State Level Higher Education Boards in the USA and Reform Suggestions for Turkey: Governance, Quality Assurance, and Finance

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Abstract

The US higher education system has received significant attention from different parts of the world because of the international success of its universities. Therefore, many countries have adapted some of its features to their systems. Turkey's system level governing board, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), was also modeled after state level higher education boards in the USA. Given this context, the current study aims to investigate the structures and functions of the state level higher education boards in the USA, compare them with the CoHE, and make reform suggestions for higher education governance in Turkey. With this aim, one state with a consolidated governing board, Georgia, and one state with a coordinating board, South Carolina, were selected for detailed investigation and comparison. The results of the study show that there are several significant differences between the CoHE and higher education boards in the USA, both in terms of their structures and their main functions. Suggestions for higher education governance reform in Turkey are also made based on the results.

Introduction

Higher education has become widely accessible to the masses in many countries regardless of their "political system, level of economic development, or educational ideology" during the last century, specifically after the 1950's (Altbach, 2005, p. 21). Massification of higher education, however, has brought many problems related to students, staff, institutions, and systems. As a result, higher education started to gain more public interest and has since dominated educational policy discussions around the world. Specifically, the role of the state in the financial, managerial, and academic functions of higher education institutions has been questioned in many countries, although the structures and the actors within higher education systems vary substantially from one country to another (Fielden, 2008; Küçükcan & Gür, 2009). Turkey is not an exception in these discussions, even though the Turkish context might be different than many other countries.

The relationship between higher education institutions and the state has been an important issue in Turkey for a long time. Since the first higher education law was passed in Turkey in 1924, there have been several significant changes in the structure and governance of the country's higher education system (Günay & Kılıç, 2011). Although Turkey is currently in the midst of its longest stretch (1981 to present) without a major higher education reform since its establishment, calls for reform by different

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social and political actors have increased over time. Discussions have mostly focused on the structure and responsibilities of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, or YÖK in Turkish), which was established after a military coup in 1980. The CoHE has frequently been accused of being authoritarian and anti-democratic, thus removing or restructuring it has been a hot political topic for decades. However, no consensus has been reached so far on how to reform the system level higher education governance (Çelik & Gür, 2014).

Rapid expansion of higher education in Turkey during the last decade makes it necessary for Turkey to reform its higher education system, specifically through restructuring the CoHE (Gök, 2016; Özoğlu, Gür, & Gümüş, 2016). However, there is a very limited amount of academic research and discussion on alternative higher education governing models for Turkey. It is therefore very important to analyze different governing models around the world and make informed suggestions for Turkey, while also of course taking into account the country's important structural and cultural differences. At this point, the USA might be a very informative case because of its high diversity in types and numbers of institutions, governance models, academic programs, etc. (Eckel & King, 2004; Keppel, 1991). In addition, many other countries have tried to learn from the USA's example, given the international success of its universities (Zhou & Wu, 2016). Turkey has also borrowed some features of its higher education system from the USA.

The founding president of the CoHE has indicated that the CoHE was structured similar to the state level higher education boards in the USA (Doğramacı, 2007). However, aside from one Turkish comparative study that investigates state level higher education systems in California, Texas, Florida, and New York (Gür, 2016), no comprehensive analysis has been done to reveal the actual similarities and differences between state level higher education boards in the USA and the CoHE in Turkey. In addition, restructuring the CoHE as a coordinating body, similar to some of the US states, has been frequently discussed in recent years (Ergüder, Şahin, Terzioğlu, & Vardar, 2009). However, knowledge about the roles of coordinating boards and what coordination in higher education actually means is very limited in the current Turkish literature.

Given this context, this study aims to investigate the structures and functions of the state level higher education boards in the USA, compare them with the CoHE, and make reform suggestions for higher education governance in Turkey. With this aim, two states, Georgia and South Carolina, have been selected for detailed investigation. First, Georgia was selected since it has a strong consolidated governing board, similar to Turkey's, which controls all public higher education institutions in the state. On the other hand, South Carolina has a relatively decentralized system, which has a state level coordinating board and individual governing boards (boards of trustees) for each university or university system. Investigating the higher education governing models of these two distinct systems will enable us to see the main differences between state level governing and coordinating boards in terms of their structures and functions.

Higher Education Governance in the USA
The decentralized governance structure of the USA also reflects on its higher education system. Therefore, state governments have been primarily responsible for the governance of the higher education sector in their respective states, rather than the federal government (Hearn, Warshaw, & Ciarimboli, 2016). State governments influence the higher education system through three channels. First, they create and implement laws for the operation of higher education institutions in their states. Second, they allocate direct funding to public higher education institutions. Third, they oversee the outcomes of higher education institutions (McGuinness, 2005). Currently, most states practice the latter two roles through their state level higher education boards. These boards play crucial roles in developing and implementing higher education policies, as well as regulating the public higher education system. Although there are significant differences among states, their higher education governance systems are generally grouped into three categories: "the planning agency model, the statewide coordinating board model (consisting of advisory coordinating boards and regulatory coordinating boards), or the consolidated governing board model" (McLendon & Ness, 2003, p. 67).

Among these three governance categorizations, only a few states (Delaware, Michigan, and Vermont) currently fall into the planning agency model. Planning agencies do not have autonomy over higher education institutions, rather they only make suggestions and recommendations. In planning agency states, higher education institutions hold a great degree of autonomy (Richardson, Bracco, Callan, & Finney, 1999). However, in many states there are autonomous state level governing or coordinating boards, which have a certain level of power over individual institutions. The first examples of these kinds of boards were established at the beginning of the 20th century in a few states (Richardson et al., 1999). After the 1950s, with the dramatic increases in student enrollment and rapid diversification of academic programs, most of the states started to create either consolidated governing boards or coordinating boards, in order to ensure the efficiency and strategic planning of their higher education systems (McLendon, Deaton, & Hearn, 2007).

Currently, around half of the states have coordinating boards, while a little less than the remaining half have consolidated governing boards (Lacy, 2011). States with governing boards show high levels of centralization in their higher education systems. In governing board systems, boards are responsible for both planning the higher education sector and controlling the activities of individual institutions (McLendon & Ness, 2003). Governing boards also play a significant role in balancing public accountability and institutional autonomy (McGuinness, 2005). In some states, governing boards are only responsible for four-year public higher education institutions, while in other states boards are also responsible for two-year public colleges (Richardson et al., 1999).

In contrast to governing boards, coordinating boards typically oversee all higher education systems in the state, and develop more general policies. However, compared to governing boards, they significantly lack autonomy over individual institutions (McLendon et al., 2007). Yet, it should also be noted that most coordinating boards have strengthened their regulatory role over the last several decades. Currently, many coordinating boards have some influence on budget allocation and have program approval authority (McGuinness, 2005; Richardson et al., 1999).

Method

The overarching research question of this study is: what is the role of state level higher education boards in the governance of the USA higher education system? Under this overarching question, the study also seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

1. How are the state level boards structured?
2. What are the main functions of these boards?

Research Model

Qualitative research design is used in this study. Qualitative research enables researchers to analyze phenomena in their own natural environments with a holistic approach by allowing participants to express themselves freely (Creswell, 2009). Interview techniques are often used in qualitative research in order to obtain detailed information about participants' views, feelings, and thoughts on things or events that the research focuses on. In general, there are three types of interview techniques: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Creswell, 2009; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In this study, semi-structured interview techniques were used in order to solicit participants' responses to the main questions of the study, as well as to allow them to express their thoughts freely and go beyond the asked questions if they felt it necessary.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview protocol was prepared by the researcher, based on a comprehensive review of related literature. Then, this protocol was sent to four professors (two from

Turkey and two from the USA), who are experts on higher education governance, in order to receive their comments and suggestions. After reviewing the comments and suggestions from these professors, some minor changes were made to the protocol and it was finalized. Professors from the USA also helped to eliminate grammar mistakes and incorporate more appropriate terms into the protocol. Sample questions from interview protocol are presented below:

1. What are your primary responsibilities as a board member (or administrator)?

2. What is your role, as a board, in maintaining and improving the quality of academic programs in your state?

3. Do you have any influence on allocating state funding to public higher education institutions? How?

Study Group

The study group involved in this research includes current and former members and high level administrators of the state level higher education boards in Georgia and South Carolina. Interviews were conducted with seven individuals from Georgia and six individuals from South Carolina. Table 1 shows the list of participants. Detailed information such as age, gender, and experience levels is not indicated in order to protect the identities of the participants, given the fact that the whole population of the study is relatively small. The total number of board members is fewer than 20 and the total number of high level administrators is fewer than 10 in each state.

Table 1. List of Participants

Code	Role	Representation
G1	Board Member	District
G2	Administrator	-
G3	Board Member	District
G4	Former Board Member	District
G5	Board Member	At-large
G6	Board Member	At-large
G7	Administrator	-
SC1	Board Member	Sector
SC2	Board Member	District
SC3	Board Member	At-large
SC4	Administrator	-
SC5	Board Member	District
SC6	Board Member	Sector

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded with an audio recorder with the permission of the participants. After interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Then, data were analyzed using content analysis methods. A three-step coding approach, which included condensing data into major themes, identifying sub-themes, and selecting cases, was used (Neuman, 2009). After this coding process, another researcher was also asked to control the appropriateness of themes, sub-themes, and selected cases, to ensure reliability of results (Creswell, 2009). As explained above, the interview protocol was prepared with the help of experts from both Turkey and the USA in order to increase the validity of the study. In addition, direct quotes from the participants are used frequently in the text in order to accurately represent participants' responses.

Results

The findings of this study, based on interviews with 13 participants from the states of Georgia and South Carolina, are presented here. Findings are presented under two main themes: structures of the boards and primary functions of the boards.

Structures of the Boards
Georgia

Georgia has a state level governing board which is called the *Board of Regents*. This board includes 19 members appointed by the state governor for a renewable seven-year term. Participants of this study emphasized that the seven-year term makes it possible to have variation on the board at any time. In fact, at the time of these interviews, the board included members who were appointed either by the sitting governor or the previous governor. Some of the participants expressed their thoughts in terms of the member appointments as follows:

> The Board of Regents was formed many years ago, and the main idea was taking politics away from academic decisions. But several things are still overlapping. For example, the governor appoints all the regents. So, the governor has some influence because he chose the people in the board. The appointment term is seven years, so there is almost always some variation in the board. (G1)

> When this was designed, the governor was only elected for one four-year term. Now, he can be re-elected for a second term. So, if the governor is elected for a second term, he can change all of the board members. But, the next governor also appoints several regents right after he comes into the office. (G3)

In terms of board members' occupations, it was observed that they came from different business sectors. At the time of the interviews, most of the board members were high level managers and/or shareholders of large companies, while there were also a few members who held other occupations, such as medical doctors and lawyers. All members are seen as representatives of the public. The governor of Georgia appoints one board member for each of the state's 14 congressional districts and five members at large. Reasons behind this method of district representation and its impact on the decisions of members were indicated as follows:

> It is not possible for me to aware of all the universities in Georgia. I represent X district and there are several universities in my district. I work more closely with those universities. Every regents do this similarly. Sometimes, I see a president in my district once a week, but I do not see presidents from other districts very often. (G1)

> The 14 members represent districts, so they are influenced by their communities. They try to know the institutions, students, employers, etc. in their area. For those who represent a district, it is natural to establish a closer relationship with the people and institutions in their districts, but they are also a member of the state level board. (G2)

> There are several universities in my district, but every decision I made on the board was not for one institution but for all 10 million people who live in Georgia. We were thinking for the state as a whole, so we were always taking into consideration that what was best for all people in Georgia. (G4)

In addition to the board members (who are final authority for any decision given by the board), there are also many staff members working for the board. There are around 400 staff who work at the board's central office. Around 20 of these people are high level administrators, including the chancellor, vice chancellors, and associate vice chancellors. The chancellor acts as an executive director of the board, while vice chancellors are responsible for different divisions such as academic affairs, financial affairs, etc. According to the official website of the board, ''the Chancellor supports the Board of Regents in

furthering and achieving its vision for the University System by providing leadership in analyzing, monitoring, and anticipating higher education trends and developments, and by planning strategically for the future of the University System.'' (University System of Georgia [USG], 2015, para. 1).

In interviews with board members and administrators, the chancellor's role and importance in the higher education system were frequently mentioned. Some of the board members' thoughts about the chancellor are as follows:

> With his staff, the chancellor leans on all of the campuses, works on curriculum, budget, etc. In addition, he goes to the legislators, fights for the budget, and allocates expenditures. He is also head of the staff in the board. (G5)

> The chancellor and his team work very closely with the universities and monitor them. For example, if the presidents are spending too much money and they are off their budget, they bring it to our attention. (G3)

South Carolina

South Carolina has a state level coordinating board, which is called the *Commission on Higher Education*. This board includes 15 members 14 voting and one non-voting. The non-voting member of the board represents private higher education institutions in the state, while three of the fourteen voting members represent public higher education institutions from different sectors (research institutions, four-year institutions, and technical colleges). Four of the remaining members are appointed by the governor to represent the state as a whole, while the last seven members represent each of the state's congressional districts. Participants in this study emphasized that the appointment system creates a large level of variation in the board. Some of the board's members expressed their thoughts on this as follows:

> For congressional district representatives, membership is two four-year terms at maximum. For sector representatives, it is only one two-year term. Sector representatives' purpose is to bring to the commission the views and opinions of those sectors. Congressional district representatives bring the views of their communities. (SC5)

> In sectors, each university gets a term and selects one of their own governing board members to recommend to the commission. When my term is up, another university in my sector will replace me with one of their sitting members. So, the university board decides who is going to represent the sector, but the governor makes the appointment. (SC6)

In terms of occupation, most of the South Carolina board members came from business sector, like those on Georgia's board. There were also members from the education, law, military, and public administration sectors. In addition, two members had some form of academic background. Therefore, it can be said that South Carolina's coordinating board was more diverse in terms of the background of its members. This diversity is probably the result of the appointment system in South Carolina that participants described in the aforementioned responses.

South Carolina's coordinating board also includes some key administrators and staff working at its central office (though fewer than in Georgia). The executive director of the board has responsibilities that are very similar to those of the chancellor of Georgia's governing board in terms of running the central office and supporting members of the board. According to the board's website, "the Executive Director provides the leadership required for the Commission to meet its responsibility for coordinating an efficient and responsive higher education system in this state." (Higher Education Commission [HEC], 2016, para. 1).

Beside the executive director, there are also four directors responsible for academic affairs, fiscal affairs, external affairs, and student affairs. According to research interviews and information gathered from the board's website, the total number of staff working for the South Carolina board is around 35. Some of the participants' thoughts on the role of the executive director and the general structure of the board are as follows:

> The executive director should have the ability to work with commissioners, the general assembly, university presidents, etc. Working with college presidents is very important. His main responsibility is ensuring the management of staff and assisting us with the public agenda. (SC1)

> We have four divisions at the commission. Our staff size is about thirty full time people. It used to be larger. We are telling our legislators that we need to be larger to be able to fulfill all the responsibilities that the legislators gave us. Staff we have often time come from universities. Sometimes they might come from elsewhere, such as our legal staff may come from law firm or our finance staff may come from accounting office, etc. (SC4)

Primary Functions of the Boards
Georgia

According to the interview data, Georgia's governing board has several key responsibilities, including 1) planning and policy development, 2) administration/governance, 3) academic affairs, and 4) financial affairs. First of all, planning and policy development is seen as one of the most important responsibilities of the board. Participants emphasized that they develop new policies and make strategic plans both to increase access to higher education and improve the quality of institutions in their state. In addition, the board collects a variety of statistical data on these initiatives and publishes them. This data helps board members to make appropriate decisions regarding policy development and planning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their performance. Some of the participants expressed their thoughts on the board's policymaking as follows:

> We set policies for the whole higher education system. Then, we give an annual review of each president and university on how they are doing. They should follow our policies because we are their supervisor. They have to report to us and they are responsible for meeting our expectations. (G4)

> The board sets very broad policies and priorities for our campuses. Also, overall missions, function and scope are determined by the board. For example, we have some world class research universities, as well as state collages which mostly have open access policies. Presidents of universities report to the board, so they are heavily influenced by the board and its policy priorities. (G2)

The board also appoints the president of each higher education institution after receiving recommendations from institutional search committees. This represents a significant and important impact on the administration of individual institutions. Besides appointing the president, however, the board does not have substantial influence on the appointment of other administrators or staff, with a few exceptions such as the vice president for fiscal affairs and head auditor. This situation was expressed by some of the participants as follows:

> We appoint a community and faculty committee for each presidential search. It might be 12 to 18 people. They start the interview process. Their responsibility is to bring us three to five candidates without any order. So, they would be happy with whomever we select as president from that list. But, we may not satisfy with any candidate so we can start the search again if we want. (G1)

> The board selects the presidents. Presidents develop their own leadership teams. There are a couple of exceptions there. There is an expectation that presidents should work with our vice chancellor for finance when selecting their vice president for finance. We would like to make sure that the person has an appropriate background for the job. For other decisions, such as provosts or deans etc., they may seek advice from us. However, it is their job to hire those people. They do not need any approval from us. (G2)

> We leave other appointments to presidents. We have to believe in presidents because we chose them. If anything goes wrong in a university, chancellor talks to the president and inform us. (G5)

Participants in the study expressed that they do not generally interfere in the day to day administration of individual institutions unless absolutely necessary. Instead, they conduct yearly evaluations of each institution and discuss them with the presidents. When academic or financial problems are detected, board staff work very closely with the institutions to solve these issues. One participant explained this situation in detail as follows:

> There is year to year contracts for presidents. We generally do not want to cancel contracts early because you do not want to change your leadership so often. So, it is highly unusual to not renew the contract after one or two year. But we have a few example that we were not satisfied with presidents' leadership, so the board did not renew their contract after 2 or 3 years. Most of the time, we work them closely to solve the problems. If a president and his/her leadership team are struggling, we will heavily involve ourselves in day to day issues and try to fix the problems. We help them to get back to on their feet. We want them to be successful. (G2)

In terms of academic affairs, the most important roles of the board are approving new programs and evaluating existing ones. According to participants, the most important criterion for new programs is student demand. Participants of the study also emphasized that they want to avoid duplications of existing programs in order to protect the waste of public money. In addition, the number and the qualifications of faculty members, physical infrastructure, and academic sources are evaluated during the program creation and assessment process. However, there are not any specific criteria, such as certain numbers of faculty members or numbers of faculty with tenure, that are required in order to open new programs. Details of the program approval process are explained by some participants as follows:

> Overall, we want to drive the economy of Georgia, because when you drive the economy it creates jobs, and if you create jobs it increases the standards of living. We also do not want to have five medical schools. We do not want to waste taxpayers' money. We want to use it effectively. (G3)

> We have a vice chancellor responsible for academic affairs. If any university want to add a major, eliminate a major, change a major etc., they go to him. He and his staff work on that in a great detail and present it to our academic affairs committee. We generally trust their judgment but we also verify what they bring us is correct. (G1)

> Whenever we get an application for a new degree program, we want documentation in terms of faculty resources, quality of the faculty, if those faculty have PhD's in related programs, etc. In addition, related to the department, we look at available laboratories, do they have enough classrooms for those programs, do they have related library and learning resources for both faculty and students, etc. (G2)

> We are here to make hard decisions. We need to say that you do not need that program because there are too many already, or you do not need that PhD program because it is not your mission. If universities decide it themselves, we will have a lot of duplications. (G7)

One participant also expressed that they purposefully avoid creating a certain list of evaluative criteria for program approval, since each academic program requires different priorities. In addition, it was emphasized that the board holds different expectations for each type of university, since universities have different characteristics and missions. For example, it seems appropriate for state colleges to have more part-time faculty members than it would for a research university. There is also a monitoring process to observe and evaluate the performance of newly established programs during their first years. A similar monitoring program is also used for programs that show significant declines in their enrollment and graduates.

Participants also emphasized that the higher education accreditation process is conducted by independent agencies, and that the board is not involved in that process. Institutional accreditation of universities in Georgia is conducted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which is one of seven regional accreditation agencies in the USA. There are also professional organizations that oversee the accreditation of individual academic programs. However, as a governing board, they also feel responsibility for the universities in their state and take the accreditation process into account. Thus, the board tries to help Georgia's universities meet necessary requirements and maintain their accreditation. Two participants commented on this as follows:

> We cannot operate if our universities are not accredited by SACS. In every ten years, universities have to go through SACS's evaluation. They send a team include numbers of academics from all over the nation. You do not know who is coming. They do deep and detail investigation about all the programs and how you operate the university. (G1)

> We want to make sure that our system level policy in terms of the quality and documentation is align with SACS' requirements. For example, chemistry department has to make documentation for their program accreditation by national chemistry society probably every 7 years. They also have to do some documentation for SACS' overall accreditation. And, there is our regular program review process. So, we want to know what their professional accreditation organization requires and what they need to prepare for SACS. Our expectations should be align with those because we do not want them to spend too much time with documentation. (G2)

In terms of financial issues, the board plays a crucial role in forming the budgets of public higher education institutions. The board works directly with the general legislative assembly during the budgeting process. Then, the board receives the total fund for the public higher education system and allocates it to different institutions. This situation empowers the board and ensures that institutions follow the board's rules and recommendations. The board also reviews and approves the capital budget requests of institutions. In addition to the budget, the board also impacts the financial situation of higher education institutions by deciding their tuition rates. The board's role in financial issues was explained by some of the participants as follows:

> We allocate the budget to each of the 29 institutions. It is formula based allocation. But, we do not follow the formula rigidly; we make some adjustments for variety of reasons. For example, some institutions have enrolled a lot less students during the last several years. So, we try to make adjustments for them. (G7)

> Besides the general budget, there is a special fund (capital budget) every year to establish buildings, etc. I can say that the government is very supportive of this. Generally, there are 200–250 million dollars each year and we allocate that money to the universities. (G1)

We set the fees and tuition rates, different for different kinds of universities. It also differs between majors. Every one of our colleges is different. For example, Georgia Tech is as good as California Tech or MIT, but its tuition is lower than those schools. However, it still should be higher than other universities in our state to keep its quality. (G5)

South Carolina

When the responsibilities of South Carolina's coordinating board were investigated, three main themes emerged: 1) planning and policy development, 2) academic affairs, and 3) financial affairs. As these results make evident, the only difference between South Carolina and Georgia's higher education boards, in terms of general themes, is in the area of administration/governance. In South Carolina, the board does not have any substantial impact on the administration of institutions because each institution has its own board of trustees. These boards of trustees act as governing boards and appoint the presidents of their own institutions.

The most important responsibilities of South Carolina's coordinating board are planning and policy development. The board develops general policies and establishes strategies for the state's higher education system, including private institutions. In addition, the board collects and publishes statistical data related to different aspects of higher education. It is also important to note that, unlike Georgia's governing board, South Carolina's coordinating board does include private institutions (independent colleges) in its planning procedures, and also publishes data about them. However, the board does not have enough authority to ensure that its policies and plans are implemented. Board members who participated in this study emphasized that they cannot dictate anything to institutions, but they do try to encourage them to follow their plans. Some thoughts on the policy development and planning role of the board are as follows:

We collect data from all universities and act as an agency to give visibility to the facts. We publish things like enrollment numbers, how many degrees are conferred and what types, scholarships, grants, tuition, etc. We monitor those things across times and publish them without favoring any university. Second, we have strategic plan written in the past, and it is still on the books. From the discussions that we had over this summer, I think that we are going to redo it. (SC5)

Through our website, you can access our annual reports. These annual reports are open to public. There are also ways to request more data and information. We get information from universities. It is mandated requirement; they have to provide us data. They have to report us enrollment rates, graduation rates, and all different kinds of data. In addition, we have our own people who can conduct research for us. (SC3)

We cannot really tell universities what to do. In our system, each university has its own board of trustees: that is where the power lies here. They do not answer to us. We cannot dictate to them, we just make suggestions. We also look at numbers and publish them in a comparative chart. We say 'this school is doing very well' or 'another school is not doing well'. We embarrass them and give peer pressure. (SC2)

The commission also keeps universities accountable to their missions. Each sector has specific mission and they have to follow that mission. We have to look at faculty, facilities, and access/equity issues, because all of the money we use is taxpayers' money. We do not want to create conflicts or unnecessary duplications between universities. (SC6)

In terms of academic affairs, South Carolina's coordinating board also has program approval authority. Consequently, all new program requests must go through the board's review process. Similar to the situation in Georgia, academic affairs staff prepare detailed reports to the board members and the board gives the final decisions. Participants expressed that the most important aspects that they look at

when approving new programs are student demand, the program's impact on the community, duplications, faculty members, infrastructure, etc. Some participants explained the program approval process and their evaluative criteria as follows:

> Every university and college can say, 'we want this program'. The first thing we look is duplication. Then they try to justify their application. For example, they might say there is a MBA program in another university in the same region, but it is for day students, and we plan to target working students. Is this duplication? We try to figure out that. (SC2)

> Universities bring their program demands to us. Generally, we look to see if there is occupational need. Another part is the cost. They have to show us the cost per student. Do they need to hire additional faculty, do they need additional buildings, etc. They prepare a file and include how many students they expect, how those affect the university and campus life, etc. (SC3)

> We ask for 22–25 pages of evidence. We look at faculty qualifications, the needs of the program, workforce projections (if the students graduate from programs with jobs waiting for them), institutional facilities (buildings, libraries, classrooms, etc.) to support the new degree. We also look at the budget, cost, and revenue that program can generate from tuition and grants. (SC4)

South Carolina's coordinating board does not have the authority to abolish an existing program; therefore, there is no systematic monitoring process for existing programs. Although this situation is generally seen by board members as a critical shortcoming, some participants mentioned that they still exert some influence on institutions' decisions about existing programs through the data that they publish, as well as through their power over new program approval. Similar to the board members in Georgia, participants from South Carolina also mentioned that they do not have any responsibility in the accreditation process and that they rely on SACS and program specific accreditation agencies. However, they still encourage their institutions to keep up with the expectations of accreditation agencies. Participants offered these insights into the board's role in accreditation:

> For accreditation, we do not have any role. But, when universities bring us a new program, we look at how they are doing, what is their graduation rates for other programs, if they started program accreditation process, etc. We look at their history and it affects our decision to approve it or not. (SC3)

> Each institution has to have institutional accreditation. All of them currently do and they have to keep it. For new programs, we expect each institution to use SACS criteria when they prepare a program. We also ask institutions to provide evidence that they will pursue program specific accreditations. (SC4)

Lastly, South Carolina's coordinating board has limited responsibilities related to financial issues. Although the board does not have any role in the general budgeting process, it does have a review process for capital budget requests. Participants emphasize that they try to avoid unnecessary expenses and protect state money in the capital budget review process. Unlike Georgia's board, the South Carolina board does not have any authority over setting university tuition and fees. However, they might have some indirect influences on universities' decisions through their publications and other responsibilities. Some participants emphasized their thoughts on financial issues as follows:

> In Georgia, the Board of Regents distributes money to universities. Here, each board of trustees prepares their institution's budget; some of them even do not send it to us, instead directly sending it to legislators. So, university boards directly work with legislators on their budgets, as well as many other issues. (SC2)

The only way that we do have influence on state funding would be through the capital funding approval process. For example, for the last 14 months we approved about a half billion dollars in capital projects. We try to look at how those expenses will impact student tuition or fees and ultimately how they impact the citizens of South Carolina. (SC1)

We do not have any authority over tuition, but we use shame and highlight some information in our statistical books. These books show each institution year by year and program by program. The general assembly also looks at them and, for example, if they see a 10% jump in tuition they will ask questions about it. (SC5)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigates the structures and functions of state level higher education boards in the USA in order to make suggestions for possible reform in higher education governance in Turkey. With this aim in mind, two states, Georgia and South Carolina, were selected for detailed investigation. The state level higher education board in Georgia is defined as a governing board, and strictly controls the activities of all public higher education institutions in the state. From this perspective, it is relatively similar to Turkey's Council of Higher Education (CoHE), which is often defined as a very centralized and powerful board overseeing all public and foundation universities in Turkey (Kurt, Gür, & Çelik, 2017; Ergüder et al., 2009; Yavuz, 2012; World Bank, 2007). On the other hand, the state level higher education board in South Carolina has somewhat less authority over higher education institutions. Rather than explicitly governing public higher education institutions, this board instead acts as a coordinating body.

Although the higher education governance model of Turkey, specifically the CoHE, was modeled after the USA system, significant differences can be seen between the structure and functions of the higher education boards in the USA and the CoHE. First, almost all members of the boards in both Georgia and South Carolina are non-academic professionals from different business sectors, non-profit organizations, and fields such as medicine or law. These two typical governing and coordinating board examples show that there is significant public representation across the state level higher education boards in the USA. However, most of the members of the CoHE are professors, and the rest of the members are high level state officers. This raises significant questions about the public accountability, collaboration with business sectors, and shared governance of the Turkish higher education system (Ergüder et al., 2009; Kurt, 2015). As such, the CoHE is not an example of "lay governance" or a "board of lay people," but rather a "board of experts" (Gür, 2016). In addition, significant numbers of board members in both Georgia and South Carolina represent congressional districts. Representation of different regions is also neglected in the Turkish case. In Turkey, it is highly likely that almost all members of the CoHE are from large universities in metropolitan cities, with very limited representation from newly established universities in different parts of the country.

When examining the appointment of board members, we observed somewhat similar situations in both of the US states and in Turkey. In Turkey, seven members of the CoHE are directly selected by the country's president, while the government and Inter University Council also select seven members each—but again, the president approves their appointment. In Georgia and South Carolina, similarly, state governors have a strong influence on the board since they either select or approve all members. State governors' strong influence on higher education boards is also prevalent in many other US states, including larger states such as Florida, New York, and Texas (Gür, 2016). In terms of the length of membership, board members in Georgia serve relatively longer terms (seven years for each term), similar to the situation in many other states with governing boards (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGB], 2017). This is seen as a way of separating the board's decision from politics by preventing a single governor from changing all of the board members in a short time period. In Turkey, although the CoHE functions more like a governing board, the length of board membership is only four years. It can be argued that the short membership term in Turkey makes the CoHE more

open to political influence. So, if the board continues to exert broad authority over universities, increasing the length of CoHE membership with staggered appointments should be discussed in Turkey. This change can make the board more diverse and less vulnerable to political influence. In addition, board members might become more independent in terms of their decisions if they are not faced with replacement in a short timeframe.

In terms of board functions, Georgia's governing board sets general goals for the state's system and determines the missions of different types of institutions. Then through its roles, such as allocating the budget and appointing institutions' presidents, the board makes sure that all institutions abide by the state's general higher education goals, in addition to following their own missions. Although South Carolina's coordinating board publishes a variety of data and engages in some general strategic planning, it lacks the authority to push higher education institutions to follow its plans and recommendations. In terms of academic issues, the board members in both states emphasized that they generally rely on the expertise of their staff. Common concerns regarding the process of approving new degree programs included student demand, needs of the community, duplications, and cost to the state. In the evaluation process, academic and physical resources are also investigated in detail, but without a specific list of criteria for all universities and disciplines. Although the boards' roles in approving new academic programs are very similar in both states, South Carolina's coordinating board does not have a systematic monitoring process after program approval, since it does not have the authority to eliminate existing programs.

When looking at the functions of the CoHE, it is evident that the CoHE's general responsibilities are more similar to those of Georgia's governing board. Georgia's governing board has even more authority than the CoHE in some areas, such as appointing the presidents of institutions and allocating the overall budget. In addition, Georgia's board also spends more time determining general goals for different types of universities, developing policies, and monitoring higher education institutions' success in adhering to those goals and policies. In Turkey, however, the CoHE heavily involves itself in the administration and daily functions of universities. For example, the deans of colleges for all universities have to be approved by the CoHE, and universities must obtain permission from the CoHE before all academic staff hiring. The boards in both Georgia and South Carolina do not supervise these details, although there are significantly fewer public higher education institutions in both of these states when compared with Turkey. In terms of program approvals, the CoHE creates a list of certain criteria and determines whether the departments meet those criteria or not. These criteria mostly focus on the numbers of full-time faculty, and do not vary across different academic programs or universities. Therefore, this practice does not seem to be very effective given the varying dynamics of higher education and differing institutional contexts. In both of the US states, participants expressed that each academic field and each institution has different characteristics, so their board staff consider broader criteria beyond just the numbers of faculty members when they prepare reports for new program approvals. In light of these findings, it can be suggested that the CoHE should reconsider its current program approval criteria, since it treats all higher education institutions and academic fields the same and does not pay enough attention to job opportunities, unnecessary duplications, qualifications of faculty members, physical resources, etc.

Regarding financial functions, Georgia's governing board carries the full responsibility of allocating the state budget to higher education institutions and determining capital project funding. This situation enables the board to determine the mission of universities and act accordingly when it comes to financial issues. Although South Carolina's coordinating board does not have any responsibility regarding budget allocation, it still involves itself in decisions related to capital project funding. However, the CoHE does not currently play any significant role in financial issues related to the Turkish higher education system (Kurt & Gümüş, 2015). Given the fact that Turkey currently has more than 100 public universities and that the CoHE has many other administrative issues to deal with, this arrangement is seen as reasonable. However, based on the current research, it can also be suggested that the CoHE delegate its detailed administrative responsibilities to higher education institutions and instead take on more responsibilities regarding macro-level financial decisions, such as budget allocations and infrastructural expenses.

In sum, several key suggestions can be made for possible Turkish higher education governance reform by considering the findings of this study. First of all, given Turkey's size and number of higher education institutions, having only one centralized board to effectively oversee all higher education institutions does not seem very appropriate. Based on the USA's example, forming a board of trustees for each university or creating regional university systems and forming a boards of trustees for each system should be discussed. In both cases, the CoHE can be restructured as a coordinating board that focuses on the system-level goals and missions of higher education institutions, rather than dealing with detailed administration processes. In addition, the composition of the CoHE should be broadened in order to ensure more public accountability. Professionals from different sectors, businesspeople, and representatives of non-governmental organizations can all be included in higher education decision-making processes. This can also strengthen the ties among higher education, the business sector, and society. As currently discussed in both the higher education literature and national media, thousands of university graduates in Turkey are struggling to find jobs. Diversifying the CoHE by including more members from different sectors of society and industry might better address public demand and sectorial needs.

Diversifying the missions of higher education institutions can be another significant step in improving the Turkish higher education system. This diversification could allow some institutions to focus on research and competing internationally, while encouraging others to better respond the needs of Turkish society. Although the CoHE recently designated 10 public higher education institutions as research universities, right now it is difficult to predict whether this change will make any significant impact on the higher education system. It is not clear yet if there will be any different treatment for research universities under the CoHE's regular procedures and rules, or in terms of financial incentives. Participants in this study often mentioned their different expectations from research universities and other higher education institutions regarding faculty members, new program approval, tuition and fees, etc. However, knowledge about the Turkish case is still very limited at the time of this publication. The findings of this study can begin to provide insight into possible areas for consideration when overseeing the development of newly appointed research universities.

Ensuring academic quality should be another focus area for the CoHE. In this vein, broader criteria should be established and taken into consideration during the approval process for new programs, such as the quantity and quality of faculty members, the needs of the community, and the availability of necessary physical resources. Each academic program and institution has different characteristics, so criteria should be flexible to respond to needs of all fields. In addition, detailed monitoring procedures should be developed for existing programs, and the success of programs in terms of graduation rates, academic test results, job placement rates, etc. should be evaluated and published annually. Institutional and program accreditations might also positively impact academic quality. Therefore, Turkey's recent establishment of a national level quality assurance body (Higher Education Quality Board) represents an important step towards ensuring the quality of programs and institutions. However, special attention should be paid to the independence of this body. The independence of accreditation bodies is seen as an important requirement in many countries, including the USA. The findings of this study also demonstrate that state level boards in the USA have no involvement in the accreditation process and respect the practices of independent accreditation agencies. In Turkey, therefore, the newly established quality assurance body has two great challenges. On the one hand, when developing policies related to quality assurance, it needs to take into consideration the broader higher education policies (e.g., access, finance, personnel, etc.) set by the CoHE and the government (Özer, Gür, & Küçükcan, 2010). On the other hand, when reviewing and/or auditing the quality of higher education institutions, it should work independently without any direct influence from the CoHE, other governmental organizations, and higher education institutions themselves.

Acknowledgements

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