

# Introduction: Commemorating the Sixtieth Anniversary of the President's Commission Report, *Higher Education for Democracy*

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In July of 1946, President Harry S Truman invited thirty prominent educational and civic leaders to serve on the Presidential Commission on Higher Education, creating the first official body to address federal higher education policy. Truman asked the Commission to broadly consider “the functions of higher education in our democracy and of the means by which they can best be performed.” First among his specific charges, Truman directed members to examine “ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able young people.”<sup>1</sup> The commissioners, led by George F. Zook, then President of the American Council on Education, took this request very seriously. The Commission’s report, *Higher Education for Democracy*, issued in six volumes between December 1947 and March of 1948, called for a dramatic expansion of enrollments in American colleges and universities, and recommended a wide-ranging set of policies to facilitate this growth. Viewed as the harbinger of mass higher education in the United States, the Zook report is considered one of the most influential documents in the history of American higher education.<sup>2</sup>

The Commission’s report was, in many ways, prescient. In addition to foreseeing an incredible growth in interest on the part of Americans in college attendance, commissioners lobbied for a number of policies that would become important features of American higher education in the late twentieth century, including the expansion of public higher education, particularly two-year institutions which the Commission renamed “Community Colleges” rather than “Junior Colleges,” federal financial aid programs, and the end to discrimination based on religion

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<sup>1</sup>Truman’s letter appointing members to the Commission is available online at *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12452>.

<sup>2</sup>*Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1947–1948). For an example of this view of the report, see Richard M. Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts, 1945–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 88.

and race. To celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of *Higher Education for Democracy*, we are revisiting the revolution in college enrollments that occurred in the decades following the end of World War II. As the essays in this volume indicate, the history of access to higher education cannot be simply understood as the triumph of the Presidential Commission's vision. Key recommendations have become widely accepted, although not necessarily by the time or in the manner desired by the Commission. But important elements were rejected, which substantially changed the social implications of college access in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the President's Commission was appointed, there had already been a revolution in college enrollment. Although enrollments grew steadily over the first half of the nineteenth century, very few Americans attended college in the nineteenth century. Only 63,000 people attended college in 1870. Most college students at this time were young white men from prosperous families. They were joined by a smaller cohort of white men from modest economic circumstances who were supported by scholarships for future ministers, white women who were also gaining access to higher learning in academies and normal schools, and token numbers of African Americans. In the late nineteenth century, several important institutional changes occurred that would lay the basis for later demographic growth: state and city universities were established, more women's colleges were founded, co-education became fairly common, and a network of colleges serving African Americans was created.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, reform-oriented university presidents, such as Charles Eliot of Harvard and James Angell of University of Michigan, introduced new admissions practices. Intending to build the size of their institutions, these reformers eliminated classical language requirements, created more flexible entrance examinations, and developed "certification" systems whereby graduates of approved secondary schools would automatically be eligible for admission. Slowly, but significantly, the college population began to build. In 1890, the number of college students had grown to 157,000, a large absolute increase, but still representing less than 2 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old population. Fifty years later, however, enrollment was up to

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<sup>3</sup>For the best overview of the history of access to higher education in the United States and review of scholarship in this area, see Scott Gelber, "Pathways in the Past: Historical Perspectives on Access to Higher Education," *Teachers College Record* 109 (2007), online at <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=12566>.

<sup>4</sup>On enrollment before 1860, see Colin Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Tradition View* (New York: New York University Press, 1982). For a general overview of institutional change, see John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

1,494,000, slightly more than 9 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old population. When the Zook Commission issued its report in 1947, enrollments had jumped to 14 percent of this age group.<sup>5</sup>

The institutional reforms of the late nineteenth century not only increased the numbers of students but also reduced the dominance of wealthy white men. White women, whose rate of college-going grew faster than men's in the early twentieth century, benefited the most. But new institutions and changing admission policies also improved access for African American and low-income students. By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, this broadening of access was offset by the beginnings of institutional stratification within higher education. The industrial wealth that helped finance the expansion of higher education was unevenly distributed among colleges and universities, and institutions sought to increase their advantage by strengthening their ties to economic elites. A few colleges and universities decided for the first time to limit the size of their student bodies, adopting admissions practices that favored graduates of private preparatory schools and discriminated among applicants based on religion and/or race. These same institutions distinguished themselves from less wealthy peers by emphasizing the "collegiate ideal"—the virtues of residential education and nonvocational liberal arts curriculum. These changes sought to solidify the prestige of certain colleges and universities by maintaining the social exclusivity of their students. This developing hierarchy most negatively impacted the groups of students who had recently gained access to higher education. Women at coeducational institutions, for example, were tracked into "feminine" fields, such as home economics and child studies. African Americans had to struggle against concerted efforts to limit the curriculum at black colleges to industrial and vocational subjects, and were increasingly unwelcome at predominately white colleges that embraced the liberal arts ideal.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For enrollment information after 1870, see Thomas D. Synder, ed., *120 Years of Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1993). On changes in admissions practices, see Edwin C. Broome, *A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements* (Princeton, NJ: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963 [1903]).

<sup>6</sup>On institutional stratification in this period, see David Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915–1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986). On women's experiences, see Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1985). On African Americans, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Cally L. Waite, "The Segregation of Black Students at Oberlin College after Reconstruction," *History of Education Quarterly* 41, (2001): 344–364. Various historians have documented discriminatory practices in admissions and student life in this period, including most recently, Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005).

The President's Commission report can be viewed as an effort to accelerate the growth of enrollments, while at the same time blunting the association between institutional status and students' social background. Commission members argued that college attendance should increase radically and rapidly, maintaining that 32 percent of the population was capable of earning a bachelor's degree and about half of American youth could benefit from two years of college-level instruction. The policies they recommended to accomplish this growth were designed to limit the hierarchy that was developing in American higher education. The Commission sought to restrict the advantage and influence that private colleges and universities enjoyed by proposing a massive program of federal aid for public institutions only. This aid would help states expand and improve the quality of their public higher education systems. Students of all backgrounds would have access to these new public colleges, which would be closer geographically and low cost. To further aid access, the Commission recommended that the Federal government fund a system of individual financial aid for low-income students, giving those students greater opportunity to attend colleges of their choice.

The Commission also sought to break down the divide between liberal arts colleges and vocationally oriented programs by proposing a program of general education that would be adopted at all types of institutions. This program of general education was designed to inculcate in students the qualities necessary for citizens in democracy, including knowledge of international affairs and domestic politics, the capacity for social analysis, self-understanding, and self-expression, and the exploration of vocation and other adult responsibilities. Although the Zook report acknowledged that differentiation in higher education (closely tied to the structure of the economy) was inevitable and necessary, it sought to soften it by promoting a universal curriculum consistent with a wide range of vocational aims. Finally, the Commission strongly condemned religious and racial discrimination, and proposed limiting federal funds to racially integrated institutions. Together these policies would expand access while moderating stratification in higher education.

Many within higher education initially dismissed the Commission's enrollment goals as impossible and undesirable. But the dramatic growth in college attendance in the postwar decades eventually affirmed the Commission's prediction. Dongbin Kim and John L. Rury's article, "The Changing Profile of College Access: The Truman Commission and Enrollment Patterns in the Postwar Era" provides a detailed analysis of the growth in college attendance between 1940 and 1980. They undertake the important task of looking beneath aggregate enrollment figures to provide a more nuanced understanding

of what kinds of students were attending college, and when and where they were gaining access. They emphasize the importance of expanding secondary school systems to achieving one of the Commission's aims—ending the geographical disparities in college access that existed in 1947. They find that the initial enrollment explosion mainly benefited the traditional college-going population—young white men who had recently graduated high school. African Americans only gained access in larger numbers in the second wave of college expansion, long after the commissioners had hoped. Ironically, women, a group that the Commission largely ignored, sustained the enrollment boom particularly after 1960.

The Commission maintained that the expansion of public higher would be an essential prerequisite for increasing college access. Public higher education had played an important role in the earlier revolution in access. Enrollments at public institutions had grown faster than those at private institutions in the period 1890–1940, expanding from less than a quarter of total higher education enrollments at the beginning of the century to nearly half of the enrollments when the Commission issued its report. This trend continued in the decades following the Commission's report: in the Fall of 1947, public institutions enrolled 1,152,000 students compared with 1,186,000 in privates; in the Fall of 1957, publics enrolled 1,973,000 students compared with private's 1,351,000; in the Fall of 1967, the respective numbers were 4,816,000 and 2,096,000; and in the Fall of 1977, the difference had grown to 8,847,000 in publics and 2,439,000 in privates. While the number of private institutions remained much greater than the number of publics, many new public institutions were created to accommodate this growth. The expansion was particularly spectacular in the two-year sector, a special focus of the Commission's recommendations. In 1947, there were 242 public two-year colleges in the United States; in 1977 the number had grown to 921. During these three decades, state expenditures on higher education increased more than forty-fold.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the growth of public higher education, the Commission did not succeed in curbing the influence of private colleges and universities. As Ethan Schrum demonstrates in his article, "Establishing a Democratic Religion: Metaphysics and Democracy in the Debates Over the President's Commission on Higher Education,"

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<sup>7</sup>On the growth of public higher education before 1940, see Claudia Golding and Lawrence F. Katz, "The Origins of State-Level Differences in the Public Provision of Higher Education, 1890–1940," *American Economic Review* 88 (May 1998): 303–308. Figures on expansion of public higher education in the period since 1947 are from *120 Years of Education*, Tables 24, 26, and 33.

the Commission's proposals for funding public higher education and for promoting a form of general education inspired by John Dewey's ideas were met with fierce opposition from educational leaders representing religiously affiliated and other private institutions. Schrum deftly analyzes how this opposition reflected a deep disagreement about the philosophical foundations necessary for democracy.

Private universities' opposition to the report also had important practical consequences for access to higher education. This opposition helped defeat proposals for federal aid to expand public systems of higher education, thereby undercutting the Commission's efforts to reduce the influence of private institutions over American higher education. Instead of the program of institutional aid recommended by the Commission, most federal monies for higher education in the two decades following World War II were linked to the nation's military agenda. This concentrated federal funds at a handful of universities and became a means for those institutions to reinforce their dominance in terms of both resources and reputation. This vastly accelerated the stratification of higher education and competition among institutions to establish a favorable place for themselves within this structure. Commissioners' desire to reduce status difference among colleges and universities was disappointed.<sup>8</sup>

The prewar trends in admissions also spread and solidified in this environment of increased competition. Leading institutions adopted new procedures for evaluating applicants that combined measures of academic achievement in secondary school, with scores on the SAT, and nonacademic factors, such as athletic ability and family background. Even while their applicant pool increased, these institutions pursued increasingly aggressive recruitment strategies while keeping their student body size relatively small. This created a self-perpetuating cycle: institutions with more resources could successfully attract applicants, which increased their selectivity and improved their reputations, which further helped them attract applicants and resources. Although begun at a small number of institutions, other colleges imitated these practices to improve their status. As colleges competed for certain kinds of students, applicants had to compete with one another for admission. The procedures for selecting students favored applicants from financially secure, well-educated, and culturally mainstream families. The Commission's efforts to eliminate

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<sup>8</sup>Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Roger Geiger, *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research University since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age*.

economic and racial barriers to college attendance failed at these important institutions.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to opposing federal financing, the critics who Schrum examines also attacked the Zook Commission's curricular recommendations. Although these critics were themselves divided on important issues, they successfully united to discredit the type of general education, modeled on Progressive educational ideas of integrating knowledge around life functions, advocated by the Commission. As in admissions, the embryonic prewar trend toward institutional stratification based on type of curriculum and relation to the labor market was strengthened rather than, as the Commission hoped, reduced in the postwar decades. The most selective colleges also offered "nonvocational" liberal arts curriculum. A growing number of their male graduates went on to attend professional schools in medicine, law, and business administration, many of which now required a bachelor's degree for admission. On the other hand, students who attended nonselective institutions were assumed to want or need an education that directly prepared them for careers. The links between curriculum, institutional prestige, and social background of students grew tighter in the postwar decades.<sup>10</sup>

The Commission's strong stand against racial discrimination and segregation was one of its most disputed positions, and like the Commission's statements on federal aid and curricular reform, it generated a great deal of direct opposition and covert resistance. Seven years later, the Supreme Court's decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), affirmed the Commission's stance. But this legal victory did not end the resistance to racial equality. Larry Johnson, Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, and Barbara Shircliffe, in their article, "African Americans and the Struggle for Opportunity in Florida Public Higher Education, 1947–1977," document the multiple ways in which the state of Florida undercut the aims of the Commission report and the Court's decision. This included a long legal battle in the *Hawkins* (1956) case, in which Virgil Hawkins sought admission to the all-white University of Florida Law School. The Supreme Court used *Hawkins* to indicate that *Brown* applied to public higher education. But when the case was returned to the Florida state courts, the state used legal maneuvers to delay implementation. During this period, Florida took advantage of

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<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth A. Duffy and Idana Goldberg, *Crafting a Class: College Admissions and Financial Aid, 1955–1994* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999); and Karabel, *The Chosen*.

<sup>10</sup>Ironically, Schrum points out that these critics were not successful in establishing their own curriculum ideals.

major changes in higher education, including the expansion of two-year public colleges and the selective admissions practices, to continue to deny equal education for African Americans. Despite *Brown*, Florida established a racially segregated, unequally funded community college system. When forced to end overt segregation, the state closed its black community colleges and used selective admissions practices to continue to exclude African Americans from predominately white institutions. Desegregation, which was intended to end racial prejudice and open educational opportunities to blacks, was distorted to limit African Americans' access to higher education.

Most of the Commission's recommendations for federal policies were ignored. Only after the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty gained enough political momentum did higher education policy become more in sync with the egalitarian vision of the Presidential Commission. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, Congress passed several major pieces of legislation that both pressured higher education to become more accessible and aided institutions in these efforts. The 1964 Civil Rights Act gave the Federal government more authority in enforcing antidiscrimination legislation. As a result, many institutions previously untouched by the main battles over desegregation in the South became concerned about their low numbers of nonwhite students, staff, and faculty. A number of major universities instituted programs to recruit racial minorities to their student bodies. Although these began modestly, campus protests in the late 1960s spurred some universities administrations to expand them significantly.<sup>11</sup>

In 1965, Congress passed the Higher Education Act (HEA), which provided the first comprehensive program of student financial aid, including an expanded work study program, federally financed student loans, and a program of undergraduate scholarships. The 1972 amendments to the HEA strengthened financial aid for low-income students by creating the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (known as Pell grants), a need-based entitlement program paying up to half of students college cost or a set figure, whichever was less. It also added incentives to encourage states to create their own financial aid programs. In addition, through Title III of HEA, Congress devoted funds to strengthen HBCUs. Congress would extend similar programs to institutions enrolling high proportions of Latino students (Hispanic Serving Institutions or HSIs), and to tribal colleges. Also in 1972,

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<sup>11</sup>Julie A. Reuben, "Merit, Mission, and Minority Students: A History of Debates over Special Admissions Programs," in *A Faithful Mirror: Reflections on the College Board and Education in America*, ed. Michael Johaneck (New York: College Board Press, 2001), 195–243.



Congress passed Title IX of the Educational Amendments that banned all educational programs receiving federal funds from discriminating on the basis of sex. While the causal connection has not been fully demonstrated, scholars assume that these policies contributed to the rapid expansion of access to higher education for minority students and women in the 1960s and 1970s that Kim and Rury document in their article.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, however, a backlash against these policies and their egalitarian purpose was already evident. Universities that adopted aggressive recruiting policies in response to student activism scaled them back when campus unrest subsided. Although they did not completely abandon efforts to attract black and Latino students, colleges sought ways to bring minority recruitment efforts in line with selective admissions practices that had developed in the postwar decades. This significantly slowed black and Latinos entry into elite institutions, and it tended to favor minority students from middle-class families. The 1978 Supreme Court case, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, encouraged these changes. Allan Bakke sued the University of California after he had been rejected twice of from the Medical School at the Davis campus, claiming that he had been discriminated based on race because the School set aside 16 of its 100 seats for minority applicants. The Court's justices split in many directions, but Justice Powell forged a "majority" opinion by agreeing with four of his colleagues that the Davis admissions plan was illegal, and agreeing with a different set of four colleagues that race could considered in higher education admissions. Powell's opinion guided future affirmative action practices on campuses: race could be one of a number of factors institutions considered in evaluating candidates for admission, and while institutions could view race as a positive factor in order to create a diverse class, they could not set minimum quotas for racial representation or consider minority students as a separate pool of applicants.<sup>13</sup>

By the mid-1990, even these modest affirmative action procedures came under sharp attack. In 1992, Cheryl Hopwood and three other unsuccessful white applicants to the University of Texas Law School (UTLS) filed suit, charging that they had been denied admission because of race. In 1996, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a

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<sup>12</sup>Robert B. Archibald, *Redesigning the Financial Aid System: Why Colleges and Universities Should Switch Roles with the Federal Government* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Rupert Wilkinson, *Aiding Students, Buying Students: Financial Aid in America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005); Hugh Davis Graham, *The Uncertain Triumph: Federal Education Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Years* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

<sup>13</sup>Reuben, "Merit, Mission, and Minority Students."

far-reaching decision, declaring the use of race in admissions unconstitutional. Although the decision contradicted *Bakke*, the Supreme Court refused to review it because UTLS had changed its original admissions practice. Buoyed by this success, the Center for Individual Rights, which helped sponsor the *Hopwood* case, initiated additional suits challenging affirmative action. One of the universities targeted—the University of Michigan—determined to aggressively fight to preserve affirmative action. Two University of Michigan cases, *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, reached the Supreme Court in 2003. In another split decision, the Court affirmed that race could be used in a limited fashion to achieve racial diversity. In addition to these court challenges, universities and colleges faced serious political opposition to their affirmative action policies. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which extended the ban on affirmative action to all state programs. Efforts to get the courts to stop implementation of the ban failed, and California colleges and universities ended affirmative action in 1998. The victory of Proposition 209 encouraged similar initiatives in other states. Ironically, such an initiative passed in Michigan, ending affirmative action at the University of Michigan and all other colleges in the state in 2007.<sup>14</sup>

Commitment to insuring access for students from low-income families also began to wane in the late 1970s. Concerns over “middle-class” access to higher education prompted the passage “The Middle Income Student Assistance Act” signed by President Carter in 1978. This vastly extended eligibility for loans, causing the portion of the federal financial aid devoted to loan subsidies to mushroom. Although the program was modified during the Reagan administration, federal funding for low-income students was not proportionately increased. Over the last decades of the twentieth century, the maximum Pell grants did not grow at the same pace as college costs, forcing low-income

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<sup>14</sup>Michael S. Greve, “Ruling Out Race: A Bold Step to Make Colleges Colorblind,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 29, 1996): B2; Douglas Lederman and Stephen Burd, “High Court Rejects Appeal of Ruling on Texas Admissions Policy,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 12, 1996): A25; Douglas Lederman, “Suit Challenges Affirmative Action in Admissions at U. of Michigan,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 24, 1997); Kit Lively, “University of California Ends Race-Based Hirings, Admissions,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 28, 1995): A26; Peter Schmidt, “Cal. Vote to Ban Racial Preferences Sparks Lawsuits, Protests,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 15, 1996): A35; Peter Schmidt and Douglas Lederman, “Legal Barriers Removed to California’s Ban on Racial Preferences,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 5, 1997). Linda Greenhouse, “The Supreme Court: Affirmative Action; Justices Back Affirmative Action by 5 to 4, but Wider Vote Bans a Racial Point System,” *New York Times*, (June 24, 2003); Tamar Lewin, “Colleges Regroup After Voters Ban Race Preferences,” *New York Times* (July 26, 2007).

students to finance a larger portion of their college educations. During the same period, many colleges and universities diverted larger portions of their student financial aid budget into merit grants in order to attract high-achieving students, many of whom came from relatively prosperous families. After a brief period of the spread of “need-blind” admissions, most private institutions admitted that they needed to consider students’ ability to pay tuition when deciding admissions, giving another important advantage to applicants from wealthy families at higher prestige, selective colleges. In order to cope with rising costs and decreasing state aid, tuition at public colleges and universities began to rise significantly. Together, these changes produced a crisis of affordability.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the backlash against the federal policies of the late 1960s, enrollments in colleges and universities continued to rise during the final decades of the twentieth century. But this growth was absorbed into an unequal system of higher education. The three excellent review essays included in this issue all confirm this pattern. Philo A. Hutcheson’s review of national commission reports issued since the Presidential Commission demonstrates that while expanded enrollments eventually became an unquestioned part of American higher education policy, increased access became disconnected from the egalitarian ideals that informed the Zook Commission’s report. Scott Gelber’s review of scholarship on public higher education shows that the major trends forged by elite private institutions—stratification, selectivity, and limited commitment to racial and economic equality—have shaped the development of public higher education as well. Jana Nidiffer’s review of recent scholarship on women in higher education reminds us that enrollment does not guarantee equal treatment and commitment to the full education of all students.

As we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the *Higher Education for Democracy*, we are aware of the dramatic growth in access to higher education achieved during the second half of the twentieth century. We are also cognizant of the inequalities embedded within the experience of college-going. We hope the essays in this volume will stimulate further research on access to college that is attentive to the relation between policies, ideologies, institutional structures, and the multiplicity of experiences of individuals and groups. In addition, we

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<sup>15</sup>On changes in financial aid and admissions, see Duffy and Goldberg, *Crafting a Class*. See also, Michael S. McPherson and Morton O. Shapiro, *The Student Aid Game: Meeting Need and Rewarding Talent in American Higher Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). On rising costs of public higher education, see Danette Gerald and Kati Haycock, “Engines of Inequality: Diminishing Equity in the Nation’s Premier Public Universities,” The Education Trust, 2006.

hope that this anniversary will remind us of the original vision of the Presidential Commission and stimulate a public debate about its aims and the extent that we continue to embrace those. We hear the beginnings of that discussion already. For example, Peter Sacks, a frequent commentator on higher education, recently wrote:

Colleges, once seen as beacons of egalitarian hope, are becoming bastions of wealth and privilege that perpetuate inequality. The chance of a low-income child obtaining a bachelor's degree has not budged in three decades: Just 6 percent of students from the lowest-income families earned a bachelor's degree by age 24 in 1970, and in 2002 still only 6 percent did. Lower still is that child's chance of attending one of America's top universities.<sup>16</sup>

Worries about the lack of access for low-income students are inspiring a handful of leading universities to change their financial aid policies, making it easier for low income students to attend. Perhaps this is the beginning of another wave of reforms that will reshape the patterns of access to college in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>16</sup>Peter Sacks, "How College Perpetuate Inequality" in *The Chronicle Review in the Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 12, 2007. Harvard University announced in March 2006 that it would be free to students whose families earned less than \$40,000 per year. Several other universities followed with announcements changing their financial aid policies. Clearly these individual actions will not dramatically change structures of inequality. They may, however, help push this issue onto the policy agenda. Many organizations, such as the Lumina Foundation and the Education Trust, are working to do this as well.

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