



# THE STATE JOURNAL

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June 12, 2009

## Marshall Student Wins Awards for Research On 'College-to-University' Name Change

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**SOUTH CHARLESTON — James Owston's** dissertation research illuminates West Virginia higher education's habit of institutional transformations.

In recent years, several of West Virginia's public and private institutions have changed their name, including:

- **West Virginia Institute of Technology to West Virginia University Institute of Technology** in 1996

- **Concord College to Concord University** in 2004

- **Fairmont State College to Fairmont State University** in 2004

- **Shepherd College to Shepherd University** in 2004

- **West Virginia State College to West Virginia State University** in 2004

- **Ohio Valley College to Ohio Valley University** in 2005

- **West Liberty State College to West Liberty University** in 2009.

Owston's research showed 56 percent of West Virginia higher education institutions changed from college to university between 1996 and 2005, the highest percentage in the nation.

In addition, eight schools during that period accounted for 25 percent of regionally accredited schools that underwent name changes.

His research in "Survival of the Fittest? The Rebranding of Higher Education in West Virginia" examined the effects of a name change from college to university on enrollment and prestige, and compared them nationwide.

Owston found that institutional transformation had little or no effect on enrollment, did not influence se-

lectivity at the undergraduate level and did not result in tuition increases. However, the number of graduate studies programs increased as well as the Carnegie Classifications, which classify institutions of higher education and directly influence funding.

Officials of most colleges that made a name change felt they were already universities and underwent the transformation to cement their classification.

Owston said that the several name changes West Virginia schools had gone through during his graduate studies inspired him to research transformations for his dissertation.

"As I was working through this, our institution had gone through two name changes," Owston said. "That was really what the genesis of what this study started as — to look at those schools in West Virginia that had made some name changes."

Owston is a faculty member at **Mountain State University**, formerly The College of West Virginia. He received a doctorate of education in 2007 from **Marshall University's** Leadership Studies program.

He was the first to compile data on college-to-university name changes.

Owston received the 2009 Alice L. Beeman Dissertation Award for Outstanding Research in Communications and Marketing for Educational Advancement from the **Council for the Advancement of Education** and the 2008 Leo and Margaret Goodman-Malamuth Outstanding Award for Research in Higher Education Administration from the **American Association of University Administrators**.