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Where's UVS 'college'?

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Higher education administrators call it "mission creep," a term that describes the ambition of some colleges or universities to move up the institutional ladder.

This time, it's Utah Valley State *College*. Recently, UVSC has unceremoniously dropped the word "college" from campus signs, gift shop items and athletic-program publications. The athletic department says it dropped the "C" word because it has difficulty scheduling games. Some universities don't want to play down to the level of colleges. UVSC entered NCAA Division I play in 2003.

While that's somewhat understandable, it's no secret the UVSC has designs — at some point — on becoming a university. Seemingly, subtle changes in the college's identity might facilitate its eventual request to seek university status.

More is at stake than the school's ease in scheduling opponents on athletic fields. Utah County is a rapidly growing area that has no public university to serve its population. UVSC's enrollment for fall semester is 24,488 students. There's obviously demand for a state institution of higher education in Utah County. UVSC has a fair number of doctorally prepared professors.

All of that has to be weighed against so-called "mission creep." Does Utah need another state university? What would be the impacts on existing universities? If UVSC becomes a university, what institution would replace its role and mission as a state college? After all, not all Utah students who seek higher education are prepared for university-level work.

If UVSC becomes a university, it must be a university in every sense of the word. Two accreditation hurdles would be UVSC's library, which would have to be upgraded to accommodate graduate-level research, and its faculty. Presently UVSC relies on a large number of adjunct faculty.

How would the state's higher education system pay for this transformation, as well as for providing "college" studies elsewhere?

Lastly, does the current demand at UVSC reflect a need for a university in Utah County or has UVSC become a default option for students not admitted to Brigham Young University?

Utah's Commissioner of Higher Education has offered his assurances that it is not a "foregone conclusion" that UVSC will become a university. Starting in November, a team of seasoned higher education experts will embark on a yearlong study of the issue. Their findings should provide a greater understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of Utah Valley's university quest. For now, it should proudly carry its "college" designation.

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