Critical Issues in Higher Education for the Public Good

Qualitative, Quantitative, & Historical Research Perspectives

Edited by Penny A. Pasque, Nicholas A. Bowman, & Magdalena Martinez

Introduction by Alexander W. & Helen S. Astin
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Dedication

We dedicate this book to all people working to strengthen the connections between higher education and society. We hope these myriad efforts continue to work toward equitable change regarding higher education for the public good.
CONTENTS

Preface xiii

Higher Education for the Public Good: Exploring New Perspectives
John C. Burkhardt, Penny A. Pasque, Nicholas A. Bowman, and Magdalena Martínez

Acknowledgments xxii

Chapter 1 1

Introduction
Alexander W. and Helen S. Astin

Section I: Addressing Class, Gender, and Race in Higher Education

Chapter 2 7

Climbing Up and Over the Ivy: Examining the Experiences of American Indian Ivy League Graduates
Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy

Chapter 3 27

Shifting from Racial Equality to Racial Diversity: Michigan’s Answer to the Affirmative Action College Admissions Debate
Denise O’Neil Green

Chapter 4 51

The Puzzle and Paradox of Student Mobility in Higher Education
Sara Goldrick-Rab
SECTION II: ENGAGING STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY THROUGH STUDY ABROAD, SERVICE-LEARNING, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Chapter 5 61
Reflections on War, Nation, and Identity: American Undergraduates Abroad
Nadine Dolby

Chapter 6 77
The Effects of College on African Americans’ Volunteer Experiences After Graduation
Lamont A. Flowers

Chapter 7 99
“To Share With All”: Vida Scudder’s Educational Work in the Settlements
Julia Garbus

Chapter 8 121
College Graduates’ Perspectives on the Effect of Capstone Service-Learning Courses
Seanna M. Kerrigan

Chapter 9 139
Contested Moral Ideals and Affirmative Action: The Importance of Public Deliberation
Michele S. Moses

Chapter 10 159
21st Century Self-Sufficiency: A Community-University Partnership Explores Information Technology’s Potential for Empowering Low-income Individuals and Families
Richard L. O’Bryant
SECTION III: REDEFINING THE ACADEMY FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Chapter 11
Diversity and Social Justice in Higher Education
Jennifer E. Learner

Chapter 12
Ethical Conflicts and Public Responsibilities: Commercialization in the Academy
Joshua Powers

Chapter 13
Chicana/o Professors and the Public Good: Community Commitment, Activist Scholarship, and the Practice of Consciousness
Luis Urrieta, Jr.

Chapter 14
Toward the Engaged Institution: Rhetoric, Practice, and Validation
David J. Weerts

Chapter 15
Conclusion
Progressing Toward the Public Good: Current Conceptions, Future Directions, and Potential Challenges
Anthony Chambers and Nicholas A. Bowman

Contributors
Preface

Higher Education for the Public Good: Exploring New Perspectives

John C. Burkhardt, Penny A. Pasque, Nicholas A. Bowman, and Magdalena Martínez

This book, Critical Issues in Higher Education for the Public Good: Qualitative, Quantitative, & Historical Research Perspectives, represents an ongoing commitment to bring new scholarly voices into a public discussion about the relationship that exists between higher education and American society. In organizing the writing project that is reflected in these chapters, we sought to provide new research which closely examines the myriad benefits between higher education and society, situated within a contemporary context. The degree to which this goal has been met is a reflection of the insight, scholarship and creativity of the authors represented in these chapters. We all owe them a debt of thanks for what they have brought to their work. It has resulted in a book that has local, state and national implications for educational practice, policy and the public. Furthermore, we hope this book builds upon and extends old frameworks that might have to be challenged, replacing them with new ideas to be explored and debated.

The concept of higher education’s place in society and the assertion that college and universities are responsible for more than what is currently expected of them—more than they are giving to be sure—is one that is central to our work at the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good. Founded in 2000 and affiliated with the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan, the National Forum has been in the forefront of a widening discussion that we believe is important for educators and policy makers to heed and to feed. After organizing a series of national conversations on the topic of higher education and society in 2002, the National Forum helped to shape a “Common Agenda” for fostering ongoing efforts to increase awareness, understanding, commitment and action in support of higher education’s public service mission. In the years that have
followed from the adoption of that goal, some progress has been made, we think, in situating this issue more centrally in the work of college presidents, policy makers and scholars. As the discussions have become more vigorous and popular, they have also become more contentious. There are more ideas available to consider; the discussions have become more nuanced, less dichotomous and more intense.

One outcome of our preliminary work at the National Forum was a realization that we needed to bring new voices into the conversation. In 2001, we initiated a series of activities to identify and encourage a generation of rising scholars at the early stages of their careers. We encouraged the scholars to participate in—and in some cases lead—the emerging scholarly debate on higher education’s public role. In 2001 through 2004, we organized three symposia at which earlier career higher education scholars and established scholars convened to share perspectives on issues related to higher education for the public good. These discussions were co-sponsored with the Higher Education and Organizational Change Division of the School of Education at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), University of Michigan’s Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, and Michigan State University’s Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education. They focused on research related to the balance between private and public benefits of higher education; the transformation of colleges and universities that was needed to achieve a better balance between private and public outcomes; the role and importance of minority-serving institutions in assuring institutional and student diversity in higher education; and the challenges facing early career researchers in maintaining a “public good” theme in their scholarly work.

In partnership with several national professional associations, we organized and funded a program to identify and promote the careers of a dozen “rising scholars” through mentoring, help with publications and support for conference attendance. The Rising Scholars were selected by and received partial funding from the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), American Educational Research Association (AERA), Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and American College Personnel Association (ACPA). This initiative has contributed to the development of monographs, articles, chapters, and books, including this one.

Over the last several years, we have also nurtured the discussion on higher education’s role in society through annual meetings at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. These meetings have helped to refocus the topic of higher education’s responsibilities by examining topics such as community engagement and the importance of community-institution collaboration, the nature of higher education’s responsibility in a society faced with complex global challenges, and emerging frameworks for examining higher education and society. Reports on these discussions have sparked comment and generated additional
new ideas, furthering the public and professional discourse (Pasque, Hendricks, & Bowman, 2006; Pasque, Smerek, Dwyer, Bowman, & Mallory, 2005).

The National Forum has also made an ambitious attempt to listen to community voices in a systematic and disciplined way. Through an effort called “Access to Democracy,” we have organized structured conversations amongst the public on the question, “Who is College For?” This project has surfaced many new ways of thinking about higher education’s role in the lives of the people it serves and, in particular, it has given us new insight into the subtleties that surround such concepts as “merit,” “hard work” and “fairness” as they relate to perceptions of higher education access and participation. Research based on these conversations has been reported at national meetings and shared with policy makers in several state capitals, including our own (National Forum, 2007).

Across these many activities, we have made frequent and intentional references to the need for a social and professional movement that would transform the relationships we are studying in our work. The concept of a “movement” is very complicated in social science and somewhat mysterious in terms of the ways in which it is viewed by the general public. It is certainly not an idea that can be casually asserted. In our earliest gatherings of leaders to discuss these issues, the idea of a movement was discussed at some length, prompted in part by remarks made by Elizabeth Hollander at a meeting held at Wye River, Maryland. Hollander suggested that several elements must be balanced in a movement to transform higher education and society: networks of informal interaction based on a set of shared beliefs and a sense of belonging, oppositional ideas (i.e., “something to move against”) and spheres of activity that operate independent of the institutions and structures that must be changed for the movement to succeed (London, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2003). By these criteria, a claim that efforts to promote “higher education for the public good” have approached the status of a movement would be entirely premature. But still, there is some reason to hope that the discussion has been engaged.

In all of these efforts, and in any conversations we have had about the potential for sparking a movement across institutions and society, we have placed an intentionally high value on the inclusion of new perspectives as critical to a well-informed and productive debate. Any critical thought of changing the ways in which higher education and society inter-relate must be grounded in the experiences of young people, historically excluded populations, and community activists, and all of these partners must be engaged directly in the work of changing the status quo. The circumstances that shape how higher education and U.S. society interconnect have been evolving over nearly four centuries. Many of the distinguished scholars whose work influences our field of higher education or who provide social commentary on educational issues have seen changes over the courses of their own careers that are monumental and historic for them; but
for younger colleagues and our community partners these same events may be perceived as less historic and more a place of departure. In this respect, this book begins an important discussion in a new place for the authors and, we hope, for the reader. Each of its chapters approaches a consideration of higher education’s place in society from a vantage point that reflects not only a unique scholarly journey, but also some aspect of a collective journey.

In his chapter, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy explores the ways that American Indian communities, through their citizens, identify themselves in relation to ongoing struggles. Part of this examination includes the ways that American Indians and citizens of their tribal nations utilize higher education to examine and explore their complex economic, political, and social structures. The partnership described in this work may serve as a model of how other Indigenous communities and tribal nations can utilize education for their community’s benefit. In this approach, academic and societal structures that have historically been oppressive can inherently serve as liberating and empowering mechanisms for tribal nations and Indigenous people.

Denise O’Neil Green examines arguments that were at the heart of a pivotal legal case. In 1997, the Center for Individual Rights filed two lawsuits against the University of Michigan on behalf of two white plaintiffs who believed they were denied admissions because of racial preferences. The diversity rationale, Michigan’s counter argument, underscored the links between racial diversity and institutional mission, but rejected long standing social justice arguments of racial/ethnic equality and remediation to combat societal and institutional discrimination. Through qualitative inquiry, Denise O’Neil Green eloquently explores how Michigan shifts the focus of the affirmative action debate from racial equality to a narrower racial diversity argument, which garners broad support and neutralizes the racial preferences rhetoric.

Sara Goldrick-Rab explores patterns of student mobility between colleges and universities and its relationship with inequality. Specifically, she explains how student mobility is both a reflection of and a contributor to inequality in American higher education along social class, and to some degree, along racial and gender lines. Her goal with this research study is to move the discussion of student mobility in higher education away from its current focus on what mobility means for institutional graduation rates to a focus on the consequences of student mobility and what these consequences mean for student learning.

Nadine Dolby focuses her attention on how American students traveling abroad negotiate their national, American identity during a time of war. In particular, students became acutely aware of their American identity as they traveled outside of the United States. This realization and struggle shaped their encounter with the rest of the world. From her in-depth interviews and focus groups with approximately 100 students, Dolby describes her findings and argues that the
possibility of raising students’ awareness and critical reflection on their national identity, as opposed to the nebulous and diffuse stage of “global awareness,” should be more clearly centered in discussions of study abroad.

Lamont A. Flowers analyzes a nationally representative dataset of college graduates to explore the relationship between volunteerism after college and a variety of college and pre-college experiences among African Americans. He shows that African Americans who graduated with degrees in social science and business were more likely to volunteer after college than were those who graduated with degrees in science, engineering, and technical/professional fields, even when controlling for previous volunteer behavior and a host of other variables. This finding supports the idea that majoring in a social science discipline can foster a sense of civic responsibility and engagement within society.

Julia Garbus examines the life of Vida Scudder, a Progressive-era academic professor and activist, and the programs she created to share her intellectual inheritance. Garbus focuses on the Circolo Italo-Americano program that led to successful cross-cultural friendship and mutual learning to enhance democracy. Her research fosters higher education for the public good as it reintroduces a woman whose life clearly embodied this principle. Garbus states that histories help chart the future by grounding current efforts which link college and community in rich traditions of similar efforts, and by showing different methods of approaching societal issues—separated by a century—but similar to those faced today.

Seanna M. Kerrigan documents college graduates’ perspectives on the effect of capstone service-learning courses three years following their graduation. Her research suggests that graduates who participated in a capstone course enhanced their communication and leadership skills, community involvement, appreciation of diversity, and career development. As part of her study, Kerrigan also considers challenges faced by participants and offers suggestions for practitioners in the field of service-learning. The results of this study will contribute to the knowledge base that improves the quality and outcomes of service-learning courses, a key tool in helping higher education more effectively develop engaged individuals who are capable of leading and service in our complex and diverse communities.

In her chapter, Michele S. Moses explores how disparate opinions surrounding affirmative action and race-conscious admissions can stem from moral disagreements about conceptions of what constitutes “fairness” and “equality.” Using philosophical inquiry, she argues that an understanding of these deep conceptions of moral ideals is necessary not only to understand the nature of this controversy, but also to promote policies that expand educational opportunity.

Richard L. O’Bryant looks at whether personal computing and high-speed Internet access can support community-building efforts by empowering low-income community residents to do more for themselves and each other. His study reveals
that residents who have a personal computer and Internet access in their homes feel a greater sense of community, experience an increase in social contact with others, and strengthen their social ties. He asserts that academia can help create an understanding of the challenges and rich potential inherent in the formation of technological environments and use this to further effective and equitable community strategy as well as informed public discussion. Moreover, he purports that higher education plays an essential role in supporting the general expansion of knowledge, wisdom and understanding in ways that challenge traditional and often inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities, especially in terms of access to technology.

Jennifer E. Lerner investigates white students’ conceptions of diversity and the potential benefits of diversity on college campuses. Through in-depth interviews, she finds that white students generally value diversity, but they do not understand the connection between diversity and racial inequality, and they reject experiences with diversity that involve issues of power and inequity. She argues that fostering an appreciation of these types of experiences should be an important step in promoting students’ understanding and appreciation of “diversity.”

Joshua Powers examines the ways in which university technology commercialization may result in ethical conflicts. Through his analysis of 125 licensing contracts between universities and industry, he concludes that these agreements create substantial ethical conflicts that compromise the norms of academic science and commitments to the public good. He provides several recommendations for reform, including a de-emphasis of the role of revenue generation in technology commercialization.

Luis Urrieta, Jr.’s chapter explores ten Chicana/o professors of education’s sense making about their role in the academy in terms of community commitments, activist scholarship, and the practices of consciousness in their struggle for their version of the public good. Chicana/o consciousness in practice involved not only active awareness of their agency in moment-to-moment interactions, but also the responsibility to seize those moments to act for change. These Chicana/o professors consciously exercised their agency not only in reaction to white supremacy in the academy, but also in proactive, enduring ways through day-to-day practices to subvert and challenge the whitestream (i.e., traditional, Euro-centric) norms and practices of higher education. The practices of Chicana/o consciousness, Urrieta argues, can contribute to further developing a common understanding of higher education for the public good.

David J. Weerts’ work examines how campus executives, faculty, and staff at large research universities articulate and demonstrate their commitment to outreach and engagement. His findings suggest that community partner perceptions of institutional engagement are informed by rhetoric and behavior of top university
leaders. The study provides implications for how land grant universities might better align their leadership, organizational structures, practices and policies to be more responsive to societal needs.

Finally, Anthony Chambers and Nicholas A. Bowman synthesize the work of the Rising Scholars. In doing so, they discuss the critical themes explored in these chapters and offer suggestions for future directions for research. They also provide some specific challenges and barriers for the continuation of this work.

In essence, this book reflects the opinion that a public and professional debate about higher education’s place in society is urgently needed and that the discussion must be radical in its content and process. While we acknowledge the important role that colleges and universities have had in shaping contemporary society in the United States, we also contend that what we have done to this point will not sustain us or improve our democracy long into the future. The challenges of the current century will require a system of higher learning that creates more opportunities for more people, a greater appreciation of the importance of complex knowledge and its uses, and an overall greater sense of vision.

None of this important work could have been attempted or sustained without the support of our major foundations. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation deserves special credit for establishing the work of the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good in 2000. The Lumina Foundation for Education has supported our efforts to promote a conversation about higher education’s importance at the community level. The Charles F. Kettering Foundation has been directly involved in shaping the ways in which we have convened and conducted discussions across political, social, and cultural boundaries. The Johnson Foundation supported our work at the Wingspread Conference Center, and we have also received support from the McGregor Fund of Detroit, Atlantic Philanthropies, and many others. We are also indebted to the Horace A. Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan for supporting our students with fellowships and stipends, and to our colleagues at the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan for their support and encouragement. We hold in special affection and gratitude our colleagues at the National Forum whose passion and dedication has contributed to this book and to the many other ambitious programs and activities that make that organization vital and important.

In sum, we see this book as furthering a long history of social commentary, reflection and writing on the theme of higher education and society by adding to it qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods and historical evidence that has been frequently lacking in this discussion. Quite often, higher education leaders, such as university presidents, provosts, legislators, and other decision makers, seek quality evidence that supports their perspectives regarding the roles that higher education plays in society. That evidence is crucial as they seek to motivate students, the public,
and to inform policy. In an earlier book associated with the National Forum’s work, *Higher Education for the Public Good* (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005), various authors speak to a changing relationship between higher education and society in the hopes of strengthening perceptions of a “social charter” and call for stronger evidence for and against the arguments that book posits. We hope that with this book, we can begin to respond to that call as the authors you are about to read provide the clear and intelligible empirical evidence for which higher education leaders have been searching to build their cases.

**References**


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There are five national organizations that collaborated with the National Forum in order to select the national Rising Scholars for the 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 academic years: American College Personnel Association, American Education Research Association, Association for the Study of Higher Education, American Association for Higher Education, and Association for Institutional Research. We appreciate the collaborative efforts of these associations, as they encouraged new interdisciplinary scholars whose work focuses on strengthening the relationships between higher education and society. The Rising Scholar Review Panel, which represented these six national associations and selected the scholars, included Tony Chambers (National Forum), Donna Bourassa (ACPA), Janet Lawrence (ASHE), Yolanda Moses (AAHE), Gerald E. Sroufe, (AERA) and Dawn Terkla (AIR).

We would like to thank the monograph review panel who provided scholarly feedback regarding an earlier version of the chapters from the first year of rising scholars. This group includes Lorraine Gutierrez, Barbara McFadden Allen, Linda Williams, and William Trent. Special thanks also should be shared with the assistant editors of those five chapters for their diligent work: Nancy A. Birk, Edith Fernandez, Elizabeth Fisher, Danielle Knabjian Molina and Christopher Rasmussen.

Of course, a special “thank you” goes to all of the individuals selected as rising scholars. We thank you for your persistence with this project and wish you the best with your continued scholarship on this important topic. In addition, we would like to thank the hundreds of applicants for this award whose research focuses on higher education for the public good. We encourage you to continue to conduct research and publish on this topic, as more scholarship and discussion is needed in order to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society.
Finally, we would like to thank Laura Dabundo (former director), Holly Miller, and the staff at Kennesaw State University Press for collaborating with us and making this research available to numerous constituencies. We hope this book furthers tangible research as well as current understandings of higher education for the public good.