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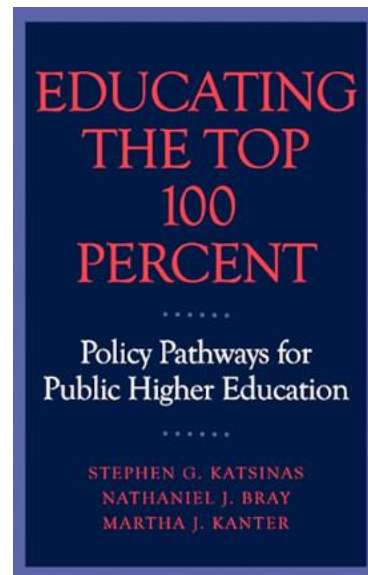
Katsinas, S. G., Bray, N. J., & Kanter, M. J. (2021). *Educating the Top 100 Percent: Policy Pathways for Public Higher Education*. Harvard Education Press.

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In Fall 2020, 14 million students attended U.S. public institutions of higher education, amounting to 72% of all higher education students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Since the establishment of the first public university—University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1795—public universities have grown and adapted to changing student demographics, expectations, and funding models. Although public colleges have historically offered a more affordable pathway to degrees in recent years public colleges have become much less affordable. For example, the annual tuition at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign went up 20 times, from \$600 in 1970 to more than \$12,000 in 2020. The rising costs of education show a clear shift from viewing education as a public good to viewing it as a private good, according to the authors of *Educating the Top 100 Percent: Policy Pathways for Public Higher Education*. Despite the public benefit of post-secondary education, small policy changes over the past century have made college a personal economic burden. In this volume, Stephen Katsinas, Nathaniel Bray, and Martha J. Kanter highlight the issue of declining college affordability and offer broad policy recommendations on how to improve public post-secondary education funding.



Before turning to their policy recommendations, the authors provide a comprehensive history of public higher education in America, with a focus from post-WWII era to the present. They highlight how federal policies and legislation served to change the landscape of college education. For example, in 1944, there was a boom in public higher education as veterans returned home and utilized the G.I. Bill, which, among other benefits, provided tuition and educational expenses for veterans attending college or trade school. Just over a decade later, in 1958, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was enacted, expanding financial support for education through improved laboratory equipment, new graduate programs, and

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expanded language programs. Higher education became a key part of national defense. The idea of “human capital” became a focus of the expansion of public higher education. However, after this period from the 1940s to the mid 1960s, prioritizing education became a subsidiary to the civil rights movement and the peak of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. The end of segregation opened doors for a much larger number of students to attend public colleges with the support of public funds. The conflict in Vietnam and the high cost of the war led to the creation of federal student loans and programs to assist middle class families as opposed to funding education for needy students. Those two events served as a catalyst, paving the way for the present day public higher education system.

Following the historical discussion of higher education and their account of how higher education arrived at its current state, the authors present their suggestions improving access to higher education. The authors propose what they call the American Prosperity Initiative. Named for the benefits that would arise from improving and expanding access to higher education, the initiative is based on six main principles.

- I. Every American should have lifelong learning opportunities, and it is the responsibility of all levels of government to partner with education, business, and non-profit entities to create stable funding sources to create these opportunities.
- II. Do no harm: the proposal asks that the federal government require a maintenance of effort to disincentivize states from cutting funding from higher education and forcing institutions to raise tuition.
- III. States should convene committees of professionals to evaluate and adjust state aid and transfer policies to help students save time and money.
- IV. The average Pell Grant amount, as opposed to the maximum amount should be used to measure how well state appropriations and student aid polies align with tuition and fees.
- V. Students must first believe they can afford to attend college prior to their embarking on their higher education journey. Thus, the authors’ goal is to make college universally accessible.
- VI. The most important principle is “federal and state policy must offer hope and affordable, demonstrated pathways to rewarding careers and civic livelihoods. (p. 139)

College funding and affordability is a complex issue which involves multiple parties with often competing demands and agendas. Universities are often called on to decrease operating budgets while increasing enrollment. The authors do an excellent job of explaining the perplexing issue and providing significant background to fully situate the issues and prepare the reader for the recommendations. The extensive history and explanations serve to help the reader make sense of the how these initiatives are historically informed. One such example is the Pell Grant. Understanding its origin and past political support are important details when discussing how the program can be improved.

In the first section of the book, the authors focus heavily on the shift in public perspective, once viewing education as a public good, and a shared social benefit to a private good, and a responsibility of the individual. The discussion of this shift seems like a vital point of focus in the efforts to increase accessibility of higher education. When degrees are viewed as a communal asset, there is a greater sense of responsibility to provide sustainable funding. It is a unique way of looking at policy changes, and the authors use their thorough history of higher education to prove this point. Higher education funding once enjoyed almost unanimous bipartisan support. Over the years though, this support waned, and higher education slowly began to be viewed as a luxury or private good. Surprisingly, this theme does not carry throughout the book. This point is an important thread throughout the first parts of the book, the authors use historical events and trends to depict how and why American public colleges operate the way they do, and public perspective seems to play an important role. By examining the historical mutuality between positive public perspective and prosperous public colleges, the authors could have provided stronger evidence for their recommendations.

The feasibility of the offered recommendations remains in question. In particular, the call for the federal government to disincentivize states from decreasing their higher education operating budget is presented as an important step in improving funding and accessibility. In the past during times of economic recession, states have pulled funding from institutions, which has resulted in freezing raises, deferring maintenance, and increasing tuition to make up the budgetary shortfalls. The authors could have bolstered this recommendation by making specific references to where the funds could be found or how this could be put into practice. As presented, the idea seems a bit idealistic.

The discussion of College Promise, an initiative aimed at making college free and as accessible as high school, lacks the depth of other sections. The authors thoroughly describe the program and all the good that it is meant to do. But they fail to provide information on how action of this type could be afforded by the federal government. It is a lofty and idealistic goal, but there are no recommendations for tangible action.

These minor criticisms aside, *Educating the Top 100 Percent* makes an important contribution to the literature on higher education. The book should be read by university governing boards, many of which are responsible for setting tuition costs for their university or university system. It should also be read by politicians, particularly those serving on education boards and committees. Higher education professionals involved in school operations, business, and finance would also benefit from both the recommendations as well as the historical context of student loans and funding models that this book provides. Additionally, students in higher education spaces would especially benefit as it would help them build a robust understanding of financial policy and provide opportunities for critical thinking and innovation when reviewing the policy suggestions. The authors provide an excellent history and thoughtful, albeit arduous, policy recommendations to increase access for all students wishing to attend a public higher education institution.

References

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About the Reviewer



Sydney Loutit is a PhD student in education at Southern Methodist University, where she is also a research assistant. Sydney received her master's in higher education policy and leadership from Southern Methodist University and her bachelor's from Texas Christian University. Her research focuses on collegiate athletics and its positionality within higher education, mainly how it has changed over time and how these changes affect student-athletes. Sydney has presented her work at several national conferences, including the American Education Research Association's annual meeting.



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