DEREK BOK

HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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TO CAMERON AND NICHOLAS AND ERIK AND ANNIKA

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In the modern world, colleges and universities have assumed an importance far beyond the
role in earlier times. They are now the country's chief supplier of three ingredients essenti
to national progress—new discoveries in science, technology, and other fields of inquir
expert knowledge of the kind essential to the work of most important institutions; and wel
trained adults with the skills required to practice the professions, manage a wide variety o
organizations, and perform an increasing proportion of the more demanding jobs in a
advanced, technologically sophisticated economy.* In addition, they help to strengthen ou
democracy by educating its future leaders, preparing students to be active, knowledgeab
citizens, and offering informed critiques of government programs and policies. Not least, the
supply the knowledge and ideas that create new industries, protect us from disease, preserv
and enrich our culture, and inform us about our history, our environment, our society, an
ourselves.

Because of the essential role that colleges and universities play, almost everyone has
stake in having them perform well. By several measures, they have succeeded handsomely.
a recent ranking compiled by a group of Chinese scholars, all but three of the twenty highes
rated universities in the world were located in the United States.† More than half of all Nob
laureates in science and economics since World War II did their most important work whi
serving on faculties in this country. Our colleges and graduate schools have long been th
destination of choice for students around the world who have the chance to study outsic
their own country. Because of these achievements, more and more nations are adapting the
systems of higher education to conform more closely to our model.

The worldwide respect accorded to American higher education should be a source o
satisfaction to many people, not least to those who work in the academy. Ironically
however, this newfound prominence has brought many problems in its wake. No longer ar
colleges and universities left to function more or less as they please. As they have grown
size and importance, they have attracted closer scrutiny from each of the constituenci
affected by their performance. State legislators want to know what taxpayers and parents ar
getting for all the money spent on public higher education. Politicians and med
commentators pay attention to what colleges are teaching and to the ideas of professors o
matters of public concern. Employers ask whether the students graduating from our colleg
and professional schools are well enough trained for the jobs they are hired to d
Communities take an increasing interest in what universities are contributing to the loc
economy and wonder whether they should pay more taxes to the cities and towns in whic
they sit.

This added attention has produced a bumper crop of complaints. Whatever the world ma
think about the quality of American colleges and universities, the public here at home is fa
from satisfied. Parents feel that tuitions are too high and that too little is done to hold dow
costs. Their children struggle to repay the loans incurred to pay for their college educatio
Legislators complain of waste and inefficiency, of low graduation rates, of a reluctance to b
held accountable for performance. Employers grumble that far too many graduates cann

write clearly, think analytically, work collaboratively, deal with other people effectively, o
observe proper ethical standards. Conservatives charge that faculties display a marked liber
bias, while critics on the left insist that universities are too beholden to corporate interest
Meanwhile, editorial writers chastise college presidents for lacking a vision for the
institutions or a clear voice of wisdom on issues of national concern.

It is tempting to make light of these criticisms and point to the unequaled global stature o
American higher education as proof of the excellence of our colleges and universities. Yet
would be a mistake to make too much of this reputation. The impressive global rankings o
American universities reflect the accomplishments of only a handful of institutions, and eve
the high regard in which the latter are held is largely due to the excellence of their researc
rather than the quality of education they provide.* No one yet has managed to measure ho
well our professors teach or how much our students learn, let alone compare the results wi
those of other nations.

It is also likely that our impressive standing in the world owes less to the success of ou
own system than it does to the weakness of foreign universities, which were lon
overregulated, underfinanced, and neglected by their governments until their importance t
the economy was finally recognized late in the twentieth century. In recent years, howeve
member states in the European Union have agreed to invest more heavily in higher educatio
and have resolved, collectively, to lead the world in scientific research by 2020.[1] German
and France have recently appropriated special funds to develop universities of internation
distinction. China has been expanding its universities and enlarging their student populatio
at astounding rates, while making remarkable strides in increasing the number of scientis
and published research papers.[2]

To be sure, the ambitious plans of these nations may not be realized within the time fram
set by their leaders. It takes much longer than most public officials think to bring about majo
academic reform, let alone build great universities and produce outstanding research, and fa
more than money is required. Still, it would be unwise to take the preeminence of ou
universities for granted. Like nations, academic institutions can start to decline at the ver
time their status in the world stands highest.

One can already detect warning signs that such a fate could eventually overtake America
higher education. For generations, our colleges enrolled and graduated a much highe
proportion of young people than any other nation in the world. In the past thirty year
however, as other parts of the globe have made the transition to mass higher education,
growing number of countries have surpassed us on both counts. Our attractiveness to studen
abroad may also be on the wane. Although America still attracts the largest number o
overseas students, our share has dropped sharply in the last decade, and many nations no
enroll much higher proportions of foreign students than the United States.[3]

In addition to the growing challenges from overseas, our colleges and universities a
facing major changes that are transforming the environment in which they functio
Technological advances have brought new methods of teaching and research. Improvemen
in communication, most notably the Internet, have vastly expanded the potential studen
audience to include people of all ages in all areas of the world. New providers, notably fo
profit universities and online organizations, have created alternative models for deliverin
instruction that are starting to make inroads on the work of traditional colleges an

universities. Growing numbers of working adults, first-generation students, and graduates o troubled urban high schools are seeking college degrees, creating added problems for thos who teach them. Meanwhile, young Americans attending college need a better education tha ever before now that many jobs they are accustomed to holding in fields such as accountin computer programming, and corporate research can be outsourced overseas to colleg graduates willing to work for much lower salaries.

The challenges facing American higher education give rise to several questions. Ho vigorously are our universities responding to their emerging problems and opportunitie Which of the many criticisms of their activities are truly valid and which are unfounded o highly exaggerated? What can our colleges do to improve their performance and how ca such reforms be best brought about?

In addressing these questions, I will try to take a comprehensive view of American highe education and examine not merely undergraduate studies but graduate and profession training too; not education *or* research but both together; not simply PhD-grantin universities but two- and four-year colleges along with for-profit providers as well. On caveat, however, is in order. Although I will discuss the role of government at various point my principal aim in writing this study is to consider what colleges and universities can do t improve themselves, rather than to argue about what others should do to help them thrive.

By attempting such a comprehensive study, I hope to offer something of interest to all o the various audiences with a stake in the performance of higher education—policy-maker academic leaders, faculty members, trustees, even students and parents. I have a speci concern for readers who have chosen to enter that particular vineyard known as "academ administration." Like so many others who have ventured down this path, I had n opportunity to study higher education in detail before finding myself consumed by i demands. Only after my active service ended did I find the time to read deeply about th subject that had already filled my life for a quarter of a century. Having done so, I often loo back with some chagrin, realizing how differently I might have acted had I understood the what I only came to appreciate much later. If I can offer something useful to those whos opportunity to serve still lies before them, this book will have been well worth writing.

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[*] According to the National Governors Association, "the driving force behind the 21st century economy is knowledge, a developing human capital is the best way to ensure prosperity." National Governors Association (2001), Policy Position R44, Postsecondary Education Policy, http://www.nga.org. Similarly, economists rank additional investment in educati and research as a top priority among federal policies to increase long-term economic growth. See, e.g., Claudia Goldin a Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology* (2008).

[†] Jonathan R. Cole, *The Great American University: Its Role to Preeminence, Its Indispensable National Role, Why It Must Protected* (2009), p. 515. Not all world rankings treat American universities quite so kindly, perhaps because they are n based as heavily on research as the Chinese compilation but attempt to give considerable weight to the quality of educatio The 2011–12 Times Higher Education World University rankings, for example, published by the British magazine *Tim Higher Education*, gives US universities only fourteen of the top twenty plac http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2011-2012/top-400.html.

[*] The so-called CQ World University Rankings do attempt to take the quality of education into account. Interestingly, the rankings (for 2011–12) place only thirteen American universities in the top twenty and even fewer—just seven of o universities—in the next thirty. http://www.top universities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2011.

PART I

THE CONTEXT

FOREWORD (I)

There is more than one way to organize a study of higher education. One can proceed, as th book does, by discussing each of the most important functions of colleges and universities- undergraduate education, professional training, and research. One can also follow th example of David Riesman and Christopher Jencks in their influential 1960s volume—*Th Academic Revolution*—and arrange the material by types of institution: liberal arts college research universities, religiously affiliated institutions, and the like.[1] There are doubtle other plausible ways to divide the pie.

Whatever method one chooses, it is helpful to begin with an overview of the system which our colleges and universities function—the different kinds of institutions that exis their purposes and goals, the influence that governments exert on their behavior, and the wa they are organized and governed. Such information has a bearing on what one can reasonab expect universities to accomplish, the strengths and weaknesses they possess, and th prospects for bringing about any needed reforms.

Providing such an overview is the aim of the initial section of this book. The first chapte analyzes the nature of our higher education system—the principal types of institutions contains, the extent to which they are controlled or influenced by government, the way which they interact with one another, and how they are financed. In order to bring out ke points about our system, its main features are compared with those of other advance industrial nations. Not surprisingly, the characteristics that make our colleges and universiti distinctive do much to explain why they have managed to achieve such an enviab reputation around the world. At the same time, these same characteristics harbor tensio and vulnerabilities that could lead to problems and limit what higher education ca accomplish.

The second chapter in this sequence considers the purposes that shape the behavior colleges and universities. Not all of these institutions share the same ends, although each engaged in one way or another with teaching students. Some colleges pursue a single goa most universities have several. Where multiple goals exist, they may conflict with each othe or complement one another. How wisely individual colleges and universities select their ain and what kinds of programs they create in order to achieve them have a lot to do with ho effectively they perform, and how well the system as a whole meets the full range of need that society expects it to serve.

Chapter 2 also considers the tendency for universities to grow continuously and eventual strain the capacity of academic leaders to oversee and guide the organization. Such a proce may be inevitable for an institution with so many opportunities to serve and so man inventive individuals who perceive the possibilities and try to make the most of them. Y some kinds of growth are needless and ill-advised. The discussion in this chapter tries identify them and suggest the difference between prudent and unwise expansion.

The third and final chapter in this section describes how individual colleges and universiti are typically governed—who within them exercises influence and authority and how th distribution of power affects the way in which they behave. Some critics have warned th

defects in the current system of governance are weakening universities to a degree th
seriously interferes with their ability to adapt to changing needs and opportunities. Such
charge warrants close attention. Whether or not it is correct, one must understand universi
governance in order to recognize who is responsible for any problems that occur and who
support will be needed to bring about desirable reform.

Rounding out this initial section is a brief afterword to introduce the values that affect ho
a college or university carries out its work. These values include various rights and privilege
such as academic freedom, that are widely considered essential to effective teaching an
research. Also included are responsibilities long recognized by the academic profession, som
of which belong to professors and others to those who occupy leadership positions in colleg
and universities. These norms, sometimes codified but often not, define the shared ends an
means that bring some order to what could otherwise become an inchoate collection
independent teachers and scholars.

Academic values also affect the efforts of campus leaders to maintain and improve the
universities. Proposed reforms that offend these values often meet resistance from the facult
and ultimately fail. What is less understood is that academic values can also be a powerf
force for constructive change, since faculties will usually experience discomfort and agree
reforms once they are persuaded that existing practices conflict with the principles an
responsibilities that help define their professional identity and shape the aspirations that giv
meaning to their lives.

CHAPTER ONE

THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

AMERICA'S INITIAL VENTURE in the realm of higher learning gave no hint of futur
accomplishments. Nor could the handful of young men who arrived in Cambridg
Massachusetts, in 1638 to enter the nation's first college have had the faintest idea of wh
the future had in store for American universities. Before the year was out, the head of th
tiny institution, Nathaniel Eaton, had been charged with assault for beating a tutor almost
death, while his wife stood accused of serving too little beer to the students and adulterati
their food. Master Eaton was eventually dismissed and promptly fled, allegedly taking muc
of the endowment with him, whereupon the college shut down for an entire academic year.[1]

From these modest beginnings, higher education in the United States has grown to becom
a vast enterprise comprising some 4,500 different colleges and universities, more than 2
million students, 1.4 million faculty members, and aggregate annual expenditures exceedi
400 billion dollars. Within this system are schools ranging from tiny colleges numbering
few hundred students to huge universities with enrollments exceeding 50,000. For descripti
purposes, however, the system can be broken down into several kinds of institutions, ea
with its own distinctive aims and characteristics.

RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Within this category one finds renowned centers of learning such as Columbia, Yale, a
Princeton that were founded before the American Revolution; a substantial number
flagship public universities dating back to the nineteenth century; a handful of priva
institutions, such as Chicago, Stanford, and Cornell, created through the generosity
wealthy industrialists following the Civil War; and a few newcomers like Brandeis and t
University of California, San Diego, that were begun after World War II.

Although there are only approximately two hundred research universities, they account f
a large majority of the PhDs awarded, most of the degrees granted in law and medicine, a
more than a quarter of all the students in the entire system.[2] The most prominent—say t
top sixty or so—dominate the national and international rankings, award at least half of t
PhDs, and receive the greater part of the billions of dollars spent each year by the feder
government on academic research. They have the largest budgets, the biggest endowmen
the best professional schools, and the most extensive libraries. Most of their colleges acce
less than half of the students who apply for admission. A few are extremely selective, turni
away several applicants for every one they admit.

COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES

There are more than seven hundred so-called comprehensive universities offering a wi

variety of professional master's and doctoral programs while also carrying on at least
modest amount of research.[3] Many are public and have large undergraduate enrollment
Their student bodies are diverse, with higher percentages of commuters, ethnic minoritie
part-time students, and adults over thirty years of age than one would normally fin
attending a major research university. They are rarely very selective in their admission
policies. Instead, they typically accept most of those who apply, and their students tend t
have significantly lower high school grade-point averages and college admission test score
than those enrolled in the research universities.

Many comprehensives evolved from technical colleges or from normal schools that traine
teachers for the public schools. Now that they have grown in size and have mounted a wid
variety of vocationally oriented degree programs, they have sometimes struggled to defin
their distinctive mission. A few have managed to become research universities. Many mor
that are located in cities have identified themselves as "metropolitan universities," wi
special responsibilities to serve the needs of their surrounding urban area. As such, the
concentrate on offering programs to match the employment opportunities in their city and i
environs. Much of their research is oriented toward the practical problems of loc
employers, government agencies, and community organizations. In addition, they frequent
offer a variety of special services for local public schools, community colleges, sma
businesses, and other entities that can benefit from their expertise and technical assistance.

Four-Year Colleges

A very different group are the almost one thousand, mainly private, nonprofit colleges
Some are more than two hundred years old and were begun under the sponsorship of
religious denomination. They tend to be much smaller than research or comprehensiv
universities, often enrolling fewer than two thousand students. A century ago, most of thes
colleges would have concentrated primarily or even exclusively on the liberal arts. As mor
and more young people have come to college to prepare for a career, private colleges hav
found it necessary to offer vocational programs in order to attract enough students to surviv
Only a minority still award less than half of their undergraduate degrees to liberal ar
majors, and no more than twenty-five are exclusively devoted to this form of education.

A few private colleges, such as Amherst and Williams, attract outstanding students an
offer an education of the highest quality. With more applicants than they can accept an
substantial endowments contributed by grateful alumni, they are highly successful an
financially secure. Once one moves beyond these fortunate few, however, the situatio
changes dramatically. Most of the remaining private colleges are hard-pressed to compete fo
undergraduates with state-subsidized public universities that charge much lower tuition
Many constantly struggle to balance the books, and scores of them over the past fifty yea
have had to give up the fight and close their doors.[5]

Community Colleges

Beyond universities and private four-year colleges are more than one thousand two-yea

nonprofit community colleges.[6] All but approximately eighty-five are public, supported b state and local funds. Together, they account for almost 40 percent of all undergradua enrollments.

The community college movement began early in the twentieth century chiefly as a mea to accommodate students who wanted a BA degree but needed a lower-cost school close home that they could attend for two years before transferring to a four-year colleg Although many community colleges had long offered job training as well as liberal ar programs, it was only after World War II that vocational education began to attract majority of the students enrolled. By now, in addition to liberal arts courses, mo community colleges offer a wide variety of vocational degree programs along with shorte courses, often developed in cooperation with nearby employers, that train students f specific jobs.

In contrast to the faculties of four-year institutions, only a small minority of those teachi in community colleges are PhDs. In earlier decades, many of their instructors came to the from high school teaching. Increasing numbers now come from industry, bringing practic skills they can teach to students in vocational programs. Most of these instructors are on part-time and either hold other jobs of a different kind or piece together several part-tim teaching assignments at different educational institutions.

Community colleges have enjoyed a boom over the past several decades. From 1963 2006, their enrollments grew by 740 percent compared with approximately 200 perce growth for four-year colleges. Together, community colleges currently enroll over seve million students attending for credit. In keeping with the American ideal of opportunity f all, they offer a chance at a college education to many people who might not otherwi enroll. In doing so, they attract students who, if anything, are even more diverse in ag ethnicity, and ambition than those of the typical metropolitan university. Sixty percent students who enroll attend part-time, and 80 percent have full- or part-time jobs. Forty-fi percent are minorities and 42 percent are first-generation college students. Many arriv lacking basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics and are required to take remedi courses and complete them successfully before they can begin taking regular classes f credit.

There is a continuing debate over whether community colleges increase or diminish t number of students who eventually earn a BA degree. For some, the chance to enroll in nearby, inexpensive community college undoubtedly makes it possible to beg undergraduate studies and then move on to a four-year college and earn a BA degree. Y graduation rates are low, even when one takes account of the academic background of thos who enter. Many students who could have qualified for a four-year college but elected start their postsecondary education in a community college never transfer, often because the receive inadequate counseling, or are turned off by indifferently taught courses, or ar diverted into vocational classes that do not qualify for credit at a four-year college. In a only some 20–25 percent of those who enroll in a community college eventually transfer to four-year institution, many fewer than the two-thirds or more who claim an intention to so when they enter.[7] Whether more students would have enrolled in a four-year college an earned a degree had community colleges not existed is a question hotly debated but st unresolved.[8]

Beyond the several categories mentioned above lies a large and growing for-profit secto composed of more than thirteen hundred schools. Roughly half of these give college degree the rest are two-year colleges or institutions that grant certificates signifying completion of training program for a specific occupation such as cosmetology or the culinary arts.[9] Fo profits chiefly offer vocational instruction, especially for older students seeking to prepar themselves for higher-paying jobs. Collectively, they award approximately 10 percent of a college degrees.

While most for-profits are small proprietary schools, a few are huge, with tens thousands, even hundreds of thousands of students. The largest fifteen alone enroll almost 6 percent of all students in the entire for-profit sector. With branches in a number of states an even overseas, these mega-universities have constituted the fastest-growing segment in th entire higher education system, both in traditional face-to-face classes and in onlin instruction.[*] Over the past two years, however, enrollments at these institutions have levele off or declined following “a steady drumroll of negative publicity about the sector’s recruitin abuses, low graduation rates and high default rates [on student loans].”[10]

Unlike public universities and most private, nonprofit institutions, for-profits rely almo entirely on tuition payments as a source of revenue. Since the vast majority of their studen have modest incomes, they are heavily subsidized by Pell Grants and educational loans fro the federal government. In 2008–9, although for-profits accounted for less than 10 percent total undergraduate enrollments, their students were awarded 24 percent of all Pell Gran and 26 percent of federally guaranteed loans while incurring larger debts than nonprof students.[11]

For-profit universities rarely compete directly with liberal arts colleges or researc universities. Their typical student is older, part-time, often employed and intent on acquirin the skills to qualify for a higher-paying job. By cutting costs, providing year-round educatio renting space, and doing without research, athletics, extracurricular activities, and othe nonessential amenities and services, for-profits can charge a tuition well below that of mo private nonprofit colleges and still earn a tidy surplus. The best of them offer convenien locations, schedule classes in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate workin students, and devote much effort to placing their graduates and keeping their courses closel aligned with opportunities in the job market. They have aggressively pursued onlin instruction, providing added convenience for working adults who find it difficult to travel t classes. By concentrating on serving the needs of their older, vocationally oriented students a effectively and efficiently as possible, they offer a welcome alternative for many individua who might otherwise attend a community college or not enroll at all.

Despite these accomplishments, the record of the for-profits is not unblemished. Whi some of them seem to perform well, others have high dropout rates and limited success helping students find the jobs for which they have ostensibly been trained. They a extremely aggressive in recruiting students, sometimes spending more on expanding the enrollments than they do on instruction. A few have accepted applicants with very lo prospects of graduating or finding a desirable job. A recent investigation by the Gener Accounting Office found that each of the fifteen for-profits it examined had engaged

deceptive practices or made misleading statements in its effort to enlist as many applicants a
possible.[12]

Once enrolled in a for-profit college, many students drop out before completing the studies. Thereafter, they default on their educational loans at a much higher rate than the counterparts in any other type of college. Six years after entering a for-profit institutio students are more likely to be unemployed and out of school than students of simila qualifications who entered not-for-profit institutions. Their average earnings tend to be 8- percent lower.[13] For the federal government, therefore, whose student grants and guarantee loans provide most of the revenue received by the larger for-profits, this segment of th higher education system represents a mixed blessing.

THE SPECIAL NATURE OF OUR HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Throughout most of its history, American higher education has differed in several respec from the university systems of other advanced industrial democracies. While the differenc have narrowed in recent years, they are still sufficiently important to give our system special flavor. Much of what is most praiseworthy about higher education in this country (a well as much that is troubling) can be linked in one way or another to these distinctiv characteristics.

Diversity of Institutions

America's colleges and universities are unusually numerous and diverse. Most of them a private, although collectively they enroll only 20 percent of all students. Some institution are tiny, numbering only a few hundred students, while others are very large, wi enrollments of fifty thousand or more. Some have very limited resources while others hav huge budgets and multibillion-dollar endowments. Many are stand-alone colleges, but othe are much larger universities containing a wide variety of graduate and professional schools. few colleges (about 10 percent) are truly selective in the sense that they attract a much larg number of applicants than they can admit. The rest accept at least a majority, and many tal virtually all those who apply. Some private colleges and universities are connected religious denominations but most are not. The vast majority are coeducational, but a handf enroll only women. Still others are almost exclusively attended by black students or Nativ Americans. More than one thousand specialize in a single field of study such as business, th arts, or allied health professions, while others offer scores of different programs. Within suc a varied array, almost any student can find a college that caters to a particular speci interest, such as the performing arts, or foreign languages, or conservative religious values.

Highly selective colleges, such as Princeton, Stanford, or Amherst, offer a more intense, al encompassing experience for their students than one normally finds in other countries. Mo undergraduates in these institutions live and eat their meals in residences on campus. The can participate in a bewildering variety of extracurricular activities sponsored by the colleg —athletic teams, orchestras, campus newspapers, political clubs, community servi activities, and countless others. They can become active in campus government and play least an advisory role in matters of curriculum and student life. Their residence halls ar

fraternities and sororities organize dances, parties, and other social activities. Student affai offices arrange a wide array of public lectures, concerts, dramatic productions, ar intramural athletics. In short, these colleges create a vast smorgasbord of activities, academ and extracurricular, with which to fill most of the waking hours of their students' lives. I doing so, they offer an experience very different from that provided in most other countrie where universities do little more than offer instruction, leaving students to organize the extracurricular lives as they see fit.

Although the residential college just described represents most people's image c undergraduate life in America, less than 20 percent of students actually share this experienc today. The vast majority of colleges, including almost all community colleges, rarely house substantial fraction of their undergraduates or play nearly as active a role as a residenti campus in organizing undergraduates' social and extracurricular lives. Instead, studen typically commute from home or live in apartments in the surrounding community. The tend to work longer hours at outside jobs, and many of them attend only part-time and tal more than four years to complete their studies. A majority pursue vocational majors and g to work immediately after they graduate instead of spending additional years in professional school.

More than most other countries, the United States is a nation of second (or third or fourtl chances. Students who do poorly in high school can still find colleges to enter and eventual earn a BA degree. Students who drop out of college can enter another institution at a late point in their lives on a full- or part-time basis. They can even pursue a degree online withou quitting their job or changing their place of residence. At present, more than 40 percent of a undergraduates in this country are over the age of twenty-four, and close to 40 percent stuc part-time.

In contrast to the tradition in Europe, most Americans entering the so-called learne professions, notably law and medicine, do not begin their professional education until the have completed college. The same is true of students who hope to become professor although most of these will have majored as undergraduates in the same discipline in whic they eventually plan to receive their PhD. Even vocational majors must usually take at lea one year of coursework designed to give them a broad foundation of learning. While th contrast with European practice is real, it is not quite as great as it might seem, since some c the breadth that American students receive in college is incorporated into professional studi in Europe, and some is provided by the secondary schools, which tend to keep studen longer and cover more ground than most high schools in the United States.

The Role of Government

American colleges and universities have been subject to less government supervision ar control than their counterparts in most other nations. In some countries, such as France ar Germany, virtually all institutions of higher education are officially treated as agencies of th state. Their professors are formally classified as civil servants, and their budgets ar administrative operations have been subject to detailed government oversight. Througho Europe, universities continue to receive almost all of their funding from the governmer although policy-makers in most of these nations are now taking steps to encoura

institutions to seek other sources of support as well.

Because our higher education system has a large private sector along with a federal syste in which much funding and oversight of universities is provided by the states, it is harder create a coherent and effective national policy for higher education than is the case in mo other countries. The federal government does have power to institute a national researc policy, since state governments give little support of this kind to universities. Even her however, the ability to effectuate a unitary policy is complicated by the fact that sever federal departments and agencies distribute their own research money (not to mention th funds provided for research by industry and foundations). Whether the lack of a stron national policy is considered a help or a hindrance depends very much on one's attituc toward government.

Of course, American colleges and universities are hardly free from government influenc As in every country, they are subject to general legislation, such as laws forbidding the use drugs or prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, religion, age, gender, and sexu orientation. As universities have become more expensive and more important to the publi their activities have been subjected to increasing regulation. A few state legislatures hav even passed laws requiring public universities to teach a particular course or prescribin minimum teaching loads for faculty. For the most part, however, state lawmakers hav refrained from regulating matters of curriculum or teaching methods.

The federal government is the principal source of research funding and financial aid f students, and officials naturally have an interest in how the funds are used. But financial a goes directly to students and is seldom accompanied by restrictions on institutional polic Research support is subject to detailed regulations to provide accountability in the use of th funds and appropriate rules for safety and the protection of human subjects. Neverthele most research grants go directly to individual professors based on recommendations by stuc groups composed of established researchers who typically belong to university facultie Thus, while the government sets priorities, professors exert much influence over how th funds are spent and which investigators receive support.

Because private colleges and universities rarely receive direct funding from their sta legislature, they are usually free of any control by state officials over their budgets tuitions. Public universities are in a far different position, since they have always receive substantial sums from their state legislature or municipality. For several decades, howeve these subsidies have been diminishing as a percentage of the operating budgets of sta universities. In fact, several leading public universities now obtain a smaller fraction of the total budget from their state than they do from tuition payments or federal research grant Paradoxically, however, while state funding has dwindled, the same is not necessarily true state supervision. In response, public universities in several states have sought agreements free themselves, at least partially, from government control in exchange for accepting le direct state support.[14]

Sources of Funding

American colleges and universities, public as well as private, have traditionally been free seek funds from any source. Public universities have long been allowed to charge studen

tuition, a practice only recently introduced in Europe on a more modest scale. As a resul
households contribute more to the total expenditures of American colleges and universiti
than they do in any other country. By successfully drawing on multiple sources of suppor
our higher education system is one of the few that receives a majority of its financing (5
percent) from private sources. Through vigorous pursuit of their various sources of suppor
American colleges and universities enjoy the highest levels of funding of any system in th
world.[15] Counting all forms of support, expenditures on higher education in this countr
amount to 2.4 percent of national income, roughly twice the average level for members o
the European Union.*

The prominent role of America's private universities and the long tradition of seeking fun
from nongovernmental sources have helped to create larger differences in size, wealth, an
reputation than one would normally find in other countries. Thanks to generous donors,
small but growing fraction of American universities have managed to accumulate larg
endowments that yield a substantial annual income to help defray their operating expense
At least seventy-five institutions currently boast funds totaling more than one billion dollar
an achievement matched by very few foreign universities. At the same time, however, mo
American colleges and universities make do with far less money and much lower salarie
smaller libraries, and less impressive facilities.

Competition

A final distinguishing characteristic of our higher education system is the intensity with whic
its institutions compete with one another. Their rivalry extends to almost every area o
university activity—attracting students, recruiting faculty, raising money, and, most visibl
engaging in intercollegiate sports. The more prominent colleges and universities constant
vie with one another for prestige, aware that the better their reputation, the easier it will b
to raise money and attract able students and faculty. Community colleges and metropolita
universities are less inclined to strive for prestige. But they too face increasing pressure fro
the large for-profit colleges that are recruiting students aggressively. Many small priva
colleges, in particular, have to struggle constantly to attract enough students away fro
lower-cost public institutions.

Competition in higher education has long been encouraged in America by the presence o
private colleges and universities that vie with one another and with public institutions. Aft
World War II, the rivalry grew much keener as improved transportation enabled colleges t
recruit students nationwide, and federal agencies began awarding growing amounts o
research funding to university scientists on a competitive basis. The decision by Congress
the 1970s to give financial aid directly to students gave a further boost to competition b
enabling more young people to consider distant colleges as well as ones close to home, thu
encouraging universities to search more widely for promising applicants.

Competition has increased even further in recent decades because of the appearance o
highly publicized rankings that compare the overall quality of hundreds of colleges an
graduate and professional schools. These ratings have touched off an intense struggle amon
institutions to outdo one another in the research reputations of the faculty and the academ
qualifications of students. Although the methods used to create the rankings are regular

(and justly) criticized, the results do seem to influence student choices and even priva
donations, causing colleges to try all the harder to reach a higher rung on the ladder.[16]

A Growing Convergence

The discussion thus far has emphasized the qualities that have long distinguished America
universities from their counterparts abroad. In the last twenty-five years, however, high
education systems in most advanced nations have been gradually growing more alike. A
research and education have come to be looked upon as vital ingredients of economic growt
countries with highly developed, knowledge-based economies are all being driven by
common desire to strengthen their universities. In doing so, most have been influenced by th
success of the American system and have consciously attempted to adopt many of its feature

In an effort to harmonize the educational practices of its member countries and encourag
the movement of students from one institution to another, the European Union has recentl
adopted a structure of degrees—undergraduate, master's, and doctoral—that rough
resembles our own.[17] To attract more students from other parts of the world, a number o
departments and even a few entire universities in Europe and elsewhere are now teaching a
or many of their courses in English. Holland has even begun building three-year liberal ar
colleges taught in English and modeled on American institutions such as Amherst ar
Williams.

Many nations have also changed the way they train professors and researchers to resemb
more closely the doctoral programs in this country. Funding for research has been increase
to come closer to the prevailing levels in America. Several governments, including those o
China, South Korea, France, Germany, and even Saudi Arabia, have set out to build "worl
class" universities resembling those of the United States.[18]

Having made the transition to mass higher education, European governments, like our ow
are struggling to pay the heavy costs of educating ever-larger numbers of students whi
building a first-rate research capability. In response, their officials have pressed universiti
to seek outside funding by restricting the amount of money directly appropriated by th
state. As in this country, policy-makers have encouraged academic leaders to see
partnerships with industry, create spin-off companies built on university research, and engag
in other profit-seeking ventures. Throughout Europe (save in Scandinavia), governments hav
begun to allow their universities to charge tuition, although the maximum amounts permitte
have tended to be well below those commonly charged in the United States. Thus far, th
efforts to create new sources of support have produced only limited results; governmen
appropriations still account for 75–85 percent of university budgets throughout most o
Europe. In time, however, outside funding is likely to assume a larger role in paying for th
mounting costs of higher education.

In an attempt to stimulate improvement, lawmakers in most European countries hav
begun to introduce more competition into the system through national rankings o
universities and competitive bidding for research funding. Many governments have also trie
to encourage entrepreneurial vigor by relaxing some regulatory controls over the plannin
budgeting, and day-to-day administration of their universities, and giving academic leade
and their professional staffs more authority within their institution. In return, policy-make

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