

CALL FOR ARTICLES

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences

ISSUE AND CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences invites paper submissions for its upcoming issue on higher education.

Although American universities dominate lists of the world's top 100 research universities, postsecondary education in the United States as a whole is generally viewed as uneven at best. Recent international comparisons show that the United States has lost the lead it once had in average educational attainment, and cross-country comparisons of literacy and numeracy among adults suggest that Americans rank in the bottom half of OECD nations on many measures. Among the concerns expressed about the American system are rising tuitions and levels of student debt, large and growing disparities by socioeconomic status in attendance and completion, low levels of degree attainment in science and engineering programs in spite of large government investments, low levels of student effort at many institutions, outdated methods of instruction, and disproportionate growth of administration and administrative regulation. At the same time, participation of under-represented racial and ethnic groups has never been higher, and the college wage premium remains high. Paradoxically, while many observers believe that colleges and universities in the United States are failing to equip students with the skills they need to compete for jobs in a competitive world economy, others argue that faster growth in the number of college graduates would decrease income inequality.

The theme for this issue is the effectiveness of American higher education, a theme intended to be broad enough to include a variety of possible topics bearing on the current performance and future prospects of U.S. higher education institutions. Theoretically informed empirical papers from all social science disciplines are welcome, as are papers drawing on concepts and methods of multiple disciplines. Papers should uncover new knowledge; their methods may be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed. For this issue, the journal invites submission of empirical papers that uncover new knowledge bearing on the effects of practices, policies, and institutions in higher education. They may feature causal models, or they may be mainly descriptive.

These papers could address time-honored topics such as the effects of financial aid and admissions policies on access and degree completion, remediation efforts, peer effects on learning or campus culture, factors associated with attrition, faculty labor market issues, and cost functions. Or they could address empirical questions that have not previously been studied. Below we offer, solely as illustrations, examples of analyses we anticipate would be of interest to the research and policy communities.

What Forces and Policies Affect Rates of Access to Higher Education? College attendance rates remain low among students from the bottom half—and particularly among students from the bottom quarter—of the income distribution. State policies and institutional practices vary in

ways that may either promote or constrain access for these students. States differ in their levels of subsidy to higher education institutions with highs in some of the mineral-rich and traditionally progressive states and lows in several of the New England states. To what extent do these variations affect access? Financial aid policies in the states also vary dramatically. Financial aid for low-income students is comparatively generous in California and far less so in many of the Southern states. Does new evidence exist about whether access is affected by the practices of discounting tuition and offering merit scholarships? For example, does a discounted high tuition have the same effect as an equivalent undiscounted lower tuition? Public universities are under increasing pressure to find new sources of revenue as states have reduced appropriations for higher education. How have institutional efforts to recruit higher-paying out-of-state and international students affected access for in-state low-income students? Curricula may also matter. Do stronger emphases on job-related training, characteristic of four-year colleges and universities in the agricultural Midwest and in the South, encourage greater access among low-income students? Simple density may also matter. Density of public institutions per hundred thousand population, for example, is low in the Northeast, where private colleges are numerous. To what extent does the density of public institutions affect the access of lower-income students?

How Can Colleges and Universities Foster the Success of Under-represented and First-Generation College Students? Although more minority and first-generation students are attending college, their grades and completion rates continue to lag significantly behind those of Asian and white students and students whose parents attended college. At the same time, some institutions have achieved extraordinary success with these students, including high levels of acceptance into prestigious graduate and professional schools and graduation rates that match those of majority students. How do campus cultures, cohort cohesion, and academic support programs facilitate these successes? Which interventions show the most promise for creating greater equality in cognitive development and success rates across racial-ethnic and educational background groups? Which interventions have proven to be less successful?

Which Instructional Practices Lead to Higher Levels of Student Learning in the Classroom? Some observers believe U.S. colleges and universities are on the verge of an effectiveness revolution in undergraduate instruction. A large number of new techniques have been introduced to break down the passivity and sharpen the focus of the lecture hall experience. These include the growing use of structured learning objectives, hooks to capture student interest, pair and share practices to increase interaction, use of clicker technology, case and project based learning, structured feedback on clear and muddy points in lecture, flipped classrooms in which discussion and in-class exercises replace lectures, and of course the incorporation of on-line instruction. What new empirical evidence exists on the effects of such practices on student learning? Which of the new practices produce the largest gains in student learning?

How Do Universities Maximize the Learning that Occurs Outside the Classroom? Not all learning occurs in the classroom or academic study sessions. At a time when online learning has become something of a popular panacea, proponents of bricks-and-mortar campuses have begun to see co-curricular learning as potentially one of the more important and least explored advantages of the physical campus. Through experiences outside the classroom, many

undergraduates learn valuable interpersonal skills and some learn practical skills, such as how to run meetings, market events, and prepare budgets. Unfortunately, many other students spend the majority of their time out of class in pursuits that have little educational value. What do we know about the types of co-curricular learning on campus and the distribution of these learning experiences across subpopulations? What models exist on campuses to foster co-curricular learning and what evidence exists for the effectiveness of these models?

What Institutional Changes Are Required to Raise Four- and Six-Year Graduation Rates?

The United States performs relatively well in providing access but completion statistics suggest that fewer than half who enter post-secondary institutions leave with degrees. For this reason state governors and major philanthropic foundations have focused increasing attention on raising graduation rates, particularly in public universities where completion is often a problem. Do the generally higher completion rates at more selective colleges reflect more than the academic preparation of its incoming students? What have campuses that have raised their four-year graduation rates done to accomplish this outcome? What roles do advising, course plans, curriculum management, changes in student culture, academic support services, and financial aid policies play in these accomplishments? What unintended consequences have occurred due to efforts to increase graduation rates among students who are interested in protecting their grade point averages, their opportunities for internships, and in some cases also their college lifestyles?

Have Externally Mandated Performance Metrics and Performance Funding Mechanisms Improved the Quality of U.S. Higher Education?

States, regional accrediting agencies, and foundations have introduced an array of performance metrics in recent years. In some cases these metrics have been tied to appropriations for institutions. In addition to student learning outcomes and graduation rates, states have lately been exploring the employment statistics of graduates as another performance indicator. The implementation of these metrics has led to predictable forms of padding of statistics, exclusion of lower performing populations, reduced resources in unmeasured areas, and frequent changes due to lobbying and revision of state or agency priorities. What evidence exists that performance metrics have led to better informed consumers? What evidence exists that performance-based funding has improved institutional performance? What evidence exists that they have led to unintended consequences? What policy design and implementation features are necessary to achieve intended results?

Can Campuses Control Costs Without Lowering Quality? College costs have increased at three times the rate of inflation over several decades. This has led to sizable tuition increases and higher levels of student debt. In the highly stratified structure of American higher education, community colleges and regional comprehensives have long offered low cost alternatives to the research university experience. Pressures to contain the costs of research universities have now developed as well in many states. Both the public and the states have indicated a strong interest in improving the capacity of colleges and universities to reduce costs without harming quality. These interests have helped fuel the growth of online courses as well as innovations such as the "no-frills," or \$10,000 degree. What strategies have cost-conscious states and research universities themselves followed to reduce their costs? What effects have these efforts had on the quality of the college experience for students, and the morale and productivity of faculty and staff? Which cost containment strategies have proven to be most promising in terms of preserving quality while reducing costs? Which strategies have led to disappointing results?

How Do For-Profit Institutions Compare to Public and Not-for-Profit Ones? For-profit colleges, universities, and other postsecondary training companies account for a significant share of enrollments and financial aid subsidies, as well as a disproportionately large share of student debt. They are especially important for less affluent students and those outside the traditional college-going age groups. How does the quality of their offerings and the economic payoff for their graduates compare to those in public or nonprofit colleges and universities? How do tuition levels in all three sectors compare to costs, and are there identifiable savings to be achieved through better use of resources?

What Lessons Can the U.S. Learn about Performance of Higher Education from Other Industrialized Countries? Although U.S. higher education is the acknowledged world leader in graduate and professional education, U.S. superiority in other facets of college-level education is not as clear. The United States currently trails many countries in the proportion of its baccalaureate students who graduate in STEM fields. The Australian province of Queensland has pioneered efforts to raise dramatically the quality of undergraduate instruction. Scandinavian countries have shown higher levels of success with students from the bottom half of the income distribution. What can reformers interested in improving the effectiveness of American higher education learn from these apparent successes in other industrialized countries?

Anticipated Timeline

Prospective contributors should submit a CV and an abstract of up to two pages of their study no later than 5 PM EST on April 30, 2014 to journals@rsage.org. A prospective contributor may also submit up to five pages of technical supporting material, but this by no means required or expected. Please put "Higher Education" in the subject line and address the email to Suzanne Nichols, Director of Publications. Only abstracts submitted to journals@rsage.org will be considered. Each paper included in the issue will receive a \$1,000 honorarium when the issue is published. The journal issue is being edited by Steven Brint, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education and Professor of Sociology, Public Policy, and Education at the University of California, Riverside, and Charles Clotfelter, Z. Smith Reynolds Professor of Public Policy and Professor of Economics and Law, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University, but all questions should be directed to journals@rsage.org.

Selected papers will receive notification by the end of May. A draft of selected papers will be due by October 30, 2014. A conference will be held at the RSF headquarters in New York City in mid-November or early December, 2014 to discuss the papers. Travel costs, food, and lodging will be covered by the foundation. Papers will be circulated before the conference. Each paper will be presented by one of the volume contributors who will provide comments and lead discussion of the paper. The conference will focus on improvements of the papers and the identification of common themes among the papers. An important goal will be to produce a volume that can influence both future scholarship and public higher education policy.

Selected papers should be no longer than 35 pages. They should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins and printed in Times New Roman font. Tables and figures are included in the page count as are notes and references, which can be set single-spaced. The papers will be sent out for review by experts in the field the paper addresses. Papers will be judged on the basis of

significance, rigor, originality, clarity of exposition, and potential usefulness in enhancing scholarly and public understanding of the effectiveness of institutional practices and policies in American higher education.

Because the volumes are intended to influence scholarly, policy, and public thinking, they will be vigorously publicized by the Russell Sage Foundation.

Papers will be published open access on the foundations website as well as in several digital repositories, including JSTOR and UPCC/Project muse.