

Higher Education: A Perspective of Administration, Access,  
Affordability and the Policy that Drives it

by

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## ABSTRACT

The following essay discusses higher education in terms of its affordability, access, and the public policy that affects it. This essay addresses the importance of higher education as it pertains to health outcomes, opportunities for upward social mobility, and the global and local economy. Furthermore, this essay establishes a clear definition of access and affordability in order to more fully understand the opportunity and challenges surrounding this. Each chapter presents a critical review of the most recent adaptations in public policy as well as existing initiatives that serve to increase access to and affordability of higher education. This review approaches questions of access and affordability from an overarching sociological perspective, continually revisiting the concern for provision of true equity. Additionally, this essay explores policies and adaptations ranging from state initiatives to historic national legislation, while broaching implicit concerns for complete applicability of the proposed opportunities presented by each. This paper provides an occasion to review higher education from various perspectives and to look to the future informed and aware of opportunities, challenges, and change.

## Chapter 1

### The Importance of Higher Education

Higher education is a significant factor impacting the overall quality of life for American citizens. From monetary to non-monetary benefits, the rewards of a higher education cannot be denied. Higher education positively impacts both individuals and society in various respects. Higher education provides for a wide range of lifelong personal and financial benefits for individuals and provides a multitude of indirect benefits for the greater society. According to the national College Board's 2007 executive summary, not only is there a positive correlation between increased education levels and higher earnings for both men and women in all ethnic groups; increased levels of education appear to lead to lower unemployment and poverty rates. Additionally, those with a higher education contribute more to tax revenues and are less likely to depend on social safety-net programs, which ultimately results in decreased demands on public budgets. Furthermore, increased levels of higher education correlate with higher levels of civic participation (Baum & Ma).

Adequately addressing all factors impacted by higher education would be improbable, but reviewing a range of these is necessary to establish the significance and validity of the importance that is placed on higher education in today's American society.

As higher education becomes established and accepted as an important factor impacting the overall quality of life for American citizens, questions surrounding the accessibility to and affordability of such education must be examined. This chapter will seek to explore the importance of higher education and its lifetime impact on health outcomes, upward social mobility and the economy. Additionally this chapter will establish clear definitions of affordability and access as these pertain to higher education.

### Higher Education and Health Outcomes

Health outcomes are affected by an individual's level of education for a number of reasons. In their research on the link between education and health, Ross and Wu (1995) posit explanations for the association of education with good health and organize these explanations in three categories: work and economic conditions, social-psychological resources, and health lifestyle. According to the concept of work and economic conditions, people with a good education are less likely to face unemployment and are more likely to have full time and fulfilling jobs. These individuals are also more likely to have higher incomes and less economic hardship. As for social-psychological resources, those individuals who are well-educated also have a higher sense of personal control and social support in addition to economic resources. The health lifestyle perspective reveals that well-educated individuals have healthier lifestyles than less educated individuals. Additionally, the more highly educated are more likely to exercise, drink in moderation, receive preventative medical care, and smoke less (p.720).

Ross and Wu (1995) focus on education as the one component of socio-economic status that is most important to health. This is not to say that education operates without regard to work and income. Rather it is the variable that structures work and income. As will be discussed throughout this essay, education is an integral component in social stratification and depends heavily on an individual's employment status and income. It is therefore important to consider the relationship between education, employment, and health status more fully. While not all individuals who are more highly educated are guaranteed higher earnings or careers with reliable benefits, the positive impact of a higher education on these factors cannot be denied. While higher earnings do not automatically guarantee good health, this factor does establish the ability to afford transportation to medical providers, fitness centers, and markets with healthy food options. Likewise, reliable health benefits do not automatically lead to good health; however, reliable benefits that include greater access to health insurance make health care, both preventative and acute, much more accessible.

Living conditions and health behaviors that may ultimately impact an individual's overall health can be affected indirectly by an individual's level of education. As previously indicated, higher education can play an important role in an individual's socio-economic status. Furthermore, socio-economic status can have a significant impact on living conditions and health behaviors. Individuals who earn more are more apt to live in areas with less pollution and are more likely to have access to public services (Quadagno, 2011, p.84). Additionally, individuals categorized as middle class consume more healthy meals and control their weight better, in addition to the behaviors

previously mentioned in first introducing the health lifestyle perspective (Quadagno, 2011, p.85).

An individual's level of education also has a significant impact on his or her overall perception of health. In fact, individuals' perceptions of their own levels of health increase directly as their level of education increases, with higher levels of education correlated with better health at every age and income level. Additionally, according to the National Center for Health Statistics' (NCHS) 2005 National Health Interview Survey, regardless of age group, the number of adults perceiving themselves as very healthy increases with higher levels of education (Baum & Ma, 2007, p.21).

### Higher Education and Upward Social Mobility

Although overall health is a factor significantly impacted by higher education, it is typically less focused upon than factors that are at the forefront of the conversation such as lifetime earnings. Data collected for a 2007 report on the importance of higher education explains that average college graduates earn over 60 percent more than high school graduates during their working lives, while individuals holding advanced degrees earn two to three times as much as high school graduates (Baum & Ma, 2007, p.8). Further figures indicate these differences also occur between individuals with at least some college education and those who discontinued their education after high school. Individuals with some college education earn 18 percent more than high school graduates; those with associate degrees earn 29 percent more than high school graduates



(Baum & Ma, 2007, p.9). While these differences are quite substantial, the literature also suggests that other factors such as parental socio-economic status and personal characteristics can contribute to such differences as well.

The lifetime earnings of college-educated individuals are markedly higher than those who have not pursued a higher education. Upward social mobility as it pertains to the attainment of higher education needs to be taken into consideration as well, however. Briefly defined, “social mobility is the movement of individuals or groups in social standing or social position” (“Social Mobility”, 2013, para. #1). Multiple means for achieving social mobility have been studied in the past, including talent, beauty, personal achievement, and self-confidence. For decades, however, as all possible means of vertical mobility have been considered, education has been affirmed as the most accessible means of upward mobility in our society (Mulligan, 1952, p.476). As Horace Mann, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century American educator, proclaimed, “Education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (as cited in Lynch, Engle, & Cruz, 2011, n.p.).

Higher education has been consistently viewed as a means of blurring the lines of social stratification because it affords those from lower socio-economic levels the opportunity to bridge the gap in lifelong earnings mentioned previously. Recent data obtained in the findings of a Pew Research Center survey illustrate that this view of higher education as the “great equalizer” persists in America today, a century after Horace Mann asserted it. According to the survey, nearly seventy-five percent of

Americans agree that having a college education is necessary in order to earn more these days (Coleman, Noble, Weisman, Parson, Thall, & Fair, 2012, p.1).

### Higher Education and the Economy

In addition to overall health outcomes and opportunities for upward social mobility, higher education significantly impacts both the local and global economy. Overwhelmingly, the findings of various studies of the economy present the same observations: investing in education increases job opportunities, enhances competitiveness, and provides opportunities for the kind of income mobility that is necessary for a growing economy.

The economic impact of higher education on the global economy is a particularly important consideration. According to a collective executive summary on behalf of The Institute for Educational Leadership, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, the competitive edge of the overall workforce in the United States is slipping (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006, p.2). The report explains that the United States no longer has the highest percent of young persons who are enrolled in college or who hold bachelor's degrees. In fact, many developed countries are surpassing the United States, placing the nation at risk of decreases in the average education levels of its workforce and leaving the nation less qualified to compete in a global economy (Callan et al., 2006, p.2). To understand this in greater detail, it should be noted that, as of 2011, 43.1 percent of 25- to

34-year-olds in the United States held an associate degree or higher, while for Canada and the Republic of Korea, these numbers were 56.5 and 65 respectively. This shows that these countries have become more successful in building an educated workforce. In fact, according to data provided by the Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development in 2010, the United States has also been surpassed in this respect by Japan, the Russian Federation, Ireland, Norway, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Israel, Luxembourg, Belgium, and France (College, 2012).

### Higher Education: Access and Affordability

In exploring the impact of higher education on overall health outcomes, opportunities for upward social mobility, and the local and global economy, it becomes evident that higher education is an extremely significant factor in the U.S. society and therefore must be attainable by as many Americans as possible. The factors that likely have the greatest impact on the attainment of higher education are access and affordability. To better understand these factors, we need to start by examining each as defined by the current literature and conversations.

“Access” is the ability to engage the resources necessary to actively pursue a higher education. Access can range from the most basic of resources to more highly complex considerations. For some individuals, the question of access to education can be as simple as having transportation to travel to their respective bricks-and-mortar educational institutions. For others, the question of access may involve possessing the

fundamental skills, knowledge, and preparation to be “college-ready” and being accepted at an institution of higher learning. For many others, access may be maintaining the needed resources to be successful in their educational pursuits. For some this may mean the ability to access the internet for supplementary or required course content; for others it may mean struggling to continue their desired program of study at an institution within geographical reach.

One cannot consider access without examining questions of affordability, as the ability to finance one’s academic pursuits certainly limits, or at the very least defines, the level to which one is able to access these pursuits. Affordability is not encompassed solely by cost of tuition; it also includes additional financial considerations. Affordability includes expenditures for housing, food plans, books, and general living expenses. It also involves how individuals at various socio-economic levels are impacted differently by the prospect of student loan debt.

Affordability and access are at the forefront of most conversations regarding higher education. This is for good reason. Affordability of and access to higher education is important because higher education is important. Higher education positively impacts our health, our opportunities for vertical mobility through class stratifications, and our local and global economy. It must therefore be truly affordable and accessible if we plan to reap these benefits. This is not simply a suggestion, but is rather a reality.

Our nation recognizes the importance of higher education and is bound to rectify various overarching issues that impede its access and affordability. In the next chapters

we will look at the states' role in providing access and affordability and the challenges and changes they face. We will also explore opportunities for and possible challenges to increasing access and affordability. Additionally, we will review the most recent policy and adaptations at the federal level that directly impact access and affordability, and we will look at the future, examining state policy, issues, trends, and implications. In so doing, we will review and question each from a sociological perspective, considering the actual opportunity for equity provided by each.

## Chapter 2

### The States' Role in Access and Affordability

As the value of access and affordability to higher education becomes a primary concern and consideration, the United States has experienced a shift in the involvement of public administration as well as the rise of policy and programs broaching these concerns. The acknowledgement of the importance of higher education and its affordability and access was notably addressed during the second 2004 presidential debate when President George W. Bush cited higher education as “the single most important means of improving social mobility and leveling social and economic differences” (Haveman & Smeeding, p. 126, 2006). This government acknowledgement and involvement in higher education has only been expanded under our current presidential administration and can be seen significantly at both state and federal levels. In the following chapter, the state’s role in access and affordability, considering both challenges and change, will be reviewed.

Access and affordability to higher education present significant challenges to the state, not only in terms of providing them adequately and appropriately, but oftentimes even more significantly in considering the consequences of not providing them. As levels of access to and affordability of higher education decrease or even remain stagnant, our society experiences a significant decline in education and skills that are required to keep us competitive in a knowledge-based global economy. As The National Center for Public

Policy and Higher Education explains in its special supplement, *The Need for State Policy Leadership*, “To address these challenges, states must improve their capacities for dealing with higher education issues and providing public policy leadership,” as “these capacities have significantly eroded in recent years” (Atwell, et al., 2005, p. 1A).

While the onus of a successful system of higher education should not be placed solely upon each state, as college and university governing boards as well as the federal government play a significant role in this process, it is important to consider that states are the entities historically responsible for making decisions regarding public higher education policy. States are best situated to frame broad educational policy, with the greatest likelihood of success in sustaining this policy and maintaining focus (Atwell, et al., 2005, p. 1A). The state as well as higher education are not under attack in this discussion, but rather looked at for improvement.

### Challenges: Global Competition

Gaps in our national performance in college access and degree attainment present various challenges for our nation and its economy. These challenges take into consideration various factors which include, but are certainly not limited to, global competition, a leaking pipeline, workforce supply and demand, and technological change. As previously noted, our nation is at risk as its competitive edge continues to decrease in terms of the skills, knowledge, and education of its citizens beyond high school. Several

countries have overtaken the nation in rates of degree attainment and in term of access to higher education, with several international competitors far surpassing the United States in degree granting (Atwell, et al., 2005, p.1A). This concern is expressed in the collective executive summary on behalf of The Institute for Educational Leadership, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, which asserts that unless the educational attainment of the young population advances, the competitiveness of the U.S. workforce is projected to decline over the next decades (Callan, et al., 2006, p.3). Economists Anthony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers, who were consulted by the authors of this executive summary, estimate that by 2020 the U.S. will be at risk of a significant shortfall in workers who have the knowledge and skills needed to compete for jobs in the global economy. This shortfall is projected to amount to 14 million jobs (Callan, et al., 2006, p.3). Our nation is slipping, and concerns about access to higher education persist as we consider the “how” and “why” of this current economic state.

### Challenges: A Leaking Pipeline

An additional challenge or concern that results from limited college access and degree attainment is what is referred to as a leaking pipeline. In general terms, a leaking pipeline can refer to any situation in which qualified candidates or equitable resources do not progress to the next level. In higher education the leaky pipeline refers to the number of high school students who do not progress to or through higher levels of education. This



leaky pipeline issue not only demonstrates the basic concern for the sheer volume of students not progressing and the potential results of this; it also, more importantly, raises the question of why students are not progressing.

The leaking pipeline of the U.S. system of higher education is characterized by low levels of student credentials and college-degree completion despite the high educational aspirations of our high school students. The high school graduation and college completion rates in the U.S. are therefore classified as inequitable. The leaking pipeline is more drastic than one might anticipate: only 68 percent of ninth graders graduate from high school in four years, only 18 percent of students complete an associate's degree within three years or a bachelor's degree within six years of first enrolling in college (Atwell, et al., 2005, p.1A). The nation's competitive edge will likely deteriorate as a result of this leaking pipeline.

#### A Leaking Pipeline: Socio-economic and Ethnic Disparities

As we examine the leaking pipeline and its likely results, an important question arises: why is the leak in the educational pipeline so substantial? The answer to this question is not simple. It does however point to many of the overarching disparities in educational attainment that result from socio-economic status and ethnicity. According to Thomas J. Kane, author of "College Going and Inequality," "even among students with similar test scores and class ranks from identical schools, students from higher-income families are significantly more likely than those from lower-income families to attend

college” (2004, n.p). This disparity is further evidenced by a longitudinal study conducted by the Department of Education, according to which 51 percent of students from the highest socio-economic quartile reported obtaining a bachelor’s degree 12 years after they were first surveyed as eighth graders in 1988, whereas only 7 percent of those from the lowest quartile reported having obtained a bachelor’s degree within the same time period (Haveman and Smeeding, 2006, p.126). Melanie Corrigan, author of “Beyond Access: Persistence Challenges and the Diversity of Low-Income Students,” explains that while 75 percent of higher-income college students had completed a degree or were still in school three years after first being surveyed, only 59 percent of low-income students demonstrated similar achievements (2003, p.28).

The inequalities in access to and attainment of higher education are linked to ethnicity as well. According to nationally collected data, nearly seventy-five percent of white students receive an associate’s degree within three years or a bachelor’s degree within six years of enrolling in college, while only 9% of African-Americans and 10% of Latinos reach those goals (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, p.127). In fact, as the educational attainment of all young Americans is on the decline and the baccalaureate degree rates of attainment for Latinos and African Americans are less than half of those of their white counterparts, Latinos and African Americans comprise the fastest growing population groups in America.

There are various reasons for the disparities in educational attainment among those of lower socio-economic status or minority ethnic groups. Some of these reasons

include these individuals' inability to accurately estimate the cost of college, the increased likelihood that they will have to enroll in remedial courses in college, and their lack of a full understanding of the college application process. Additionally, these young adults experience decreased levels of higher educational services necessary for attaining a college degree, tend to enroll most predominantly in community colleges, cite external factors that conflict with their educational pursuits, and demonstrate lower test scores and other indicators of ability.

As we explore and further consider these additional reasons for such educational incongruences, opportunities to identify future solutions arise. At a conference on higher education and economic inequality as these relate to access, persistence, and success, Robert Haveman and Kathryn Wilson reported on the findings of their study, which used the Michigan Panel Survey of Income Dynamics applied to a nationally representative sample of children born between 1966 and 1970 who were followed until 1999. These findings indicate that half of all educational services that are identified as necessary for attaining a college degree are delivered to youth from the richest 25 percent of the nation's families. Conversely, only seven percent of these same resources are delivered to youth from the poorest 25 percent of the nation's families. Only three percent of these resources are delivered to youth from the poorest ten percent of families (2005).

Additionally, for youth of lower socio-economic status or of Latino or nonwhite ethnicity, community colleges serve as the primary point of access to higher education; almost 60 percent of all Latinos who are enrolled in higher education first enroll in a

community college. While any point of access to higher education is respectable, it should be noted that most students who attend community college are more likely than students at four year institutions to come from families of a lower socio-economic status, to delay enrollment directly after high school graduation, to enroll part time, and to interrupt their education or “stop out” (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, p. 139). All of these factors associated with community colleges can have a negative impact on the educational attainment of the students enrolled.

Finally in considering the multiple reasons for the disparities of the young adults of lower socio-economic status, we must consider the lower test scores and indicators of ability of these students. These lower test scores and lack of other indicators of ability are indirectly related to family income. Unfortunately, test scores and other indicators of ability play a significant role in the disparity in enrollment of low-income students in colleges and universities. For example, while 36 percent of low-income students who attended higher income schools placed in the top half of the test score distribution, only 24 percent of low-income students at low income high schools scored at this level (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, pp. 133-134). This points to the disparities in educational resources for success that can and often do result directly from a family’s income level and indirectly affect students’ performance on tests.

### Challenges: Workforce Supply and Demand

The leaking pipeline has been explored at length as one of the challenges of higher education access and attainment. An additional concern is workforce supply and demand. The most quickly-growing and most highly paid jobs in America require education and training beyond high school. This is the result of our globally competitive market, which requires education, skills, and ability beyond what a high school offers. Additionally, this is the result of the fact that the best-educated generation in America's history, the baby-boomers, is quickly approaching retirement. As the baby-boomers retire, a gap will be created in the workforce, with some labor markets predicting significant shortages in employees with a college education. This shortage is predicted to occur within the next ten to fifteen years and is said to be a direct consequence of America's failure to produce a sufficient number of college graduates (Atwell, et al., 2005, p.1A). Again, we see the impact and potential consequences in the gaps in access to and attainment of higher education.

### Challenges: Technological Change

A final concern or challenge potentially resulting from inadequacies of higher education attainment in this country is the ongoing and anticipated technological changes in the United States and its economy. As technology becomes an ever-increasing part of our daily life, and as we grow to become more heavily dependent upon technology, there must be a substantial supply of individuals who are educated enough to operate, manage,

assess, and improve such technologies. In response to this deficiency, the Obama Administration has begun to focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education. President Obama declared in a State of the Union address that we should “Think about the America within our reach: A country that leads the world in educating its people. An America that attracts a new generation of high-tech manufacturing and high-paying jobs” (Koebler, 2012). President Obama’s words echo the understanding that STEM skills, like so many of the other globally competitive skills that have been previously mentioned, require the knowledge and aptitudes gained through the completion of a higher education.

### Changes: Structure and Funding

As mentioned previously, the state can play a powerful role in increasing access to higher education. This can be achieved in various ways. Those discussed are not to be interpreted as the only or best opportunities for increasing access and closing the educational gap, but they are offered as occasions to improve the current state of our higher education system. These opportunities reflect the current changes in the higher educational system and warrant additional changes in the nation’s approach to various facets of higher education to meet current needs. For the purposes of this discussion, we will focus on the changes as that pertain to state government: shifting responsibility for funding, modes of providing higher education, and student mobility and transfer.

Whereas the state historically oversaw institutions, ensured allocation of resources, avoided duplication of educational efforts, and managed expansion via statewide governing boards or coordinating boards, the state's role is changing. Because of changes in educational climate and concerns for access and affordability, the state's role has been refocused, with the oversight and regulation of higher education decreasing as a concern and the focus turning toward campus autonomy as well as market adaptability (Atwell, 2005, p. 2A). These recent changes from regulatory control have been positive for many individual higher educational institutions, in particular for public universities. For other educational institutions, however, these benefits are not experienced. Furthermore, and possibly most importantly, the state itself and the public interest have not benefited equally from these changes.

With these recent changes in state involvement in higher education, the need for further change to increase access and best serve the public interest is called into question. As Atwell, 2005, explains, "As old regulatory models have eroded, there has not been development of new forms of public policy capable of using state policy to address public needs" (p. 2A). New forms of state policy for higher education need to be created and instituted. The shift from regulation to market adaptability must shift again to increased educational opportunities and accountability models. These accountability-based models should focus on specific and measurable goals that assess and evaluate college preparation, access, retention, and graduation rates.

Additional changes in funding modules must also occur to increase access to and affordability of higher education. Changes in funding have shifted the cost of higher education from taxpayers, in the form of state share of instruction and need-based federal aid, to individual students. Unfortunately, need-based financial aid has not increased proportionately with tuition. Because of this, students from the lower and middle classes are slowly being priced out of colleges. Rising financial needs have resulted in over 200,000 college-qualified students being unable to afford college (Atwell, 2005, p.2A). Most recently, the Grapevine Study conducted by the Illinois State University Center for the Study of Higher Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers found that higher education funding in 41 of the 50 United States was slashed, with state appropriations for colleges and students sinking by 7.6 percent in 2011-2012 from the previous fiscal year. This change in state appropriations is the largest decline in at least a half century (Lederman, 2012, para.2).

Such statistics are staggering and lend themselves to bold policy recommendations designed to decrease this inequity in educational access. These recommendations include developing a financial structure that increases access for students of lower-income families, using revenues in public institutions to provide additional direct aid to students, and having state governments redirect financial support to lower-income students that would previously have been directed to the public and private institutions of higher learning (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). While many states have early access programs in place, additional states are encouraged to consider incorporating them or improving upon existing programs.



### Changes: Modes of Providing Higher Education

Changes are also being demonstrated by the means through which students obtain or attempt to obtain their higher education, with accredited degree-granting proprietary institutions being the fastest growing higher education sector in the country (Atwell, 2005, p. 2A). These changes force states to reconsider the traditional definitions of higher education, traditional funding modules, and accessibility. As leaders in distance learning and flexibly scheduled programs, proprietary schools provide greater opportunity for access. Concerns for financing this opportunity of access persist, however, and concerns about ensuring and maintaining the quality of the education delivered arise.

In light of these changes, states are forced to consider shifts in funding from subsidizing institutions to greater direct funding for students. More importantly, while proprietary schools are becoming increasingly recognized as contributors to higher education, governing boards should ensure that such institutions are reviewed, monitored, and held accountable as other institutions are. This will afford continued access and will ensure that what is accessible is consistent in quality, accreditation, and standards. While proprietary schools offer to close a substantial gap in access, they also present a potential yet significant threat to their consumers. These consumers are often the students most challenged by accessibility concerns and are easily lured by opportunities, whether legitimate or not. Regardless of the legitimacy in degree programs presented by these institutions, proprietary schools are often quite expensive. This can make for a potentially

predatory situation. The state should work to view proprietary schools just as any other institution of higher education, holding them to the same standards of graduation and retention rates and overall accountability.

### Changes: Student Mobility and Transfer Policies

A final consideration is that of student mobility and transfer. More often than ever, students are completing courses at various institutions along their degree path. Oftentimes, this is the result of traditional school-to-school transfer, in particular from a community college to public university or private college. Sometimes this occurs as students concurrently enroll in a “bricks and mortar” school and an online learning opportunity housed at another institution. Transfer and student mobility is not only becoming more common, it is becoming a highly encouraged process. This support of transfer and student mobility is for good reason. Transfer policies allow for many low-income students to start their degree by completing an associate degree or pre-requisite coursework at a community college prior to entering more expensive four-year institutions.

According to The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the White House, national foundations, and states have recently taken action to launch initiatives to increase the number of Americans who complete associate and baccalaureate degrees and postsecondary certificates (2011, p.1). These initiatives are extremely important to close the gap in educational attainment. This ambitious goal will

be met in a strategic manner, by pursuing improvements in state budgeting, requiring better tracking of college completion rates, and providing financial incentives for colleges to adapt education practices that will improve student success (National, 2011, p.1).

While these initiatives are aligned to provide a positive impact on the overall access to education and degree attainment, some concerns persist. As The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education acknowledges, “these policies may fall short of expectations if they fail to improve affordability of two- and four-year colleges and the transfer pathway from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities” (2011, p.1).

As the potential problems in current policy and initiatives are acknowledged, suggestions for best aligning and sustaining such positive and eager endeavors are suggested. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education explains that the primary goal of state transfer policies should be to ensure that community colleges are a viable route to bachelor degree completion, and that students who first enroll at community colleges complete their educational goals with no greater difficulty than students who begin in four-year colleges (2011, p.4). Ultimately, states must make changes in order to improve upon both affordability and transfer and completion. States are encouraged to recognize that tuition increases are outpacing growth in family income, and that need-based financial aid should be available to students who transfer and attend both full and part time. Financial aid will not be enough if tuition increases that consistently exceed the growth of family income are allowed (National, 2011, pp.4-5).

In addition to ensuring affordability, states must strive to provide clear systems of transfer that can be navigated with ease. This means requiring standardized lower-division core curriculum and acceptance of associate degrees by all public institutions to meet general education requirements and act as pre-requisite work for bachelor degrees (National, 2001, p.5). A clear and navigable system ensures the greatest opportunities for student success, while those muddled in incomprehensible policies, procedures, exceptions, and requirements will contribute to decreased persistence and completion. When students are forced to muddle their way through an unclear system, they take courses that do not transfer, are required to re-enroll in the same coursework at their transfer institution, incur significant costs, often become discouraged, and accrue substantial student debt. Statewide systems, articulation agreements, and common course numbers are a few of the key components of the changes that states can make to improve student transferability and mobility (National, 2001, pp.5-6). These changes will ultimately lead to increased opportunities in education access and attainment.

As we reflect on the current state of higher education, we consider the challenges. We acknowledge the overarching concerns of access and affordability and recognize the disparities in degree attainment. We know the problems that our society and economy will experience as a result of these deficiencies. We note the many changes that higher education is undergoing, particularly as a result of the current recession. We also accept the state's role in making even further changes in light of these most recent changes and challenges in order to make higher education affordable and accessible. As we acknowledge all of this, we are reminded of the innumerable opportunities and benefits of

higher education, and we once again reflect on the concept of education as the “great equalizer.” While education may in fact be the great equalizer, there remains a significant inequality in reaching this opportunity. Educational attainment presents challenges at all levels. However, in contrast to its repeated claims, the U.S. higher education system continues to fall short in equalizing opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the following chapter, we will explore the various policies, approaches, systems and initiatives that are in place to increase access to and affordability of education, and we will consider opportunities within the system that truly offer equity, as well as those that perpetuate the current problems.

## Chapter 3

### Increasing Access and Affordability: Opportunities and Possible Challenges

While our current system of higher education faces many challenges when looking to the future and considering concerns of access and affordability, various initiatives, systems, and approaches have been implemented to counter such challenges. These include, but are not limited to, open-access or nonselective colleges and community colleges, early access programs and initiatives, state scholarship programs, and federal programs and initiatives. In this chapter these programs and initiatives will be reviewed, and the opportunities, limitations, and challenges of each explored. Careful consideration will be given to which of these programs and initiatives truly provide opportunities for increased access and affordability as well as which of these initiatives and programs continue to perpetuate the existing challenges surrounding access to and affordability of higher education.

## Open-Access Colleges and Community Colleges

Community colleges and open-access or non-selective colleges provide educational opportunities, in particular to students of lower socio-economic status and students of particular ethnicities that have not fared well in higher education. Community and open-access colleges serve an important role in America's system of higher education. These colleges provide a key access point to postsecondary education for Latino and African American students. They provide remedial education for individuals who do not meet the qualifications of the selective four-year college and universities. Community colleges and open-access regional campuses often offer the opportunity for students to obtain an associate's degree that can lead to a bachelor's degree (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006, p.139). Additionally, open-access colleges are now becoming those experiencing the greatest gains in graduation rates. According to research conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "nonselective colleges and universities (those that accept at least 80% of applicants) are leading the way in improving graduation rates. In 16 states, these institutions account for more than 75% of the increases." "In 33 states, over half of the increase in college graduation rates is from nonselective colleges and universities" (Doyle, 2010, pp.1-2).

Overall, the state of non-selective, open-access, and community colleges appears to be promising. However, in light of this, it is important to consider carefully any challenges that such a structure may face, or any stratifications of inequality that it may perpetuate. As noted previously, one of the greatest challenges of the community college

is demonstrated in the actions, behaviors, and decisions made by its students. According to Haveman and Smeeding, 2006, students who attend community colleges are more likely to delay enrollment, enroll part time, and to interrupt their education (p.139).

These behaviors raise a question of social causality versus social selection, since these behaviors can be viewed as a product of the students or as a product of the system.

Discussions as to which is the case could ensue endlessly. These behaviors can be a product of the students, or a result of social selections, where the students, by their very nature, socio-economic status, familial background and commonly witnessed practices, are not alarmed to place their education behind other concerns. This leads to delays and “stop-outs”. Inversely, these behaviors can be viewed as a social causality, as the result of an overarching system that not only allows for such behaviors, but ultimately supports them, allowing students to come and go as they please with intermittent “stop outs,” and other delays. True causality would be difficult to prove. However, it is important to recognize the potential challenges posed by the system.

Another consideration or criticism of non-selective, open-access, and community college systems is that they ultimately reproduce a sociocultural system of privilege. This criticism has led to a long-standing debate on the merits of such colleges. This perspective suggests that two-year institutions emerged as a mode of social stratification and keep undesirable students out of genuine institutions of higher education (Doyle & Gorbunov, 2007, p.6). Performing what Burton R. Clark, professor of higher education, referred to as the “cooling out” function (1960), a term first coined in Erving Goffman’s 1952 article "Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure," community



colleges are said to “help softly deny students of certain backgrounds and aspirations the entry into the higher levels of educational hierarchy” (Doyle & Gorbunov, 2007, p.6).

This perspective suggests that true opportunities for the kind of education that can provide social mobility are often obstructed, and community and open-access colleges exist simply to placate disappointed students and deflect their immediate resentment, all the while continuing to motivate these students to continue their education in a system that is suggested to act as an education holding tank, at best. In fact, open-access and community colleges are viewed by some as a diversion from selective four year institutions, threatening the dream of upward social mobility for all (Doyle & Gorbunov, 2007, p.6).

In stark contrast to this view of open-access and community colleges as the great perpetuator of class stratification, more recent perspectives present these colleges as the primary point of access to overcome such barriers. As Haveman and Smeeding, 2006, explain, “the primary social role of community colleges lies in their ability to raise college completion rates among low-income children.” This statement was made in light of recent policy changes, in particular those that promote and provide bridges to four-year baccalaureate degree completion (p.140). Ultimately, as this college system is reviewed, it becomes evident that while it demonstrates recent and significant achievements, we must also be mindful of the possibilities of class stratification perpetuation that can still occur. Most importantly, in considering this possibility of “cooling out” and social stratification, we must look to the future and to public policies, such as those relating to

articulation and transfer, to sustain the achievements and to conquer the challenges that community colleges offer.

### Early Access Programs and Initiatives

As we continue to look at opportunities and challenges to increase access to and affordability of higher education, we need to consider those pertaining to early access. There are various current early access programs and initiatives that provide high school students the opportunity to obtain postsecondary credits. Among these programs are postsecondary enrollment options, dual enrollment programs, and a newer and less widespread program, Seniors to Sophomores.

The postsecondary enrollment options program allows high school students to earn college credit while earning high school credit by attending classes at a nearby college or university. Not all states have postsecondary enrollment options; however, Ohio has had a strong postsecondary enrollment options program since 1989, and provides a model for the program. It exists as a result of Senate Bill 140 and has specific qualification and participation guidelines (Ohio). Such specificity allows for a more thorough review of the opportunities and challenges of the program.

The postsecondary enrollment options program is available to any student (grades 9-12) enrolled in the state's public or non-public high schools. In order to participate in the program, the students must meet particular admission standards set by the college or university in which they plan to enroll concurrently. Typical standards include a

minimum score on the ACT or SAT, a high cumulative high school grade point average, completion of the university or college's admissions exam, and the completion of a standard application. Additionally, as specified by the Senate bill, students must have a 3.0 high school grade point average in the subject area he or she wishes to study at the postsecondary institution (Ohio).

Aside from these qualification guidelines, there are very stringent guidelines regarding financial responsibility. Since students' participation is funded publicly, their school district holds them accountable for successfully completing the college coursework in which they enroll. If students are not successful in the courses, costs will be recovered by the school district. This is an explicit component of the program. Parents or legal guardians must sign off on this financial responsibility before the student can participate in the program (Ohio).

As a positive result of this program, thousands of high school students obtain free college credit annually. Some students even complete their associate's degree requirements prior to graduating from high school. The postsecondary enrollment options program provides innumerable opportunities and cost savings to students and their parents and has merit in providing access to college and making it affordable. However, much like open-access, non-selective, and community colleges, the postsecondary enrollment options program presents some challenges and faces certain criticisms.

The primary concerns surrounding the postsecondary enrollment options program are a result of the financial responsibility as well as the fundamental resources required to be successful in the program. Nine rules established by the Ohio State Board of

Education provide the guidelines for the PSEO program and specify the procedures necessary to implement the program. Per the Senate bill requirements, as outlined in these nine rules, a waiver of financial responsibility must be submitted by the participating student's parents or guardians. This is outlined in rule eight of Ohio's PSEO program (Ohio). This can limit accessibility, in particular for students from a lower socio-economic status. For these students' families, the sheer consideration of taking the possible financial responsibility for a failed course is unimaginable. Paying rent and putting food on the table may present a financial hardship for these families. Consequently, agreeing to compensate their child's school district in light of failure is not an option, and therefore, their children ultimately do not participate in the program.

Additional concerns involve the primary, yet surprisingly commonly overlooked basic resource required to participate in the program—transportation. Since the college credit is obtained through participation in college courses held on respective campuses, it is the students' responsibility to transport themselves to and from the college. Unfortunately, for many students their only form of transportation is walking or the school bus, neither of which is an appropriate means of transportation to the college. These students and their families cannot afford extra cars, and may often be sharing one car to transport individuals to multiple jobs and responsibilities, and are therefore faced with competing priorities. Sadly, the postsecondary enrollment options program quickly becomes an opportunity not accessible to these students.

In light of the challenges and concerns of the postsecondary enrollment options program previously mentioned, dual enrolment programs have become increasingly

popular. In this model of early access, students are able to obtain both college and high school credit concurrently while remaining on their high school campuses. In many versions of the program the high school teacher and respective college professor work collectively to deliver the course content. Admission requirements are less stringent and based more on agreements between individual local school districts and participating postsecondary institutions, and there is no need for special transportation (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2011). Additionally, the financial responsibility lies with the school district, which typically makes a payment to the postsecondary institution that covers the cost of the delivery of the course, rather than with a public subsidy covering the cost of attendance for each individual student (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2011). The students and their families are at no financial risk in this model. Typically, the student has an extended period of time to withdraw from the college-credited portion of the course, as opposed to the postsecondary enrollment options program, which typically only affords the student one to two weeks to withdraw before financial penalties are incurred for discontinued participation.

Furthermore, dual enrollment programs provide a unique opportunity that the postsecondary enrollment options program does not. According to a recent report completed by the U.S. Department of Education, Dual Enrollment is seen as assisting low-achieving students meet high academic standards. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), which aligns with the dual credit option, specifically targets students who are otherwise typically underserved in college. These students are able to begin the ECHSI even if they are academically below

grade level. As a result of the ECHSI program, a majority of students earn at least 30 college credits by the time they graduate high school, and have been found to have outperformed their peers in matched comparison districts on state assessments in math and English (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2011). Overall, the dual enrollment program appears to be comprehensively effective in providing students of all socio-economic statuses with access to higher education. In fact, the dual enrollment program can be considered a smart response to a solid program that presented some fundamental access challenges

As a result of dual enrollment program successes, various other programs have arisen. One in particular is the Seniors to Sophomores program that was established in 2008 by the governor of Ohio. The program was established to create a direct pathway, allowing Ohio high school students to take college courses during their senior year, earning their high school diplomas and one year of college credit simultaneously (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2011, p.5). Since this program is relatively newer, there is less information regarding criticisms, concerns, and support. However, it undoubtedly aligns itself to a program of best practice in terms of early college access.

### State Scholarship Programs

Alternate initiatives exist that focus more on affordability in the form of state scholarship programs. Many states have scholarship programs, some having greater success than others. We will look at four of these programs for review. They have been

selected to demonstrate the variety in standards and rigor, and to provide a perspective of programs across various regions within the United States. The programs reviewed include Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship program, Kentucky's Educations Excellence Scholarship, Oklahoma's Academic Scholars program, and Missouri's A+ Scholarship program. They will be examined in terms of which afford the greatest opportunities, as well as any challenges or limitations they may pose.

Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship program is a combination of three lottery-funded scholarships rewarded to Florida high school graduates for high academic achievement. In order to be eligible for the program, a student must be a resident of Florida, a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen, not owe a repayment or be in default under any state or federal grant, loan, or scholarship program, and must meet specific coursework, minimum grade point average, and test score requirements (Florida).

Students are awarded a per-credit-hour scholarship with the opportunity to receive up to one hundred dollars toward each credit hour of coursework they complete. The scholarship dollars are based on the type of institution in which the student enrolls and the student's grade point average. Additionally, the student must enroll in at least six credit hours of non-remedial coursework (Florida). While this program does not cover the full costs of higher education, it does defer costs for students, making higher education more affordable. Overall the program has a positive impact on Florida's high school graduates. While it is based on requirements that include test scores and grade point average, it does offer a scaled model that provides at least some scholarship dollars to students performing in the 2.75 grade point average range or higher (Florida). This gives

even students who are not the most exceptional academics an opportunity for access. One concern about the program, however, is that it begins funding coursework at six or more hours of concurrent non-remedial enrollment. Unfortunately, many students, in particular those of a lower socio-economic status, begin their higher education enrolling in remedial coursework. In this regard, there exist some concerns for the access of award.

The State of Kentucky offers a similar state scholarship program entitled the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES). The KEES program awards scholarships to students who attend a certified Kentucky high school. The student must maintain at least a 2.5 grade point average during each year of attendance, with higher grade point averages resulting in larger awards. Students can earn additional awards based on ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) test scores. Individuals who are home schooled or who complete their GEDs may also be eligible for some award based on their ACT scores (Kentucky). For each year a student earns a 2.5 grade points average or better, he or she is eligible for a scaled award up to \$375 a year with the possibility of an additional one-time \$500 bonus for his or her ACT score. Additionally one-time awards for AP and IB scores are awarded up to \$300 (Kentucky).

Much like Florida, Kentucky takes a scaled approach to scholarship awards based mostly on academic merit. This program expands its eligibility standards to include students earning a 2.5 grade point average or better. Additionally, Kentucky extends its scholarship program to home-schooled and GED students, expanding this opportunity for affordability (Kentucky). Again, like Florida's program, Kentucky's scholarships will not



cover all the costs of a postsecondary education, but they too assist in deferring these costs. The one concern that may persist with this program relates to the larger “bonus” awards based on standardized testing. This can present some concerns for equity as we consider the inequity of test performance as a function of socio-economic status and ethnicity.

Unlike Florida and Kentucky, Oklahoma’s Academic Scholar’s Program does not award scholarship monies on a tiered academic system, but rather provides scholarships to students designated as a National Merit Scholar, National Merit Finalist, or United States Presidential Scholar because they rank in or above the 99.5 percentile on the ACT or SAT (Oklahoma). This program awards a one-time scholarship up to \$5,500 dependent on what type of institution the student chooses. Students enrolling in Oklahoma public colleges and universities receive a tuition waiver in addition to their scholarship award (Oklahoma).

While Oklahoma’s Academic Scholar’s Program provides substantial awards, the range of students whom it reaches and assists is limited. Any assistance in affording higher education is important. However, Oklahoma’s Academic Scholar’s Program likens itself to many of the typical merit scholarships that individual institutions of higher education make available to their most competitive and academically prepared students and provides fewer opportunities for affordability to the multitudes than one might expect a state scholarship program to do.

With similarities to as well as many distinctions from those state scholarships already discussed, Missouri’s A+ scholarship program is a comprehensive initiative that

provides scholarship funds to eligible graduates of A+ high schools who attend participating public community, vocational, or technical colleges as well as some private vocational and technical colleges (Missouri). An A+ designated high school meets the state board of education's standards of achievement and excellence as defined by its improvement incentive. There are currently 402 A+ designated schools of the existing 987 throughout the state (Missouri). To be eligible, students must be U.S. citizens, enter into a written agreement with the A+ high school that they attended for at least three consecutive years prior to graduation, graduate with at least a 2.5 grade point average, and have at least a 95% high school attendance record. Additionally, candidates for the scholarship must engage in a minimum of 50 hours of unpaid mentoring or tutoring, and maintain a good record of citizenship with no unlawful use of drugs or alcohol (Missouri).

If they meet these eligibility standards, the students are awarded up to the unpaid balance of their tuition and general fees after all available non-loan federal aid is applied to their account. Reimbursement is made for all completed coursework, including remedial coursework and does not require a minimum number of hours of coursework per semester. Eligibility for the program expires 48 months after high school graduation, upon obtaining an associate's degree, or completion of 105% of the hours required for the college program in which the student is enrolled (Missouri).

This program is one of the best models of a comprehensive approach to affordability and access. While it focuses on academic achievements, this program is open to students earning a grade point average of 2.5 or above. Additionally, this

program does not place any importance on debatably inequitable standardized testing. The program focuses on personal achievement and commitment to education. It also includes a clause that waives the single high school enrollment requirement of three years for students whose parents serve actively in the military (Missouri). Furthermore, this program places no limits on reimbursing remedial coursework, allows deferment of immediate enrollment in college for active duty service, and does not require certain rates of enrollment, demonstrating a true understanding and system of support for access and affordability. The only concern for access is school eligibility for the program, both high school and college, because not every high school is designated as an A+ high school and not every two year college participates in the program. However, the benefits of this program and the opportunities for equity based on measures other than pure academics are undeniable.

### Federal Programs and Initiatives

States are not the only government entities that provide programs and initiatives to increase the affordability of and access to higher education. In fact, the United States government is extremely involved in initiatives promoting access and affordability. These initiatives include, but are not limited to, three well-recognized programs: The Federal Pell Grant Program, The Federal Trio Program, and The Post-9/11 GI-Bill. Each of these initiatives serves particular populations and provides opportunities for affordability of and access to higher education.

The Federal Pell Grant Program is one of the most well-recognized federal forms of financial assistance for postsecondary education. It provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and some post-baccalaureate students. Students are able to use this grant at approximately 5,400 participating post-secondary institutions. Grant amounts are dependent on the student's expected family contribution (EFC), the cost of attending their post-secondary institution, the student's enrollment status, and whether the student attends for a full academic year or less (U.S). Financial need is determined by the U.S. Department of Education using a standard formula, which evaluates the financial information reported by the student on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The Federal Pell Grant makes college a possibility for millions of Americans, with more than 9 million students depending on a Pell Grant to attend and complete college (Institute). These students have lower EFC's and therefore lower socio-economic status. They are also more than twice as likely as other college students to have student loans. According to the Institute for College Access and Success, almost nine out of ten Pell Grant recipients graduating from four-year colleges have student loans, with an average debt level about \$3,500 higher than their higher income peers. Additionally, Pell Grants are particularly important for students of color. Nearly fifty percent of African-American undergraduates and approximately forty percent of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants in order to attend school (Institute).

The Pell Grant award is based on need alone and therefore is one of the most socially equitable programs available. However, the program's recent changes place millions of students at a greater economic disadvantage. These changes include recent budget agreements that have reduced Pell Grant funds by \$56 billion and are projected to remain at this lower level (Institute). There is also a change in the lifetime limit of the Pell Grant from eight to six years or 12 full-time semesters (Bormann, 2012). These changes are cited as having a negative effect, prompting some students to leave school entirely. Given that, according to the U.S. Department of Education, about 64,000 of the 9.4 million students receiving Pell grants last year had received them longer than six years, the exodus of students from post-secondary institutions prior to their degree completion could be considerable (Borman, 2012, para.5). This is particularly concerning as the average full-time college student spends five-and-a-half to six years completing a four-year degree (Institute).

This means that one of the most beneficial and socially un-stratified programs for educational access and affordability has changed drastically, with the potential to affect millions of students negatively. While the changes may ultimately be positive, with students having a stronger motivation to plan and complete their degrees in a timely fashion in light of the lifetime limit changes, decreases in actual dollars awarded do not support optimism. Unfortunately, one of the programs that aimed to assist in obtaining education at an affordable cost, and that made the great equalizer potential of education a reality, no longer exists as we once knew it. As the changes to the program continue to

affect the students who make use of it, only time will tell the impact that these changes may have.

Another Federal program that aims to increase the accessibility of higher education is the Federal TRIO Program. The Federal TRIO Program includes federal outreach and student services oriented programs that identify and provide services to students from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Federal, 2012, para.1). The program consists of eight sub-programs that assist first generation college students, low income individuals, and students who struggle with disabilities. The aim of the program is to assist these individuals in progressing from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. The programs provide grant monies to both public and private agencies engaged in community-based services for disadvantaged youth as well as institutions of higher education (U.S. Federal). The TRIO programs are unique in that they focus more on accessibility and services. They offer upward social mobility through education, and uniquely compensate for many of the deficiencies in resources experienced by students of lower socio-economic statuses.

A third and final federal program is the Post-9/11 GI-Bill. The Post-9/11 GI-Bill provides funding for education and housing to individuals who have completed at least 90 days of aggregate military service after September 10, 2011, or individuals discharged with a service-related disability (United, 2012, para.1). The Post-9/11 GI-Bill pays for up to 36 months of education benefits and covers the full cost of tuition and fees for all

public schools where the student is an in-state resident, provides a monthly housing allowance, and covers the cost of books and supplies with an annual stipend (United).

In terms of class stratification, socio-economic status, and ethnicity, the Post-9/11 GI-Bill is the most socially equitable program available, since none of these components is even considered in awarding the benefit. However, while the merits of this program are evident, it is difficult to look upon such an opportunity without considering the emotional and physical price already paid during military service. Additionally, it appears that this program places no bearing on class or ethnicity. However, it is difficult not to question the overall demographics of those enlisted in the armed forces, where the common perception is that minorities and those of lower socio-economic status are already over-represented. The U.S. Department of Defense asserts that “The U.S. military is not a ‘poor man's force,’ that, “on the socio-economic side, the military is strongly middle class,” with “more recruits drawn from the middle class and fewer coming from poorer and wealthier families” (Garamone, 2005, para.1,8). Unfortunately, the most comprehensive data on socio-economic status and minority enlistment in the armed forces is from 2005. In light of recent economic downturns, one cannot help but wonder if the demographic data has changed. However, assumptions cannot be made. From the available data, a socially equitable opportunity is suggested by the Post-9/11 GI-Bill.

In reviewing the multitude of programs that exist to increase access to and affordability of higher education, it is clear that the government, at both a state and federal level, recognizes the need to increase educational opportunities. It is also clear

that in these efforts many challenges and concerns exist, and conversely, multiple opportunities present themselves. However, as each of the programs is reviewed, one recognizes that for many of these, underlying questions and concerns of perpetuated inequity persist. Fortunately, as is demonstrated by a few of these initiatives, though such inequities exist, we can identify alternate opportunities providing true access and affordability.



## Chapter 4

### Recent Policy and Adaptations

In the previous chapter federal programs and initiatives that aim to increase the affordability of and access to higher education were examined. In this chapter, we will again look to the federal government, this time further exploring recent policy and adaptations in response to challenges met surrounding the affordability of and access to higher education. While various adaptations and new policies have been implemented recently, this chapter will review more closely the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, as well as one of the newest funding modules proposed for higher education: Performance-based Funding. In reviewing these policies, the equity of opportunity provided by each will be discussed.

#### Exploring the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, signed into law by President Barack Obama on Tuesday, February 17, 2009, was historic legislation that sought to stimulate job creation immediately during challenging economic times by cutting taxes and investing hundreds of billions of dollars in economic sectors including energy, health care, infrastructure and education (U.S. American).

In the education sector, the act planned to provide immediate stimulus to the economy by saving and creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in early childhood, K-12 and higher education in those states that were at the greatest risk of state and local budget cuts. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also planned to create thousands of additional construction jobs related to school modernization projects. In the long-term, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 proposed to give strength to the American economy by raising Pell grants as well as tuition tax credits in order to assist more young people in attending college (U.S. American, 2009, para.2).

While The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was slated to provide direct funding to education in the amount of \$77 billion dollars, and to provide an additional \$33.6 billion dollars to school modernization, both of which have direct effects on the preparation of the American public for higher education, the act provided for \$30.8 billion to be allocated directly to college affordability. With this measure of affordability, two primary considerations were addressed, the shortfall of the federal Pell Grant program and tuition tax credits for families, with the act appropriating \$17 billion to the Pell Grant program and \$13.8 billion to boost the tuition tax credit.

Historically, the Federal Pell Grant program has been funded entirely through annual appropriations of Congress. However, in 2007 Congress passed the College Cost Reduction Act which created a new funding structure for the Pell Grant program that supplemented the annual process of appropriations (New, 2012). Shortly thereafter, in 2008 and 2009, the number of Pell Grant recipients and the program cost rose rapidly.

According to The New America Foundation, which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy institute, a combination of large increases in college enrollment and Pell Grant applications, the weak economy, broader eligibility rules that Congress passed in 2007 and 2008, and a substantial increase in the maximum grant that Congress included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 account for this growth (New, 2012, para.10).

While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 aimed to cover an already existing shortfall in the Federal Pell Grant program, and successfully maintained the maximum grant level of \$5,550 in fiscal years 2011 to 2012, Congress did not sufficiently increase the annual appropriations for the program's higher costs. Consequently, a fiscal year 2012 appropriations bill was passed that both repealed and modified the changes that had been made in 2007 and 2008. Ultimately Pell Grant costs as well as lifetime limits have decreased (New, 2012). Unfortunately, while the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009's \$17 billion appropriation to the Pell Grant program successfully sustained maximum grant levels, the cost of the Federal Pell Grant program increased from \$16.5 billion dollars in 2008 to \$38.2in 2012, a cost that cannot currently be sustained (New, 2012).

As previously noted, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also provided \$13.8 billion to increase the annual tuition tax credit by \$700 for all families earning up to \$180,000 a year (U.S. American, 2009). The annual tuition tax credit, or American Opportunity Tax Credit, modified the existing Hope Credit for the tax years

2009 and 2010 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This appropriation was further and successfully extended to tax years 2011 and 2012 by the Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2010 (IRS, 2011). The new credit makes the previous Hope Credit available to a greater range of taxpayers, including those with higher annual incomes and those who owe no tax. Under this new credit, required course materials are added to the list of qualifying expenses. Additionally, and perhaps the most significant change in terms of affordability, is that the credit now allows for four post-secondary education years instead of two (IRS, 2011). As a result of changes set forth by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, more families are able to take advantage of tuition credits for a longer period of time, increasing the affordability of higher education.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also appropriated funds to keep more educators employed and to modernize schools, providing better and more advanced learning conditions for America's younger students. The act proposed that it would lay a foundation of education reform by encouraging states to adopt standards and assessments that would ensure that their respective high school graduates are prepared for college or a career. The act also cited intentions of building large data systems that would allow school districts to track the growth of individual students, to identify and improve failing schools, and embrace innovative new learning models. Additionally the act proposed to invest heavily in teacher and principal quality initiatives that aim to elevate the teaching profession and more successfully recruit and retain well-qualified teachers and principals for underserved schools and communities (U.S American, 2009, para.3).

By recognizing the need for school modernization and professional training for teachers, the act addressed some of the most fundamental concerns in education, such as class stratification and perpetuation. The basic infrastructure of a school can affect the extent of learning opportunities for students. For those students who live in disadvantaged areas with a poor tax base, the conditions of their schools are often mediocre at best. These students are not exposed to the latest technology, nor do their teachers have the opportunity to engage them in a wide variety of learning experiences, as do teachers in more affluent districts. This puts these students at an initial disadvantage in the educational process, because their disadvantaged family backgrounds and socioeconomic status indirectly limit their learning opportunities. Furthermore, in all school systems the lack of professional mobility for teachers can create an underlying challenge, one that limits motivation for extraordinary performance. In fact, the challenges limiting opportunities for upward mobility for teachers are like those challenges faced by their disadvantaged students. However, with the proposed professional improvement for teachers, there is the opportunity to provide for some upward mobility within this profession. All of the aforementioned factors have the potential to increase accessibility to higher education. However, those aforementioned initiatives also require time to be adapted, enacted, and then evaluated.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 can be viewed as a success, a failure, and a consideration requiring more time for evaluation. In light of the tuition tax credit increases, the act is ultimately successful by extending the opportunity and increasing the credit amount. As regards the Pell Grant program, the act both

succeeds and fails, because it was able to maintain maximum award amounts for 2010, yet has been cited as a significant contributor to the extraordinary increases in the overall costs of the program. We are not yet able to determine the success of the additional educational investments the act made. However, these investments may be looked to with hope for success in providing a greater level of equity in opportunity to all of America's students.

### Performance-Based Funding

One of the more recent adaptations suggested by the federal government and the final one we will discuss is performance-based funding. The strategy of performance-based funding is not a new concept; however, it is one that has just recently been revisited. Because the need to increase access to and affordability of higher education in the face of a changing economic environment and global competition, and the need to provide opportunities for upward social mobility persists, ambitious national goals have been set to establish the United States as a leading nation in its number of college graduates by 2020 (U.S. College, 2011). This goal has led to a national completion agenda.

According to political analyst Thomas L. Harnisch, 2011, "At the core of this agenda are public colleges and universities." He further explains that "Public postsecondary institutions, from community colleges to research universities, educate the majority of U.S. students. They provide high-quality, accessible educational opportunities

that reflect the needs of communities, regions, and states” (Harnisch, 2011, p.1).

However, it has been noted that in light of the most recent budget cuts and reduced operating support from their respective states, many of these institutions are faced with a struggle to meet the goals set forth in President Obama’s completion agenda. Since public colleges and state universities rely on budget appropriations that are steadily declining in our current economic downturn, these colleges and universities have been forced to increase tuition. Financial aid awards have been decreased. Enrollment caps have been instituted, and many academic programs have been shut down (Harnisch, 2011). These factors all compound the difficulty of President Obama’s completion agenda becoming a reality.

In response to these concerns, the Lumina foundation for Education, has led the establishment of a national productivity agenda for higher education. The agenda aims to measure, identify and increase institutional effectiveness while sharing best practices and exploring alternative educational delivery systems. As a comprehensive effort, this agenda is set to offer more high-quality college opportunities to a larger population of students while working within the constraints of the existing budget (Harnisch, 2011). As a large component of this agenda, performance-based funding is revisited by the current presidential administration and subsequently the states. Performance-based funding is a finance strategy that links public college and university public funding with institutional performance, shifting emphasis from state financial input to college educational outcomes and from institutional needs to state priorities (Burke & Modaresi, 2001). Traditionally, performance-based funding focuses on specific performance

measures such as completion of courses with passing grades, overall credit attainment, and degree completion. However, in an effort to avoid the mistakes of past performance-based funding models, a new model referred to as “performance-based funding 2.0” has been developed that emphasizes the need to reward progress toward graduation over simple course completion and to recognize the differences that exist between community colleges and universities (Miao, 2012, pp.1-3). Since performance-based funding strategies have a history of both success and instabilities, the Obama administration has recommended that states explore this model to improve their overall college completion rates.

Performance-based funding provides both key advantages and various disadvantages for higher education attainment and accessibility. We can look at a few of the states that have already embraced performance-based funding: Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. In each of these states, there is clear evidence of such funding’s success. In Ohio, the median time to degree for a bachelor’s degree was cut from 4.7 to 4.3 years from fiscal year 1999 to 2003. In Pennsylvania, significant changes in campus attitudes towards performance have been experienced with gains being cited in student retention, graduation rates, and campus diversity. In Tennessee, the shift to performance-based funding has led to campuses increasing the number of advisors for students as well as increasing the amount of tutoring and remedial courses (Harnisch, 20011). To address institutional differences between community colleges and four-year universities, some states have adjusted funding formulas to weigh various factors more heavily depending on the institution’s focus. Tennessee has adopted an approach that specifically considers



its disadvantaged students as a factor by implementing a system that incorporates a 40 percent premium in its funding formula for low-income and adult students (Miao, 2012).

Despite their common goals, the states that are incorporating “performance-based funding 2.0” in their higher education funding formulas vary widely in the structure and delivery of these programs. This is evidenced in the total percentage of funding allocated toward performance-based measures, the various behaviors that are incentivized, and the formula used to measure performance in different types of institutions (Miao, 2012, p.3). The states that are effective in adapting performance-based funding recognize that the specific metrics of performance need to adjust according to the institution’s type, its mission, and its needs. However each of these states is challenged to meet the overarching recommendations of the national completion agenda. This recommendation focuses on increasing the number of 25- to 34-year-olds who hold an associate degree or higher to 55 percent by the year 2025 via various initiatives. These initiatives range from pre-school on and many significantly impact institutions of higher education. Within these recommendations, it is suggested that: a program of voluntary preschool education be universally available to children from low-income families; college and career counseling be improved at the middle and high school level; research-based dropout programs be implemented early and often in education, starting in elementary school; the K-12 system align its standards with international standards and college admissions expectations; teacher quality be improved, with a focus on recruitment and retention; colleges clarify and simplify their admissions processes; more need-based financial aid be provided through a transparent system; growth in college costs and tuition be

restrained; college completion rates be dramatically increased; and postsecondary education opportunities be provided as an essential component of adult education programs. As we look to college completion rates being dramatically increased; states adopting performance-based funding formulas must consider the recommendation that institutions of higher education increase college completion rates by improving retention, graduation rates, and the number of degrees awarded by the university (College, 2012).

While there are successes of the performance-based funding approach to higher education, there also remain various problems with accessibility. Three main problems involve mission distortion and student access, quality reduction, and increased inequality and instability. With of performance-based funding, some institutions may be lead to abandon their mission in order to increase their performance measures. Institutions that typically serve the under-prepared and under-qualified with their open access policies may be forced to consider who they admit and those individuals' potential for success in relation to performance-based metrics. These institutions may also abandon or at least reduce their outreach efforts to low-income students. This could have a distinctly negative impact on students with disadvantaged backgrounds (Harnisch, 2011).

Since performance-based funding awards institutions financially for completion rates, there exists a concern that these institutions will shift from focusing on gains in student learning or acquired skills to focusing purely on the efficacy of the system. For many institutions, in particular for open-access or non-selective institutions, there are additional concerns. These institutions face additional challenges, as they are initially

working with resources, or students, who have greater gains to make. These students are expected to make the required gains in the same amount of time as those students who are more academically prepared. This raises various concerns for the continuation of academic rigor in courses and programs. Additionally, inflation of grades in order to improve overall academic performance scores in order to meet the metrics of the agenda become a danger. Ultimately each of these actions would devalue the merit of their degrees.

Additionally, many administrators in public higher education believe that performance-based funding will have the greatest negative impact for the institutions that need the most help. These institutions are those serving disadvantaged populations. The lack of university resources, not university efforts, can lead to poorer performance levels in performance-based metrics. There is a concern that this could create great shifts in institutional funding, ultimately leading to significant threats to the stability of such institutions (Harnisch, 2011). Luckily, some states, such as Tennessee, have recognized the validity of these concerns and have created initiatives to counter this. However, as more states look to performance-based funding formulas for higher education, concerns about retaining accessibility measures persist and must be considered if our nation intends to make higher education an accessible and affordable opportunity for all Americans who wish to pursue a higher education.

As we have seen, obstacles persist, in particular for those of lower-socio-economic status or disadvantaged backgrounds. The next and final chapter will close this

conversation by discussing what has been identified by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities as the top 10 higher education state policy issues for 2012, and by looking to the future as we continue to face the challenges, changes, and opportunities for access to and affordability of higher education posed by an environment of economic global competition, college completion agendas, and the pursuit of upward social mobility in a nation that continues to present higher education as the “great equalizer”.

## Chapter 5

### Looking to the Future

In the previous chapter, recent policy changes and adaptations were reviewed and explored, indicating that while many opportunities are present for accessibility to and affordability of higher education, there are still many limitations to these policies and adaptation we considered. These limitations were in light of the barriers to access that they present or may present. In previous chapters, the states' role in access and affordability as well as the many changes and challenges encountered were discussed, while multiple opportunities for increasing access and affordability were explored. At the heart of these discussions lies the overarching concern of providing equitable access to and true affordability for higher education to all Americans, including those who are of a lower socio-economic status, those for whom the greatest opportunity for upward social mobility is found in education beyond high school. This final chapter will emphasize the current challenges and changes faced by higher education by exploring the top 10 higher education state policy issues of 2012, and will consider future implications as they pertain to the attainment of higher education by the disadvantaged.

## Top 10 Higher Education State Policy Issues of 2012

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities State Relations and Policy Analysis Team identified the top 10 higher education state policy issues as projected for 2012 by January of that year. These issues included: 1) state operating support for public higher education, 2) the cost of providing a college education, 3) governance restructuring and regulatory reform, 4) college completion, 5) performance-based funding, 6) tuition policy, 7) state student grant program funding and reform, 8) college readiness, 9) veterans' education, and 10) immigration policy.

State operating support involves the steady reduction in legislatively-allocated taxpayer appropriations for universities and colleges. The cost of providing education includes concerns about the focus that is being put by state legislature and college leaders on maximizing the utility of all college resources while actively pursuing increases in student outcomes. This concern results directly from governance restructuring and reform that include measures from combining, reducing, or eliminating governing boards, to providing more autonomy to public universities while requiring greater accountability. The concern about the cost of providing education also results from the push towards college completion agendas that respond to President Obama's ambitious goal for becoming the world leader in higher education attainment by 2020, and the shift to performance-based funding that has resulted from this goal (Hurley, et al., 2012).

With regard to tuition policy, there persist concerns about tuition prices and caps as state funding for higher education continues to fall short of the needs posed by

growing enrollments, which result in less funding per student and the shift to the student and his or her family of the burden of increased tuition. Since students and their families are expected to compensate for the ever-increasing costs of higher education, it is not surprising that state student grant program funding and reform is cited as a major concern, as states continue to cut both need-and-merit based financial aid and as the Federal Pell Grant Program undergoes the changes outlined previously. Additionally college readiness is at the forefront of policy concerns, because states are compelled to meet ambitious college completion goals with shrinking or limited resources; colleges are being measured by their output of performance indicators, but their input of prepared students is not always considered (Hurley, et al., 2012).

Finally, veterans' education and immigrant policy play a role in state policy concerns. Because the number of veterans using education benefits is steadily increasing, government policy for implementation and the institutions of higher education struggle to come to terms with questions of implementation concerning these benefits. As regards immigration policy, unresolved issues about unauthorized immigrants persist because concerns about undocumented college students come to the forefront. Policy is implemented either to restrict or expand these students' access to educational opportunities (Hurley, et al., 2012).

## Future Implications

Each of the concerns cited by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, aside from immigration policy, has been discussed at length in the previous chapters. As each of these, along with additional factors, has been considered, it has become increasingly evident that the state of the nation's higher education system is at a pivotal intersection of change and challenge. Higher education is an extremely important factor in the nation's economy, in the overall well-being of its citizens, and in the pursuit of upward social mobility.

As the importance and impact of higher education has become fully recognized and appreciated, the involvement of state and national governance has increased and changed. Overwhelmingly, the agenda of increasing access to and affordability of higher education is at the forefront of most legislative discussions. Our nation recognizes the need to provide an opportunity for higher education to all of its citizens. As a response, it has worked to sustain and implement numerous initiatives focusing on access and affordability, as we have seen. Additionally, some of the most recent government policy has directly addressed the importance of higher education, has resulted in billions of dollars in funding for education initiatives, and has begun to restructure the funding formulas with which most higher education institutions are familiar.

The current environment is in flux. There are numerous threats to higher education, to our global economy, to our citizens, and to the greater good that higher education provides. With these threats come responses that are often promising steps



toward an equitable and accessible system. As the nation continues to take these steps and respond with various initiatives and policies, it must focus access for all. The impact of these changes must be viewed from all angles, in particular to ensure that these initiatives do not preclude, or even discriminate against, those of lower socio-economic status or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Since it has become increasingly clear that those of a disadvantaged socio-economic status face barriers to the access and affordability of higher education, it becomes evident that the nation must move forward with initiatives while being extremely mindful of this concern. We need to realize that social inequality exists and constitutes a significant obstacle in the attainment of higher education. Consequently, our nation must recognize that there is no “quick fix” that can be made to remedy this issue. However, if we are to maintain education as the “great equalizer” and the primary means for upward social mobility, our nation must work diligently to provide greater equity in the educational opportunities provided.

Increasing equity in opportunity will not be easy and it will not happen quickly, but measures to achieve this should be considered by looking to best practices and embracing a broad perspective when making significant decisions concerning education. Evidence of the nation’s focus on providing equity in opportunity, in particular in terms of affordability, can be seen in one of the most recent national initiatives, the College Scorecard, developed in February, 2013, under the Obama administration. This resource serves to empower families to make wise investments in higher education by providing

key data about the costs, graduation rates, loan default rates, average amount borrowed, and post-graduation employment associated with each institution of higher education (The White House, 2013). The College Scorecard is a good example of a national initiative that takes a vested interest in providing greater equity in educational opportunities.

We live in a nation of checks and balances, with multiple political parties concerned with their respective agendas. As a result, we will continue to experience ebbs and flows in the fiscal support for and focus on educational opportunities and equity. As a nation we need to accept this; we need to react to these changes, and whenever possible we need to be proactive. States are reacting to completion agendas and sustaining equity in educational opportunity by implementing bonuses for credit and degree completion by low-income and adult students. Additionally, because of competing priorities that limit post-secondary enrollment option participation for some students, some states have reacted by establishing the dual credit program—a smart solution for providing early access to higher education.

States as well as the nation can be proactive by working to increase early learning opportunities to better prepare all students for the pursuit of a higher education. As a nation, we can also look to our systems of higher education and truly examine the equity in the admissions requirements of selective colleges and universities. We need to examine further what inequities standardized testing presents and the weight given to these standardized test scores in admitting students. Furthermore, we can learn from

states such as Missouri that consider both the social merits of students and their academic merits in awarding state scholarship funds.

Additionally, states and the nation as a whole should continually review and assess their systems of higher education with respect to transfer modules and articulation agreements, as well as some of the behaviors supported by specific institutions. We need to consider how important it is that with adequate guidance for a student, every college credit earned is a college credit that counts. We also need to measure and balance continually the flexibility of attendance provided by open-access institutions and some of the negative behaviors and undesirable patterns of decreased persistence that result from that policy.

There is no one way to make opportunities for higher education more equitable. It is a matter of collective efforts and reflective initiatives. This is unlikely to come about easily. We cannot expect to see significant changes in a short period of time. Equity in educational opportunities will require persistence; it will also require that we pause to consider a “bottom up” approach to our higher education policy, as we have so recently experienced a “top down” approach that fails to acknowledge some of the primary but most significant concerns in the success of an initiative or legislation. Additionally, we need to recognize as a nation that such legislation is only as good as it is applied, both in practice and in fiscal support.

As multiple concerns surrounding higher education and its accessibility and affordability are addressed, in particular in terms of equity of opportunity, higher

education has been positioned as an extremely important factor in individuals' health, the local and global economy, and the overall well-being of society. Consequently, higher education should be affordable and accessible to all Americans who wish to pursue a higher education, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, or family background. As our nation encounters challenges in higher education and responds to them, it must continue to acknowledge the greater agenda, it must embrace and promote equity, and it must aspire to maintain and develop what for decades has been seen as the "great equalizer".

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