What's in a Name? The Relationship Between Institutional Control and a College's Name

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During a recent conversation with a parent of a high school senior, the parent incorrectly insisted that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a public institution because "only public colleges and universities have a city or state in their name." MIT is actually a private non-profit research university founded in 1861. This anecdote demonstrates that the name of a college may contribute to confusion as to whether the college is a public, non-profit or for-profit institution. Families are much less likely to confuse a for-profit college with a public or non-profit college based on the college's name than a non-profit college with a public college. Nevertheless, up to about a quarter of colleges may give little or no indication as to the nature of the college in the name of the college.

Public colleges do tend to be named after the city or state in which they are located, but so do non-profit and for-profit colleges. More than half of public colleges (54.3%) have the city or state in the name, compared with almost a third of non-profit (29.5%) and for-profit (32.5%) colleges.[1] There is greater differentiation among the types of colleges according to the inclusion of a state in the name as opposed to the inclusion of a city in the name, since cities are often included in the name of a branch campus. Almost a third of public colleges (30.8%) include a state in the name, compared with less than a tenth of non-profit (9.3%) and for-profit (9.1%) colleges. Three-fifths (61.3%) of colleges with a state in the name are public colleges. But the percentages for cities are much closer, with a third of public colleges (33.5%), a fifth of non-profit colleges (20.6%) and almost a quarter of for-profit colleges (24.1%) including a city in the name. The inclusion of a city in the name is not as predictive of the college being a public college, since only about two-fifths (41.5%) of colleges with a city in the name are public colleges. For example, the University of Houston is a public college, the University of Pittsburgh is a state-related[2] college, the University of Chicago is a non-profit college and the University of Phoenix is a for-profit college.

Other terms may serve as signals to the nature of the institution when included in the institution's name.

- The words "community", "county",[3] "state", "practical" and "vocational" are strongly predictive of a college being a public college when they appear in the name of the college and the words "city", "technical", "center" and "central" to a lesser extent. Almost three-quarters (73.5%) of public colleges have the name of the state or the words "community", "county", "state", "city", "practical" or "vocational" in the name, compared with 10.5% of non-profit colleges and 11.0%

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[1] These statistics are based on whether the college's name included the city or state in which the college is located. Colleges located in different cities or states were excluded. For example, Virginia College is a for-profit college with 19 campuses in 9 states, only one of which is located in Virginia. Boston College is in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

[2] State-related colleges are incorporated as non-profit institutions but currently receive significant levels of state appropriations and as such are quasi-public institutions.

[3] Although statistics were not gathered regarding whether the college's name matched the name of the county in which the college is located, it is highly likely that the name of such a college would include the word "county".

of for-profit colleges. Of the colleges with these words in the name of the college, more than three-quarters (76.5%) are public colleges.

- The words "seminary", "theological", "theology", "saint", "Christian", "Baptist" and "bible" are strongly predictive of a non-profit college, as are the words "nursing" and "hospital".

- The words "career", "careers", "institute", "school", "academy", "training" and "business" are strongly predictive of the college being a for-profit college, as are the words "beauty", "hair", "cosmetology", "barber" and "hairstyling" and the words "culinary", "design", "therapy" and "massage". More than three-quarters (76.6%) of for-profit colleges have one of these words in the name, compared with 9.2% of public colleges and 17.8% of non-profit colleges. Of colleges with one or more of these words in the name, three quarters (75.1%) are for-profit colleges.

The words "college" and "university" are not predictive of any particular type of college, although for-profit colleges are much less likely to have the word "university" as part of the college's name.

Words	% of Public	% of Non-Profit	% of For-Profit	Probability Public	Probability Non-Profit	Probability For-Profit
STATE	30.8%	9.3%	9.1%	61.3%	19.0%	19.7%
CITY	33.5%	20.6%	24.1%	41.5%	26.1%	32.4%
STATE or *CITY*	54.3%	29.5%	32.5%	45.4%	25.2%	29.4%
University	29.7%	29.4%	2.4%	47.6%	48.1%	4.2%
College	57.9%	46.2%	32.5%	41.2%	33.7%	25.1%
Community	31.4%	0.2%	0.1%	99.0%	0.8%	0.2%
County	6.5%	0.1%	0.1%	97.2%	0.,9%	1.9%
Practical	3.0%	0.2%	0.0%	92.3%	7.7%	0.0%
State	16.1%	0.4%	1.3%	89.9%	2.1%	8.0%
Vocational	1.6%	0.0%	0.2%	89.3%	0.0%	10.7%
STATE, Community, County, State, City, Practical, Vocational	73.5%	10.5%	11.0%	76.5%	11.1%	12.4%
Central	2.9%	1.0%	0.7%	62.7%	21.3%	6.0%
Technical	10.2%	0.5%	6.0%	59.5%	2.9%	37.6%
City	1.3%	0.3%	0.7%	54.1%	13.5%	32.4%
Center	5.7%	1.9%	3.3%	50.8%	17.3%	31.8%
Seminary, Theological, Theology, Saint, Christian, Baptist, Bible	0.2%	16.0%	0.0%	1.1%	98.9%	0.0%
Hospital	0.1%	2.9%	0.2%	3.8%	88.7%	7.5%
Nursing	3.1%	4.4%	0.3%	38.9%	57.1%	4.0%
Beauty, Hair, Cosmetology, Barber, Hairstyling	0.1%	0.1%	35.5%	0.2%	0.2%	99.7%
Careers	0.0%	0.1%	1.9%	0.0%	5.7%	94.3%
Culinary	0.0%	0.1%	0.9%	0.0%	6.3%	93.8%
Massage	0.0%	0.2%	2.9%	0.0%	7.4%	92.6%
Business	0.1%	0.3%	4.3%	1.3%	6.3%	92.5%
Academy	0.3%	1.0%	13.5%	2.0%	6.3%	91.8%
Therapy	0.0%	0.2%	1.8%	0.0%	8.8%	91.2%
Design	0.1%	1.1%	6.7%	0.7%	13.3%	85.9%
Training	0.1%	0.4%	2.5%	3.9%	11.8%	84.3%
Institute	1.6%	4.8%	23.0%	5.2%	15.7%	79.1%
Career, Careers, Institute, School, Academy, Training, Business, Beauty, Hair, Cosmetology, Barber, Hairstyling, Culinary, Design, Therapy, Massage	9.2%	17.8%	76.6%	8.3%	16.5%	75.1%
Career	3.1%	0.2%	8.4%	24.6%	2.0%	73.4%
School	4.3%	10.7%	23.0%	10.6%	27.3%	62.0%
Technology	3.3%	2.3%	3.8%	33.5%	24.5%	41.9%

About a quarter of public colleges (26.5%) and a quarter of for-profit colleges (23.4%) are not addressed by the words in the previous table and so may give little or no indication as to the type of college in the college's name.[4] For example, it is not readily apparent from the name of the college that College of William and Mary, Fashion Institute of Technology, George Mason University, James Madison University, Old Dominion University and Purdue University are public colleges or that Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Northeastern University, Occidental College, Sarah Lawrence College or Washington and Lee University are non-profit colleges. Likewise, many of the publicly traded for-profit colleges have names that do not include any words that demonstrate a close affinity with the nature of the institution. Colleges that aren't named after a location are often named after their founders or other historical figures, regardless of type of college.

The following tables show the top 25 most common naming schemes for public, non-profit and for-profit colleges, after replacing the name of the state with *STATE* and the name of the city with *CITY*.[5]

Public College Names	Non-Profit College Names	For-Profit College Names
CITY Community College	*CITY* College	ITT Technical Institute-*CITY*
University of *STATE*-*CITY*	*CITY* University	Empire Beauty School-*CITY*
CITY State University	University of *CITY*	*CITY* Beauty College
CITY College	*CITY* Theological Seminary	Everest College-*CITY*
University of *STATE* at *CITY*	*STATE* Wesleyan University	The Art Institute of *CITY*
STATE State University	*STATE* College	Heald College-*CITY*
CITY State College	*STATE* Wesleyan College	Everest Institute-*CITY*
STATE State University-*CITY*	*STATE* Institute of Technology	Remington College-*CITY* Campus
University of *STATE*	*STATE* Christian University	Artistic Beauty Colleges-*CITY*
CITY University of *STATE*	*CITY* Hospital School of Nursing	*CITY* Beauty Academy
CITY Technical College	*CITY* Bible College	Brown Mackie College-*CITY*
CITY University	*STATE* School of Professional Psychology	Rasmussen College-*CITY*
SUNY College at *CITY*	*STATE* Baptist University	Maric College-*CITY*
CITY City College	*CITY* Pacific University	*CITY* School of Cosmetology
The University of *STATE* at *CITY*	*CITY* Law School	*CITY* Business College
CITY Community and Technical College	*CITY* College of Art and Design	*CITY* Beauty School
Western *STATE* University	*CITY* Christian University	*CITY* Beauty College Inc
University of *CITY*	*CITY* Christian College	Aviation Institute of Maintenance-*CITY*
CITY Junior College	University of Southern *STATE*	TESST College of Technology-*CITY*
SUNY at *CITY*	The University of *CITY*	*STATE* School of Beauty
STATE State University-Main Campus	The College of *CITY*	*STATE* Career College
Eastern *STATE* University	*STATE* Pacific University	*STATE* Business College-*CITY*
CITY State Community College	*STATE* Lutheran University	*CITY* Career College
Central *STATE* Community College	*STATE* College of Optometry	Blue Cliff College-*CITY*
University of *STATE* *CITY*	*STATE* Christian College	Wyotech-*CITY*

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[4] The lack of certain terms in the name of the college may be predictive of the type of college. For example, it is unlikely that a public or for-profit college will include religious terms in the name of a college. Similarly, it is unlikely that a public or non-profit college will include words relating to cosmetology or beauty schools in the name of the college. Still, the few terms that strongly signal that a college is non-profit are not very prevalent among non-profit colleges, so a much greater percentage of non-profit colleges may give little or no indication as to the nature of the college in the name of the college. Public and for-profit colleges are much more likely to give clear signals as to the nature of the college in the name of the college.

[5] The analysis in this report was based on the 4,962 colleges included in the "Repay and IPEDS data" tab of the ge-data-model.xls spreadsheet published by the US Department of Education on August 13, 2010. The University of Phoenix appears in this data set only once. About a third of the colleges are public (32.2%), about a third are non-profit (33.0%) and about a third are for-profit (34.8%).

There is much greater overlap in the naming schemes of public colleges with non-profit colleges than with for-profit colleges. The non-profit college names that are most likely to be confused with public colleges are as follows:

- *CITY* College
- *CITY* University
- University of *CITY*
- *STATE* College
- *STATE* Institute of Technology
- University of Southern *STATE*
- Southern *STATE* University

The for-profit college names that are most likely to be confused with public colleges are as follows:[6]

- *CITY* Business College
- *STATE* Career College
- *STATE* Business College-*CITY*
- *CITY* Career College
- *STATE* Career Institute
- *CITY* College
- *STATE* Technical College
- *STATE* School of Business
- *STATE* Junior College
- Central *STATE* College

Few if any colleges specify the type of college on the front door of their web site, regardless of whether they are public, non-profit or for-profit.

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[6] The inclusion of the words "Business College" as opposed to "Business School" or "School of Business" is likely to be assumed to be a for-profit college. However, these words are common among both for-profit and public colleges. Similarly for the word "Career".