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## University status for UVSC - more than a name change

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Senate Bill 70, which grants a name change and \$10 million to Utah Valley State College for university status, is moving through the legislative process.

If it passes, the Board of Regents will redefine UVSC's role within the Utah System of Higher Education as a Type 2 institution - like Weber State and Southern Utah universities - from its current Type 3 status. Thus the real issue is not about name but institutional charter.

It is absolutely essential that university status not come as an unfunded mandate from Utah's political leadership. The name change itself is relatively trivial. Of paramount importance is bringing funding in line with taxpayer expectations of UVSC.

The maturation of UVSC toward a regional university is a foregone conclusion, and SB 70 would largely be an *ex post facto* recognition of demographic dynamics building momentum for decades. Numerous Utah Valley adults interested in post-secondary education are married, have children and work or live at home and simply do not want to move north or commute several hours, several days a week.

In the past the private Brigham Young University met much of the community's demand for advanced education, but highly selective admission standards are now in place. So students, not surprisingly, look to UVSC. As community need has changed, so has UVSC's function.

UVSC has made startling progress in meeting these new demands. For three years in a row, *US News & World Report* identified UVSC as one of the best four-year colleges in the West.

What has happened, though, is that the faculty have maintained a community college teaching load while at the same time have been asked to teach upper-division courses, which by necessity requires more preparation and grading. On top of this, professional activities standard in American higher education, such as scholarship, research and participation in conferences, are now expected.

A baccalaureate structure has essentially been erected on a community college foundation not designed to support the weight. Work weeks at UVSC of 50 hours or more are common, as is preparing for the autumn semester throughout the summer without pay. If you see me mowing my lawn in the afternoon, you do not see me grading papers throughout the middle of the night.

This incongruity has created major problems in hiring gifted faculty. For example, in my department, one job search ended in failure when all three top candidates declined working at UVSC in favor of superior job offers, noting that UVSC's onerous teaching load is far afield of comparable institutions.

Such disparity between community demand for advanced degrees and state funding is unsustainable. Additional faculty, advisers and staff to bring the human resources of academic affairs in line with national norms is desperately needed.

"University" has two meanings in American higher education. One connotes a flagship institution with expensive and highly specialized research programs, such as medicine, law and engineering. The other meaning connotes a regional institution of higher education which offers accredited bachelor's degrees and some master's degrees in line with local demand. University status for UVSC is of the latter type.

Like an adolescent facing with anxiety and excitement the looming responsibilities of adulthood, UVSC faces the obligation of delivering quality educational opportunities for a growing population and economy. UVSC will inherit these responsibilities whether faculty, staff, administrators and political leaders want them or not.

Given the centrality of higher education to democracy and economic development, there could be no better use of \$10 million of state funds than to facilitate UVSC in achieving its full, latent potential.

Citizens of three other populous counties - Salt Lake, Weber and Davis - enjoy public university access. It is time to correct a fundamental imbalance of demography and demand and provide similar opportunities for residents of Utah County and environs.

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