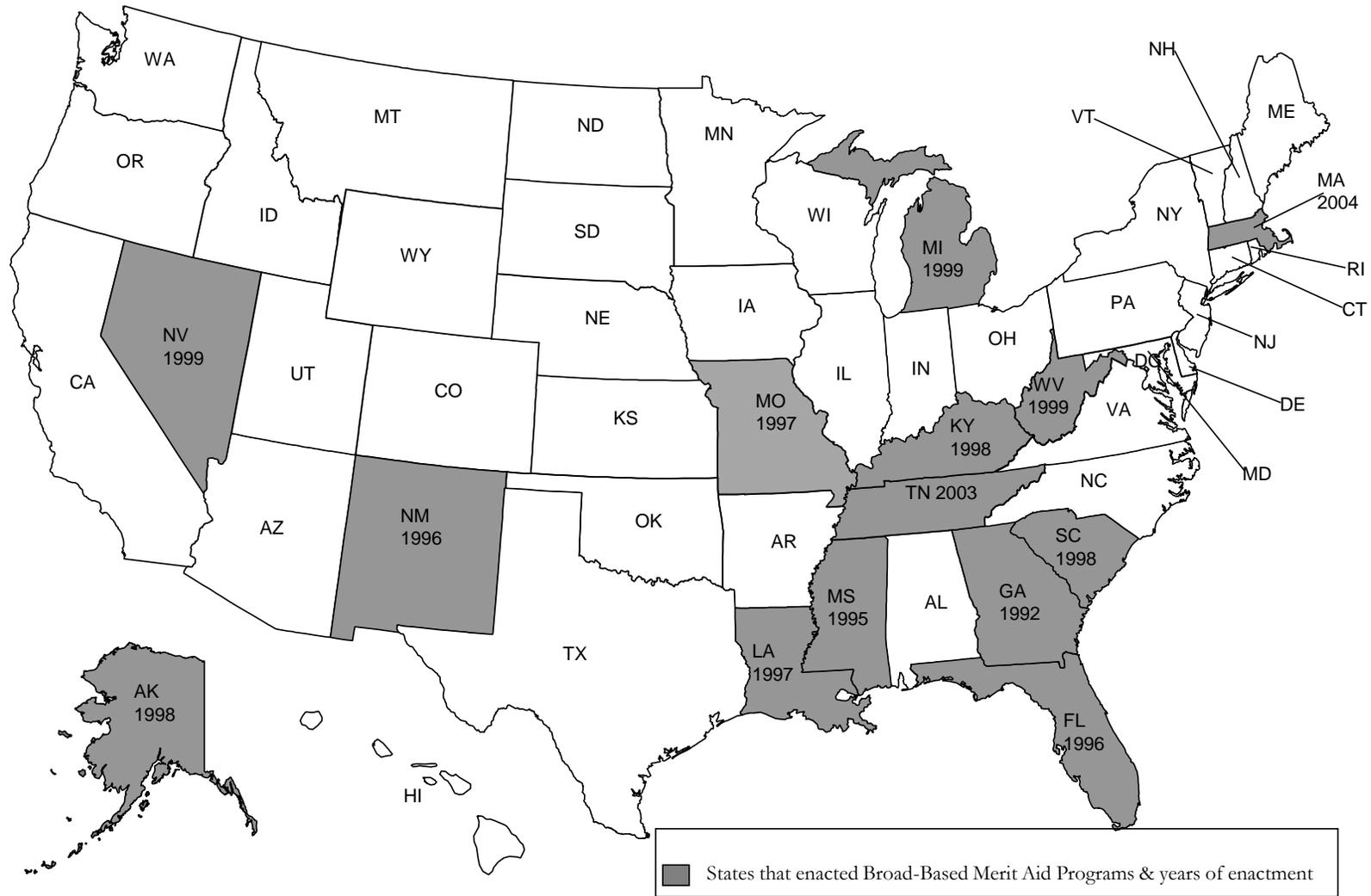


Figure 1. Broad-based Merit Aid Programs in the USA

Innovation Diffusion Research in Public Policymaking

In his seminal work, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett Rogers defined an innovation as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (2003, p. 12). A policy innovation has been defined as a policy or program that is new to the governmental unit that adopts it (Walker, 1969). The study of the diffusion of innovations can be found in a range of research fields, including sociology, anthropology, education, and public health (Rogers, 2003). Public policies have been found to diffuse across American states (e.g., Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992, 1999; Berry & Baybeck, 2005; McLendon & Cohen-Vogel, 2008). The regional diffusion perspective holds that decision makers at the state level simplify the task of finding policy “solutions” by borrowing ideas from neighboring states. Walker (1969) has described a “system of emulation” (p. 898) through which regional policy patterns have been attributed to the imitation of proximate bellwether states. Interstate competition and networks, both formal and informal, have been found among regional policy actors (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Levine, & Spence, 2008; Dye, 1990; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998).

Another school of thought—the internal determinants perspective—has countered that neighbor-to-neighbor diffusion pattern is less a function of regional emulation. Instead, states have adopted policies only when their own political, economic, and social environments were favorable (e.g., Gray, 1994). In the absence of regional diffusion and concentration—as was the case among adopters outside of the southeastern United States—the shortlist of potential theoretical explanations becomes shorter, leaving the internal determinants perspective as a possibility, which could include the activities of public entrepreneurs operating from inside and/or outside of adopting states.

Innovation diffusion researchers have tended to utilize quantitative techniques, particularly event history analysis (EHA). EHA has been utilized in political science and related fields (i.e., policy studies and public administration) to study a range of policies and programs, including the spread of state lotteries and tax reform (Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992), school choice, and other educational reforms (Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998), dual enrollment policies (Mokher & McLendon, 2009), medical savings accounts (Karch, 2006), and e-government approaches to public administration (Jun & Weare, 2011). Most relevant to this study, Doyle (2006) examined the spread of merit aid across US states. His event history analysis indicated that, “no relationship was found between the number of states within a region adopting a program and the likelihood of policy adoption in a given state” (p. 277). Doyle acknowledged that, “As with several of the other findings in [his] article, this finding may be overtaken by subsequent events. In particular, so few states (only 25%) have adopted such a program that the process of diffusion, while underway cannot be observed” (p. 281). However, one need only look at a map of the United States (see Figure 1) to see that there has been a propensity for these programs to be adopted within the southeastern United States more so than in any other region.

EHA has been criticized for what is known as a “pro-innovation bias”, such that the assumption is that an innovation, by its nature, is worthy of diffusion and should be diffused (Mooney, 2001; Rogers, 2003). This might not be surprising. McLendon, Heller, and Young (2005) and Osborne and Gaebler (1992) noted that policy innovation is neither good nor bad, but often is perceived as positive evidence that policymakers are responsive to new ideas, the preferences of citizens, and changing environmental conditions. Noted innovation diffusion researcher Everett Rogers (2003) has contended that this bias has led diffusion researchers to “underemphasize the rejection or discontinuance of innovations” (p. 107). Berry and Baybeck (2005) have suggested that a

further limitation of the typical empirical approach for studying interstate influence—modeling an indicator of a state’s policy choice as a function of its neighbors’ policies and weighting each neighbor equally—does not adequately test for interstate competition.

Researchers (e.g., Coburn 2005; Ness & Mistretta, 2010) have contended that qualitative studies are a viable approach to the study of the policymaking process. Coburn (2005) noted that, “in-depth investigation made possible by a small number of cases provides the opportunity to generate new hypotheses or build theory about sets of relationships that would otherwise have remained invisible” (p. 26). Likewise, Ness and Mistretta have noted that qualitative studies can capture “the black box of the policy process within the policy windows of opportunity” (2010, p. 26). By speaking with key policy actors participating (or who participated) in the policy process, qualitative analysis can seek to explain how and why policies spread and avoid the potential pitfalls of conventional quantitative techniques employed by innovation diffusion scholars; notably addressing the pro-innovation bias.

A recent spate of studies has employed qualitative approaches to explore the diffusion of policies, such as the spread of environmental policies (Crow, 2010; Wiener & Koontz, 2010; 2012). Researchers also have examined adoption and non-adoption of broad-based merit aid in the Southeast (Cohen-Vogel & Ingle, 2007; Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, & Hughes, 2007; Ness & Mistretta, 2010). These researchers have suggested that internal determinants facilitated or prevented the adoption of broad-based merit aid, or made the adoption of such a program more or less necessary in their state contexts. What remains an understudied phenomenon is the qualitative analysis of broad-based adopters outside of the Southeast. Indeed, only one researcher (Ness, 2008, 2010) has examined broad-based adoption qualitatively outside of this region, and only in one state (New Mexico).

The Role of Public Entrepreneurs in the Diffusion of Innovations

Entrepreneurs have been identified as a catalyst for innovation in a wide range of fields, including sociology (e.g., Eisenstadt, 1980), economics (e.g., Libecap, 1996), and political science (e.g., Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Schneider & Teske, 1995). Within the context of educational policy and politics, the concepts of “policy entrepreneurs” (Bardach, 1972; Price, 1971) and “idea champions” (Mazzoni, 1991) are certainly not new. Educational policy and politics researchers have defined policy entrepreneurs broadly in the literature as those who seek to initiate a dynamic policy change (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 2002; Mintrom, 1997; Polsby, 1984). Kingdon (2002) identified policy entrepreneurs as having expertise or authoritative position, access to the political process, negotiating skills, and persistence—waiting for policy windows to open.

However, policy entrepreneurs are individuals with varying roles in the policy making process. Some are elected officials charged with legislating policy. Others are outside of government. With regard to the former, Weissert (1991), Schiller (1995), and Carter and Scott (2010) focused upon legislators as entrepreneurs. Ness (2008) found that legislative leaders from both the state house and senate in New Mexico used their connections to enact merit aid legislation. In Tennessee, Senator Steve Cohen persisted for over eighteen years in pushing a state lottery and funding merit aid with the proceeds.

Researchers and news sources in education (e.g., *Chronicle of Higher Education*) also have identified the growing activist role that governors play in PK-12 and postsecondary education (Doyle, 2006; Heller, 2002; Henig, 2009; Johnson & Clark, 2003; McLendon, Heller & Young, 2005; Mokher, 2010; Richardson, Bracco, Callan & Finney, 1999; Selingo, 2001). McLendon, Heller and Young acknowledged that “governors may be performing the ‘policy entrepreneur’ role that research in other domains has shown is necessary for large-scale policy change to occur” (p. 372). Doyle

(2006) tested the impact of a governor's first year in office on the adoption of merit aid programs, initially suggesting this as a factor related to adoption, but when controls for factors were introduced (e.g., composition of upper house of the legislature), the relationship was inconsistent. Ness (2008) identified West Virginia's Governor Bob Wise as a key policy entrepreneur in establishing merit aid in his state. Mokher (2010) examined the role of governors in P-16 education reform efforts, finding that the presence of an "education governor" (quantified by the percentage of the governors' state of the state speeches devoted to education) was related to the spread of mandatory statewide formal P-16 councils. However, the existence of internal conditions and policy windows also played important roles in the priorities and directions that state executives emphasized for education in their states (Doyle, 2006; Kingdon, 2002; Mokher, 2010; Ness & Mistretta, 2009). Both Doyle and Mokher have suggested the importance of states' internal characteristics (political-, economic- and demographic) for predicting the adoption of an innovation.

Mintrom (1997) and Mintrom and Vergari (1998) found that the presence of policy entrepreneurs and external networks of advocates from other states increased the likelihood of legislative consideration, but did not increase the likelihood of legislative approval. Miskel and Song (2004) found that a small circle of policy entrepreneurs—White House staffers, key legislators (from both parties), and representatives from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development—pooled their political capital to create the federal Reading First program within a matter of months of George W. Bush's first administration. Researchers have indicated that policy entrepreneurs must develop strategies for "selling" their innovation to others, including participation in policy communities or issue networks. These have been defined as "a (more or less) stable pattern of social relations between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes" (Klijn & Koppenjam, 2000, p. 155). Such participation provides a venue for presenting and refining their message, and developing relationships with those inside and outside of the policymaking process (e.g., Hecl, 1978; Howlett, 2002; Sabatier, 1988).

With the wide array of policy entrepreneurs that have been identified in the research literature, categorizing and typing them is useful in understanding the various roles that they play. To that end, Roberts and King (1991) developed a typology of what they referred to as "public entrepreneurs." First of these is the political entrepreneur, who they defined as one holding an elected leadership position in government, such as a governor or legislator. Second, Roberts and King categorized one who holds an appointed leadership position in government as an executive entrepreneur. A third category within their typology is the bureaucratic entrepreneur—one who holds a formal position in government, although not a leadership position. This would include a legislative aide, program administrator, or policy analyst. Fourth and last of Roberts and King's typology is that of the policy entrepreneur. Rather than the all-encompassing definition of one who seeks to initiate a dynamic policy change (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 2002; Mintrom, 1997; Polsby, 1984), Roberts and King constrained their definition of policy entrepreneur to one who works from outside of the formal governmental system to introduce, translate, and implement innovative ideas into public sector practice.

Recent research by Crow (2010) has provided evidence of an additional type of public entrepreneurs. Crow found that "policy experts" (e.g., attorneys) were policy entrepreneurs key to bringing about changes in water rights policies in Colorado. Koski (2010) has drawn a distinction between policy entrepreneurs and knowledge brokers such that policy entrepreneurs are those who emphasize and utilize specific types of political tactics, such as lobbying, to spread an innovation. Knowledge brokers utilize a facilitative approach by translating and communicating complex aspects of technical standards.

Roberts and King's (1991) typology of public entrepreneurs aids us in understanding the various policy actors that champion innovative policies and facilitate the spread and adoption. However, understanding the policymaking process in which they must operate is also useful. Theoretical frameworks—notably the stages approach—aid in our understanding of the complex policymaking process, which we will discuss next.

Stages of the Policymaking Process and the Role of Public Entrepreneurs

Stages models (e.g., Anderson, 2003; Jones, 1984) developed in order to disaggregate and simplify the complexity of the policymaking process that does not always have a clear beginning or end (Kingdon, 2002; Lindblom, 1993). The policymaking process begins with the identification of a public problem for which redress by governments or their agents is sought, becoming one among many vying for attention on the agenda of policymakers. When policymakers with the authority to address the public problem discuss it, the policy agenda stage has begun. In this stage, the public problem joins others; all waiting to be coupled with a policy solution (Elder & Cobb; 1983; Kingdon, 2002).

The next stage, the policy formulation stage, includes the development of potential courses of action (also referred to as policy alternatives, proposals, or options). While proposal formulation is the development of a course of action to deal with the identified problems, the selection of a course of action from among policy alternatives happens in the policy adoption stage. Policy adoption involves bargaining, compromise, and persuasion in support for a proposed policy (Anderson, 2003). If a policy alternative is not selected, the public problem falls to the wayside, or back into the queue of problems left to be addressed by policy makers. If a policy alternative is selected, the pre-enactment stage is concluded and the post-enactment stages begin—implementation and evaluation. The implementation stage is one in which an adopted policy is put into effect. The evaluation stage includes analysis of the impact(s) of an implemented policy (e.g., program outcomes, costs, intended and unintended consequences).

The stages approach to understanding policy has not been without criticism—notably, that this is an oversimplification of what is a very complicated process (Lindblom, 1993; Sinclair, 2000). However, this approach remains one in which policy scholars have turned to in order to understand policymaking. Ness (2008) has noted that:

While the public policy literature appears to have reached consensus on the limitations of the stages model since no stage can be studied without overlap into other stages, scholars continue to set their frameworks in the context of these five phases. (p. 14)

As to the role that policy entrepreneurs play in the policymaking process, researchers have suggested that policy entrepreneurs are integral in drawing attention to a public problem, shaping how the problem is perceived and offering a policy response as an answer (Kingdon, 2002; Mintrom, 1997; Polsby, 1984). Kingdon (2002) and Ness and Mistretta (2010) have contended that entrepreneurs take advantage of open “policy windows” (i.e., crises, the release of reports, elections), using their resources (influence, money, data, media attention) to bring the policy ideas they favor to decision makers.

McLendon, Heller, and Young's (2005) quantitative analysis of postsecondary policy innovations revealed evidence of a “shelf life” for innovations in which ideas can incubate for years before being acted upon by policymakers and disappearing from debate. With so many problems awaiting public redress, “trendy” policies may come to the attention of policy makers, pushing out other in the crowded market of policy problems and potential solutions (Chandler, 2009). Preventing this depends on the public entrepreneur's capacity for factors such as social acuity, defining problems, building teams/coalitions, and leadership (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). Public

entrepreneurs must have the requisite communication abilities and technical knowledge about the innovation they are seeking to advance. Even with considerable access, technical skills, and communication abilities, placement on the agenda does not guarantee that the problem will be taken up by policymakers (Cobb & Elder 1972; Cobb, Ross, & Ross, 1974; Hays & Glick, 1997; Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, & Hughes, 2007; Mintrom, 1997). Notably, Mintrom (1997) found that the presence and actions of advocates for school choice options frequently gained legislative consideration, but policymakers often stopped short of legislating school choice options.

Ultimately, the preferred course of action is determined less by the relative benefits it promises than by the ability of public entrepreneurs to build support. Likewise, the option selected (if any at all) may not be the desired one of the public entrepreneur. For that matter, policymakers must not only secure the votes necessary for the program's authorization, but also find acceptable ways to fund it. An example of this can be found in Alabama, a state surrounded by merit aid adopters that actually passed merit aid legislation on two separate occasions, but both were subject to referenda on funding proposals (Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, & Hughes, 2007). Both failed and merit aid implementation went no further. Such failures may still influence the diffusion of the innovation by keeping the issue and debate in the public eye. The problems and pitfalls of the policymaking process can serve as cautionary lessons to other policy actors in their strategizing and diffusion of an innovative policy.

Method

Like others (e.g., Crow 2010; Ness 2008; Wiener & Koontz, 2010), we utilized a qualitative case study design to understand the spread of an innovation across broad-based merit aid adopting states outside the southeastern United States. Specifically, we selected an embedded case study design with units and sub-units of analysis (Yin, 2003). Broad-based merit aid adopting states outside of the Southeast served as the unit of analysis. Key policy actors within each of these adopting states served as the sub-units of analysis. Drawing from extant research on broad-based merit aid adopting states (e.g., Doyle, 2006; Zhang & Ness, 2010), we identified broad-based merit aid adopting states—14 across the United States (See Figure 1). We focused our selection on states outside the southeastern United States that were not contiguous to other broad-based merit aid states (Alaska, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada and New Mexico). We narrowed our study to 4 out of the 5—Alaska, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Nevada¹.

Data Sources

Case study research uses multiple sources of evidence in order to deepen data collection, data richness, and provide a means of triangulation (Yin, 2003). Following Ness (2008) and Ness and Mistretta (2010), we used two primary data collection procedures. First, we collected primary documents, including state laws, government reports, and websites of state offices charged with administering merit aid (e.g., Nevada Office of the State Treasurer, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education). This was done in order to provide program information, such as the funding source, initial eligibility requirements (e.g., high school GPA), continuing eligibility requirements (e.g., college GPA), and award amounts. Legislation and other program documents (e.g., websites) were analyzed to determine the official policy rationales behind their creation (those explicitly cited in law or agency documents) comparing them to rationales reported by informants (See Table 2). Key policy actors were selected purposively from searching legislation and program documents as

¹ We opted not to examine New Mexico, as Ness (2008, 2010) employed a qualitative, case study of broad-based merit aid that included the state of New Mexico.

well as by telephone calls to the program administrators in each state. News sources in education (e.g., *Chronicle of Higher Education*) and leading newspapers (via LexisNexis) were used to identify policy actors that played central (supporting or opposing) roles in the merit aid debate leading up to the creation/enactment of merit aid in each adopting state. Snowball sampling yielded a second group of informants. In all, we conducted interviews with 22 informants². Informants included executives, sponsoring legislators, other key legislators (e.g., Ways and Means Committee Chairs), legislative staffers, program administrators, agency heads (i.e., chief state school officers), and representatives from business/industry and private non-profit foundations. We used a semi-structured interview protocol³, asking informants to explain merit aid's development and adoption in the state. For example, we asked participants "Tell me about the first time you heard about the [merit scholarship] idea?" To understand the factors that influenced adoption, participants were asked, "Why do you think the merit program was adopted in [state] when it was?" The interviews were conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year and lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Using NVIVO8 qualitative analysis software, we coded interview transcripts to identify codes and themes that existed across informants and states (Fetterman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Throughout the study, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, following Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Our coding procedures were initially theory-driven, guided by multiple theories of state policy adoption—internal determinants theory of policy diffusion (Gray, 1973), Anderson's (2003) stages of the policymaking process, and Roberts and King's typology of public entrepreneurs (1991). Using these frameworks, we coded interview transcripts and archival documents along the following themes: (a) influence of state-level internal determinants (i.e., political, economic, demographic, and educational characteristics); (b) stages of the policymaking process (agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, policy evaluation); public entrepreneurs (political-, executive-, bureaucratic-, and policy entrepreneurs); (c) use of technical information (e.g., pre-existing program information and legislation); and policy networks (e.g., National Governor's Association). We also developed codes inductively (e.g., K-12 administrative experience; policy experts).

Following Coburn (2001, 2005) and others, we used the following methodological strategies to help ensure that reported patterns represent the process of state higher education policy change in what we call "outliers states": coding by multiple analysts; systematic, iterative coding of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); iterative team memo-writing (Miles & Huberman, 1994); efforts to examine countervailing evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994); and sharing transcripts and findings with informants in all sampled states (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). We adopted a diachronic analysis (e.g., Spalding, 1980) that examined both pre-enactment and post-enactment (or policy evolution) stages of implementation and evaluation, but focused our attention to the pre-enactment stages in this present study.

² As part of the interview protocol, informants were asked, "Do you object to being identified by name in our manuscripts or publications?" Informants are not identified by name unless express permission was given.

³ In the interest of minimizing the length of this manuscript, the interview protocol was not included in this manuscript, but is available upon request by the researchers via email.

Table 2
Official and Reported Rationales For Broad-based Merit Aid Programs in the Sampled States

<i>State</i>	<i>Program name</i>	<i>Official rationales</i>	<i>Reported rationales</i>
Alaska	UA Scholars	Provide an incentive for Alaska's middle and high school students to achieve academic excellence, to nourish efforts of schools to provide high quality education and to encourage the high school graduates from every community in Alaska to attend the University of Alaska; Provide an extra incentive for Alaska's best students, including those who are considering other options, to seriously consider the educational opportunities that the University of Alaska has to offer (University of Alaska, 2010).	Incentivize state community college/university attendance; Keep best and brightest in state; Increase college going rate among under-represented demographics (e.g., low SES, Native American populations); Decrease reliance on out-of-state sources for hard-to-staff occupations; Contribute to a more diversified economy.
Massachusetts	John and Abigail Adams Scholarship	Reward and inspire student achievement; Help attract more high-performing students to Massachusetts public higher education; Provide families of college-bound students with financial assistance (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n. d.).	Incentivize student performance on MCAS; Increase K-12 accountability; Incentivize state community college/university attendance; Keep best and brightest in state; Increase college going rate among under-represented demographics; Relief for middle class; Economic development for a global economy
Michigan	Michigan Merit Award	Increase access to postsecondary education and reward academic achievement (MCL §390.1454).	Incentivize student performance on MEAP; Increase K-12 accountability; Economic development for a more diversified economy; Relief for middle class; Keep best and brightest in state.
Nevada	(Governor Guinn) Millennium Scholarship*	Increase the number of Nevada students who attend and graduate from Nevada institutions of higher education; Assist Nevada residents in obtaining and maintaining good health (NRS §396.911)	Increase college going rate of Nevadans; Incentivize state community college/university attendance; Diversify the state's economy.

Findings

In this section, we structured our findings following the example of Wiener and Koontz (2010), discussing each sampled state as an individual case. We discussed them in order of adoption—Alaska, Michigan, Nevada, and Massachusetts. Our separate discussions addressed the internal conditions (e.g., political-, economic- and demographic characteristics) reported by informants as facilitating the establishment of merit aid. We also discussed the types of public entrepreneurs (political, executive, bureaucratic, or policy) identified by our informants as active in the pre-enactment stages policymaking process (agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption). A cross-case summary follows these separate discussions in order to summarize our findings.

Case Study 1—Alaska

Failed attempts to legislate broad-based merit aid were made as early as 1998 in Alaska. The unsuccessful efforts were championed by Governors Tony Knowles (Democrat, 1994-2002) and Frank Murkowski (Republican, 2002-2006) respectively. When asked to explain why these efforts were unsuccessful, Alaskan informants consistently indicated that the wealth of employment opportunities in the state not requiring a college degree (commercial fishing, mining, and oil drilling) shaped residents' and their elected officials' perceptions of the value and need for higher education. The state's low tax burden, conservative trending legislature and the existence of an annual stipend paid to state residents from the sale of the state's natural resource also were factors reported by informants as limiting the success of merit aid legislation. As one key policymaker put it, "We don't need to fund that, [Alaska] already gives everybody a thousand dollars per person a year... They can take it and spend it on a snow machine or whatever they want."

In contrast to previous research of merit aid in the Southeast US (Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, & Hughes, 2007), informants from Alaska indicated that their state economy and coffers were in poor shape and that the University of Alaska System had serious enrollment and funding issues when work on UA Scholar began. As one Alaskan informant explained:

When the [UA Scholars] program was first started, the economy was horrible. We were at \$9 a barrel of oil and the state didn't have any money. And the university had just come out of about a ten year cycle of really, really tough financial times. So clearly that was a factor as well.

Also unlike programs in other states, the UA Scholars Program was created at the institutional policymaking level rather than legislated. (Now retired) President Mark Hamilton was acknowledged consistently among Alaska informants as the person behind the creation of UA Scholars. Hamilton, who previously served as a two-star general in charge of the Army Recruiting Command, was hired in order to improve a university system struggling with poor funding, low enrollments, brain drain in a state over-reliant on out-of-state sources for hard-to-staff occupations. Under Roberts and King's typology (1991), the closest categorization for Hamilton is executive entrepreneur; given that the presidency of the state university system is a position that is appointed by a majority vote of the Board of Regents, whose members are, in turn, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Alaska Legislature.

The focus of our activities in the state of Alaska was initially on the UA Scholars program, which has been around since 1998. As we identified and interviewed informants, we found that upon taking office in 2009, Governor Sean Parnell (Republican) pursued the creation of additional

scholarship programs—the Alaska Performance and Alaska Advantage Scholarships⁴ (merit- and need-based, respectively). In 2010, Governor Parnell signed legislation creating these programs, but still in need of long-term funding. In 2012, Governor Parnell worked with the state legislature in creating a long-term funding source for these programs.

Governor Parnell’s publicly available documents note that, “The idea [for the Alaska Performance Scholarship] originated with the late Patrick Taylor, a Louisiana businessman who personally challenged a handful of young people to earn scholarships through greater educational achievement” (Office of Governor Sean Parnell, 2011, p. 2). Patrick Taylor⁵ and his foundation’s operatives were reported as active in the promotion of merit aid programs across the Southeast (Cohen-Vogel & Ingle, 2007). Dr. James Caillier, Executive Director of the Taylor Foundation, indicated that he communicated with the Sarah Palin administration (Republican, 2006-2009) seeking to get broad-based merit aid back on the agenda and expressing a willingness to aid in crafting legislation. Caillier indicated that, “Sean Parnell saw the value of it when he was lieutenant governor and when Sarah Palin did not take a strong interest.”

Our interviews and documents from Alaska revealed three of the four types of public entrepreneurs at work for the cause of broad-based merit aid. The first merit aid program in Alaska, UA Scholars, was created by what Roberts and King (1991) would classify as an executive entrepreneur (UA system president Mark Hamilton). Political entrepreneurs (multiple state governors and legislative leadership) were active in championing broad-based merit aid; eventually finding success during the Sean Parnell administration. Finally, policy entrepreneurs from outside of Alaska (Taylor Foundation representatives) were active in the agenda setting and policy formulation stage of the policymaking process.

Case Study 2—Michigan

Michigan informants overwhelmingly acknowledged Republican Governor John Engler (1991-2003) as the key political entrepreneur who prioritized and championed the Michigan Merit Aid Program. Broad-based merit aid creation in Michigan was part of a policy agenda described by one Michigan legislator as “focused, well planned, and well-funded.” Only one Michigan informant credited the merit program with someone other than Governor Engler—the Speaker of the House and the bill’s sponsor, Charles Perricone. This informant stated:

I think it is fair to say that he [Perricone] came up with it and drove and sponsored the first bill and drove that agenda forward. And the Governor found the funding for us. [Michigan Merit] was one of the last bills I worked on prior to coming on to Governor Engler's staff and I was the lead staff member in the House in negotiating that bill with the Senate and the governor's office.

Although the majority of our Michigan informants and press coverage (e.g., Cuda, 1999), pointed to Governor Engler as the political entrepreneur and “starring role” responsible for merit aid in Michigan, the previous excerpt highlights that the policymaking process is seldom a one-person show. Key political entrepreneurs, including the Speaker of the House, Senate Majority Leader and Chair of the Appropriation Subcommittee on Higher Education, were identified as

⁴ These scholarships were created in order to “improve high school graduation rates; increase parental involvement; lead to higher college entrance exam scores; create affordable post-secondary education opportunities; position Alaska’s economy for growth; retain Alaskan students in Alaska; further job training advancement; prepare students for post-secondary education; and encourage students to complete their post-secondary degree and training in a timely manner” (Office of Governor Sean Parnell, 2011).

⁵ Patrick Taylor was personally active in the promotion of merit aid programs until his death in 2004.

involved in the agenda setting, policy formulation, and adoption stages of the policymaking process. Among them, the former Senate Majority leader (Dan Degrow) described his role as “making sure the merit aid legislation passed through the Senate.”

Legislative and governor’s office staffers—bureaucratic entrepreneurs under Roberts and King’s (1991) typology—were reported as instrumental in formulating policy, which included researching existing programs and potential impacts. One staffer explained, “We did most of the leg work, legislative work, and fiscal analysis on this as it moved through [the legislative process].” Programs in previously adopting states were reviewed with emphasis placed on Georgia as the initial adopter and Florida. With regard to the latter, this was due to the fact that a Michigan policy advisor had worked in Florida when Bright Futures was developed and enacted. Explaining how an innovation can diffuse, he stated:

When you get in other states you draw from the arrows in your policy quiver, people say, “Okay, give me five ideas that we can run with in the next legislative session.”... Sometimes these things spread just because the infected species moves to another state.

While less active in Michigan than Alaska, informants from the Taylor Foundation indicated that they played a role in keeping adoption of broad-based merit aid on the agenda. As Dr. James Caillier, Executive Director of the Taylor Foundation, explained:

In Michigan, we met with legislators. We met with the governor’s staff. We met with higher education folks, and one of their biggest concerns, of course, was the money and how much this program would cost... Outside of our contacts with the key players that I just mentioned, we did not do much footwork inside of Michigan.

Speaking to program costs, a condition within Michigan that advanced merit aid creation in Michigan was the availability of a funding source—the 1998 Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, in which Attorneys General from 46 states settled state lawsuits to recover costs associated with treating smoking-related illnesses. This plan was not without its detractors; notably healthcare interests. As one informant explained:

Public health advocates were opposed to it because it was a substantial amount of money... The argument from the administration side and from supporters’ side was that the resources that would have in the past been dedicated toward state colleges or something like that went to the cost associated with tobacco illness, Medicaid, Medicare, and many other things. Had those issues not happened they would have been dedicated toward scholarships.

The political climate in Michigan was characterized by a Republican executive and Republican dominated legislature⁶. This characteristic lent itself to the cooperative pursuit of the Governor’s agenda. Michigan informants indicated that merit aid sought to address multiple problems and goals for the state, including expanding access to postsecondary opportunities, diversifying the economy, and workforce development, but also increasing K-12 accountability and incentivizing student performance. By establishing a broad-based merit aid program that required minimal score levels on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) for eligibility, the scholarship could strengthen what Governor Engler viewed as a weak K-12 accountability system and use an instrument already in place⁷. As one Michigan informant, explained, “We wanted to drive both K-12 school reform and access to post-secondary education—college readiness types of

⁶ The Michigan State House consisted of 52 Democratic members and 58 Republican members in 1998. The State Senate consisted of 15 Democratic members and 23 Republican members (Dubin, 2007).

⁷ MEAP was mandated by the Michigan Legislature in 1970 in order to provide information on student progress to stakeholders, such as parents, the general public, and educators (Michigan Department of Education, (2010).

initiatives—through our assessment [MEAP] and through our merit based scholarship program in the state.” The programs not only provided a “carrot on a stick” to motivate student performance on state assessments. It also was a way to deal with what researchers and Michigan informants noted as apprehension and opposition among teachers (and their unions) toward accountability systems prior to and after No Child Left Behind (e.g., Cooper & Sureau, 2008; Hursh, 2005). A scholarship awarded using students’ MEAP scores was hard for teacher unions to attack, as it could be perceived by the public as coming at the expense of students’ opportunities for higher education.

Our Michigan case study offers evidence that political, bureaucratic, and policy entrepreneurs were active in the agenda setting, policy formulation, and adoption stages. An available funding source, a strong economy, and a Republican executive and legislature were political and economic factors reported as facilitating merit aid creation.

Case Study 3—Nevada

Nevadan informants concurred that Governor Kenny Guinn (Republican, 1999-2007) introduced broad-based merit aid as an important part of his first gubernatorial campaign and his first state of the state address. Governor Guinn’s prior experiences as a former school teacher, district superintendent, and interim president of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas shaped his desire to enrich the education system of his state at the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

Nevada was reported consistently by informants and confirmed by national data (NCHEMS Information Center, 2009) as having one of the lowest college going rates among all US states. Informants also reported low high school graduation rates and an expanding population. Like Alaskan informants, Nevada informants explained that a major contributing factor to the low college going rate was the ability for high school graduates to obtain employment in industries such as gaming/entertainment, mining, and ranching.

Although the governor was the key political entrepreneur placing merit aid on the policy agenda, he was not alone in identifying the problem and a possible solution. There was also Richard Jarvis, the Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education (appointed by the Board of Regents to serve as the chief executive officer) and the Board of Regents (elected officials) One informant explained the situation, stating:

We all knew of the Georgia model. We had been to Georgia and looked at what they were doing and why... Their college going rate was not as dismal as ours, but they emphasized “let’s keep our best and brightest in the state.” And we elected to mimic the Georgia model. Richard [Jarvis] really sold that to Kenny [Guinn] while he was running for governor. And as you know it became Kenny Guinn’s program.

Another important supporting role in the policy adoption stage was the Senate Majority Leader, Bill Raggio. Informants described the state of Nevada as politically split along a North-South divide. The southern region includes Las Vegas. The northern region encompasses the state’s predominately rural mining and ranching communities as well as the University of Nevada, Reno. The alliance between Governor Guinn and Senator Bill Raggio was reported as bridging this north-south gap. As one informant explained:

You generally had in those days a southern [Nevada] governor who had to literally make the deals with Senator Raggio... He looked after the northern Nevada institutions, particularly Reno, but he was a supporter of higher education. He and Guinn were close personal friends; a lot of respect and friendship. So that bridged the legislature-governor issues and it bridged the north/south in Nevada, and that meant you could do something like this.

Much like Michigan, a policy window opened for the creation of a broad based merit scholarship in Nevada. A Republican Governor (Kenny Guinn) and Senate, a widely acknowledged public problem, recently acquired tobacco settlement money, a higher education chancellor and board of regents with exposure to the concept of broad-based merit aid, and minimal opposition made 1999 the right time for the enactment of what is now known as the Guinn Millennium Scholarship.

Case Study 4—Massachusetts

Prior to running for the Presidency of the United States, Mitt Romney ran for and won the Governorship of Massachusetts in 2002. Romney ran on a platform that included connecting K-12 education reforms with higher education systems. Annual student testing—the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)—had been created to meet the requirements of the Commonwealth’s Education Reform Law of 1993 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The assessment was used as a condition for high school graduation, but as one of our informants explained, “It really was a pass/fail thing in terms of whether you graduated or not. If you happened to get advanced standing, well good for you, but it didn't go on your diploma. It didn't go anywhere.” Like his home state of Michigan, Romney proposed using the state assessment (MCAS) as an eligibility requirement in order to incentivize the assessment and strengthen K-12 educational accountability.

Unlike states in the Southeast where policymakers rationalized the programs as a means of mitigating “brain-drain” to other US states (e.g., Ness & Mistretta, 2009), Massachusetts informants indicated that in-state private colleges and universities were hurting enrollments at in-state public colleges and universities. While other states (e.g., Kentucky) allowed for the use of merit aid scholarships at in-state private institutions, broad-based merit aid in Massachusetts was only available for in-state students to attend public institutions of higher learning.

Although Massachusetts informants and press coverage (e.g., Astell, 2004) consistently identified Governor Romney as the highly visible political entrepreneur calling for the creation of broad-based merit aid in Massachusetts, other types of public entrepreneurs were identified as playing less visible, but key roles in formulating the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship. Romney’s program was shaped by his own policy advisors (bureaucratic entrepreneurs) and members of the Board of Higher Education (executive entrepreneurs). Romney’s original proposal to the Board of Higher Education offered scholarships to kids within the top ten percentile of MCAS scores across the state. An informant who served on the Board of Higher Education countered, stating that, “my institutional research people...were able to get the data on MCAS scores and get them straight—that this would literally give scholarships to the richest people in the state.”

Three informants in Massachusetts also provided evidence of what Crow (2010) identified as “policy experts” in the agenda setting and adoption stages. As one of the Governor’s advisors put it, “We definitely heard from some researchers and their concerns of merit versus need based aid. We made our own arguments as it related to that and it definitely was something we took under consideration.” In the end, Governor Romney’s MCAS eligibility requirement remained, but expanded, such that the top 25% of performers across each district would be eligible. Romney could take credit for seeing through his goals of establishing broad-based merit aid and incentivizing MCAS performance. The Board of Higher Education and policy experts, in turn, were able to shape the final form of the scholarship’s eligibility requirements.

Cross-case Analysis

Regional diffusion theorists (notably Walker, 1969) contend that interstate competition, proximity to bellwether states, and the presence of networks (formal and informal) have facilitated the spread of an innovation. These “merit outlier states” were too far afield to support regional diffusion pressures. At best, there were consistent statements of broad goals of economic competitiveness, but with no focus on any one or group of neighboring states. In the absence of regional diffusion pressures, we examined the internal determinants reported by informants as contributing to the establishment of broad-based merit aid in four states outside the southeastern

Table 3
Internal Determinants

Themes	Codes	States			
		<i>AK</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>MI</i>	<i>NV</i>
Political	Strong, vocal public advocate for merit aid creation	X	X	X	X
	Republican Governor as highly visible public advocate	X**	X	X	X
	Legislature-Republican majority (House and Senate)	X		X	
	Legislature-Democrat majority (House and Senate)		X		
	Legislature-Split				X
	Merit aid legislation-failed attempts	X	X		
	Merit aid legislated	X**		X	X
	Merit aid through board or institutional action	X*	X		
	Weak educational accountability reported		X	X	
Merit aid opposition-healthcare interests			X	X	
Economic	Need to strengthen state economy and diversify workforce	X	X	X	X
	Funding source-tobacco settlement			X	X
	Funding source-general revenue	X	X		
	Importing labor	X			
	Strong or improving state budget reported when merit aid adopted	X**	X	X	X
	Poor state economy and budget reported when merit aid adopted	X*			
Demographic	Low enrollments at public colleges/universities	X	X		X
	Low overall college going rate	X			X
	Low high school graduation rate	X			X
	State population growth				X

Notes: *UA Scholars Program. **Alaska Performance Scholarship.

US. We also examined what types of public entrepreneurs active in establishing merit aid in these four states as well as when in the policymaking process they were active.

Beyond the adoption of merit aid, our sampled states were not without other similarities—and dissimilarities—in terms of internal determinants (See Table 3) and public entrepreneurs reported as facilitating merit aid creation (See Table 4). Research has suggested that favorable economic conditions (strong economy, budget surpluses, dedicated revenue source) were factors that supported the adoption of broad-based merit aid in the Southeast. Conversely, poor state fiscal health and competing spending priorities mitigated the likelihood of passage in non-adopting states in the region (Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, & Hughes, 2007). In our present study, informants from only two of four adopting states outside the Southeast (Michigan and Nevada) reported healthy state

economies and the availability of a funding source (tobacco settlement) as factors contributing to the adoption of merit aid. Informants in the late adopting state of Massachusetts (2004) described their state economy in 2004 as “improving.” Michigan and Nevada informants reported the existence of public problems (weak K-12 accountability and low college going rates, respectively) that were identified prior to the tobacco settlement and the revenue it generated. Merit aid was used to incentivizing state assessments (Massachusetts and Michigan), thus strengthening K-12 student performance and K-12 accountability. Merit aid programs sought to encourage diversity of its public institutions of higher learning by developing percentage-based eligibility across all school districts in order to encourage attendance at in-state institutions of higher learning (Alaska and Massachusetts). Informants reported the problem of a low college-going rate at in-state colleges and universities as a problem that merit aid also sought to improve. (Alaska, Massachusetts, Nevada).

Table 4

Public Entrepreneurs and Their Involvement in the Pre-enactment Stages of the Policymaking Process

State	Program Name	Pre-enactment stages of the policymaking process		
		<i>Agenda-Setting</i>	<i>Policy Formulation</i>	<i>Policy Adoption</i>
Alaska	UA Scholars	EXE	EXE	EXE
	Alaska Performance Scholarship	ELECT pol bur	ELECT pol bur	ELECT pol bur
Massachusetts	John and Abigail Adams Scholarship	ELECT bur	ELECT EXE bur exp	ELECT EXE bur
Michigan	Michigan Merit Award	ELECT bur pol	ELECT bur	ELECT bur
Nevada	(Governor Guinn) Millennium Scholarship Program*	ELECT EXE	ELECT EXE bur	ELECT bur

Notes: ELECT = Political Entrepreneurs; EXE= Executive Entrepreneurs; BUR = Bureaucratic Entrepreneurs; POL = Policy Entrepreneurs; EXP = Policy Experts. Upper-case letters indicate highly visible leading roles. Lower-case letters indicate public entrepreneurs reported as playing supporting roles.

*Renamed in honor of Governor Kenny Guinn in 2005.

Fowler (2000) has defined policy actors broadly as individual and groups actively involved in the policy process—the “dramatis personae of the policy drama” (p. 141). A cast of characters is an appropriate analogy for public entrepreneurs involved in the policymaking process (See Table 4). As one Michigan informant put it, “You can't get anything done by yourself.” Our data suggest that a cast of public entrepreneurs—some leading and some supporting—were responsible for the eventual adoption of broad-based merit aid in four US states. In all four states, Republican governors played important “leading roles” as political entrepreneurs with the political power, public voice, and visibility to champion a merit aid. Before and after election, governors used their highly visible position to get broad-based merit aid on the agenda. As one informant described it, putting “personal horsepower behind this issue and making it a big priority.” Dr. James Caillier of the

Taylor Foundation, an informant in this study, discussed the importance of governors in establishing merit aid stating that, “Unless the governor wants it, these programs will not go very far.”

Implications for Future Research and Policy

This study answered a call for research that integrates the entrepreneurship literature into the study of postsecondary policy diffusion (McLendon, Heller, & Young, 2005). Roberts and King’s typology (1991) served as a useful heuristic to categorize public entrepreneurs, but researchers have suggested additional types or more nuanced policy actors, such as Koski’s (2010) facilitative “knowledge brokers” and Crow’s (2010) “policy experts”. Informants in Massachusetts (one of the later adopters of broad-based merit aid) provided evidence of policy experts seeking to shape the form that the scholarship program would take in the Commonwealth. Future research may reveal that policy experts play greater roles in the pre-enactment stages of states considering an innovation that has had time to diffuse elsewhere; or in the post-enactment stages within states whose existing policies have had time to produce data. Even in terms of Roberts and King’s typology (1991), our study suggests that political, executive, bureaucratic, and policy entrepreneurs can assume leading, co-starring, or supporting roles in their efforts to create a policy or program. Future research should further expand our understanding of the types of public entrepreneurs, the roles they play, and when in the policymaking process they are active.

Policy actors, including public entrepreneurs, advanced their preferred solutions by framing problems, shaping the debate, and seeking to influence the policy outcome(s) (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000). Much of the negotiating and advocacy efforts occur inside the ‘black box’ of the policy process (Ness & Mistretta, 2010). However, public entrepreneurs (supporting and opposing) interviewed in this study provided evidence of seeking to shape public opinion and outcomes behind the curtain and in the broader public debate through campaign platforms and/or press coverage; for example, Michigan and Nevada’s tobacco settlement money for broad-based merit aid rather than public health related interests. Informants provided evidence of “framing” policy issues in order to justify the desired course of action. A Nevadan informant justified this because, “People who are college educated are less likely to smoke.” In Michigan, informants countered healthcare interests with an argument that they would have spent money on programs like scholarships had they not had to spend so much on tobacco-related health issues in the past. Informants also invoked phrases commonly heard (“best and brightest”, “increased access”, “reward performance”) in other merit aid adopting states. Future research may explore the symbolism used in the political discourse surrounding policies, such as broad-based merit aid, in order to unmask what have been called illusions of rationality and objectivity in the policy making process (e.g., Rosen, 2009).

McLendon, Heller, and Young (2005) have suggested that future diffusion research should examine the extent to which an innovation changes with each successive adoption (policy replication, tinkering, or reinvention). We concur with McLendon, Heller, and Young (2005), but also suggest another avenue of future research—examining the extent to which changes—radical and minor—occur within an enacted policy and what may explain these changes. Although our present study focused on the pre-enactment stages of the policymaking process, we saw evidence of programs changing in the post-enactment stages of implementation and evaluation. In spite of the popularity of broad-based merit aid among constituents (e.g., Ness & Mistretta 2009), these programs and US states have never endured an economic downturn quite like that of the “Great Recession.” State policy makers across the United States have struggled with a slow economic recovery characterized by continued unemployment/under-employment, and budget shortfalls,

looking critically at all state expenditures such as broad-based merit aid (Zumeta, 2010). In our four sampled states, we witnessed how an established program can remain static over time or become a pawn of changing administrations and economic conditions, leading to policy tinkering (e.g., name change, additional eligibility requirements), being reinvented/repackaged (e.g., Michigan Merit Award becomes Michigan Promise), or as evidenced in Michigan, a program can come to its end. Internal determinants and policy actors can influence the consideration and adoption of merit aid, but can also have an impact on programs after their establishment.

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education policy analysis archives

Volume 21 Number 58

July 8, 2013

ISSN 1068-2341



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