Access & Equity in Higher Education: Issues and Complexities

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Issues

- The imperative
- Defining the problem
- Dilemmas
- Strategies
- Access or Attainment
The Imperative:
Where is the pressure coming from?

Equity

[Diagram with circles and arrows connecting them]
The imperative:
Education to reduce inequality

“. . . the best way to improve economic opportunity and to reduce inequality is to increase the educational attainment and skills of American workers. . . .”

Ben Bernanke
Harvard Class Day 2008
The imperative: Education as economic necessity

“In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite.”

President Obama
The problem: What are the factors that contribute to inequities?
The problem: Who gets admitted to university?

• In some countries, *all* high school students are eligible for admission at public universities.

• Where admission is restricted it is determined by:
  – Examinations
  – Grades
  – Recommendations
  – Portfolio
  – Extra-curricular activities
Evolution of National Policies

• First stage: inherited merit
  – Access based on academic performance, “... Principally the good fortune of being born within certain favored social groups or categories. Mainly it was about being male, coming from an upper-class family, and living in an urban area” (Clancy, et al, 2007).
Evolution of National Policies

• Second phase: equality of rights
  – Formal barriers regarding gender, ethnic/racial groups, social groups, etc. are eliminated
Evolution of National Policies

- Third phase: equality of opportunity
  - Taking into account differences in the opportunity structure.

  “. . . ‘merit’ is measured by the distance between the academic level reached by students and the social handicaps they have had to face” (Clancy, et al, 2007, p. 39).
Who are the “under-served”? 

- Racial
- Religious
- Lower income
- Women
- Physically disabled
- Linguistic minorities
- First generation immigrants
- Social caste
- International students
- Rural
The Access and Equity Dilemma

Group A - experienced limited access to a good quality education based on a prevailing social hierarchy and historical patterns

Change in social dynamic and concern for disparities in distribution of opportunities

Group B - past access to good quality education and others social opportunities based on historical patterns, merit and personal networks

Resolution?

University

Government

BOSTON COLLEGE
The Iron Triangle
(Sir John Daniels)

Access

Policy Dilemma

Quality

Cost
Access and Equity

• What’s fair?
• When a society has lived with inequity for decades (or longer) how can it be rectified?
• Do some citizens have to give up benefits in order to resolve current disparities even though they had no direct responsibility for the inequities of the past?
Participation in tertiary education has expanded

- UNESCO data confirms this
- Greater participation has not meant greater equity
- Why not?
- Why are social inequities so persistent?
Maximally Maintained Inequality*

“Relative inequalities between classes are likely to change only when demand for advanced schooling from the privileged class is saturated” (Clancy, et al, p. 47)

* In Raftery & Hout (1993)
Factors Affecting Access

• Expectations
  – 4\textsuperscript{th} year high school students expecting to attend a 4-year college or university (US National Center for Educational Statistics 2010):
    • 64.2\% of white students
    • 62.9 \% of black students
    • 47.4 \% of Hispanic students
    • 72.2 \% of Asian students

*http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010170.pdf*
Factors Affecting Access

- Parental aspirations
- Student aspirations

BOSTON COLLEGE
Factors Affecting Access

• Education of parents
  – % of high school seniors expecting to attend a 4-year college or university correlated to education level of parents (NCES 2010):
    • 44.2 % when a parent has high school or less
    • 56.6% when a parent has some college
    • 73.4 % when a parent has completed college
    • 80.6 % when a parent has completed graduate study
Factors Affecting Access

• Family income
  – Not surprisingly the % of high school seniors expecting to attend a 4-year college or university varies with the family income:
    • 49.4 % when the family income is < $35,000
    • 60.6% when the family income is $35,00-75,000
    • 76.7 % when the family income is > $75,000
Factor affecting access

• Aspirations
  – Patterns of social reproduction

• Supportive agents
  – Parents
  – Teachers
  – Peers
Factor affecting access

• Parental Education
• Parental Income
• Financial aid
• Comfort with debt
So how do you address the inequities?
Affirmative action: Brazil

• Half the population is of African decent and the 2000 census showed
  – 2% of university graduates were black
  – 12% of mixed race
  – 1 in 4 Afro-Brazilians were illiterate
  – 1 in 10 whites were illiterate
So how do you fix it?
Affirmative action in Brazil

• “You’re not discriminated against because you’re black, but because you’re poor”
  (Lloyd, 2009)

• Social class often intersects with race and ethnicity
Affirmative action in Brazil

Who is black?
Affirmative action in Brazil

- Brazil in Black and White
Getting affirmative action right

• It’s a broad policy that is undermined by the challenges of implementation
  – The famous case of the twins

• Can work against people who are trying to help themselves
  – Poor people who have managed to place students in private colegios
Affirmative action: Challenges in India

• Gender
  – 65 women for every 100 men enrolled
  – Enrollment of women has improved but they are concentrated in degree programs with less income potential
Affirmative Action: Challenges in India

• Social Caste
  – Reservation system to insure inclusion of “scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and backward classes”
  – Up to 50% of the spaces are reserved in some states
    • Often includes fee concessions and additional support
    • Has led to public protests
    • Often leads to “stigmas”
Affirmative Action: Challenges in India

These “favored” groups are ultimately concentrated in the arts and in less competitive universities

Is this incremental progress or a problem?
So how do you fix it?

Challenges in India

• Structural reform
• At the same time that India has introduced policies to insure better access for “under-represented” social and religious groups, the system is being “privatized”
  – Expansion of tuition dependent private universities
  – Increased pressure for self-financing and cost recovery in the public sector leading to fees passed on to students
Different kinds of quotas: Zero sum game?

- Can you have too many minority students?
- Should diversity be limited as well as encouraged?
Different kinds of quotas: Zero sum game?

• If Jews are 2% of the US population but 25% of the undergraduate enrollment at Harvard and
• If Asian-Americans are 12.6% of the population of California and 40% of the enrollment in the UC system . . . ?
• should there be a quota to insure space for more diversity?

• http://www.chineseorjapanese.com/university-of-california-asian/
Different kinds of quotas

Effective in 2012, UC Regents have changed the admissions requirement to drop the SAT subject test (SAT II) and to extend automatic admissions to the 91st percentile of California high school students.

Applicants are currently required to maintain a certain GPA and SAT composite score that combines SAT and SAT II scores in order to qualify for UC.
Different kinds of quotas

The new requirements will lax the current standards. But UC estimates the new changes would qualify 1,800 more black, 7,500 more Latinos, 15,000 more whites, and 4,000 Asian-American students.

Although the test is aimed to increase UC’s applicant pool, Asian- and African-American students benefit the least. Especially since Asian-Americans perform better on the soon-to-be dropped SAT II subject test and other minority and white students perform better on the SAT (I) reasoning test.
Access or Attainment?

“There’s too much emphasis on access and not enough on finishing.”

William Bowen
Crossing the Finish Line (2009)
Bowen Interview
Access or attainment:
Further responsibilities of affirmative action

• First generation, under-represented groups need support that is rarely available
  – Academic
  – Social
  – Psychological
# US Graduation Data

% of 25-29 year olds with college degree or higher *

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Access or attainment: Challenges of retention

- Undermatching and Overmatching
- Students from families with lower income are more likely to drop out
- Lower income families are more sensitive to cost due to fees or lost income
- Lower income students are more vulnerable where their social and cultural capital is not validated
So where does this leave us?

• Is there a problem that policy can solve?
• Who is responsible for determining what university enrollment should look like?
• What should be done?
Solutions must include

• Outreach to students still in high school
• New mechanisms for identifying talent
  – Tests are not sufficient
• Involvement of parents
• Academic support
• Social support