

Achieving Equity and Quality in Higher Education: Global Perspectives in an Era of Widening Participation

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University enrollments have skyrocketed over the last forty years. For example, University enrollments in Chile, which numbered 175,000 in 1983, exploded to more than 1.2 million by 2015 (174). South African HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) noted a 46 percent increase in enrollment from 2000 to 2008 (243). This expansion of access to tertiary education has changed the educational landscape in considerable ways and has provided unprecedented opportunity for those from lower socioeconomic strata. This fourth volume in the *Palgrave Studies in Excellence and Equity in Global Education* series explores the impact of policies and programs implemented within institutions of higher education to widen access to and facilitate participation by non-traditional students around the globe. Spanning nine countries, everywhere from Turkey to Australia, this volume explores a wide range of programs and policies with similar goals of reform.

The intentions of these HE (Higher Education) programs and policies might be consistent across the globe (widening access and participation especially among underrepresented groups) yet, the context of each case plays a deciding factor in how these programs are implemented. The existing structures of HE in each country or province also profoundly shape how these programs work. For example, the quota policy implemented in Brazil's federally-funded institutions reflects the country's efforts to lessen the significant racial and class divide still prevalent there. Race is also a critical variable in South African HEIs. However, the demand for spots in reputable programs in South African HEIs (89,000 applications for 7,000 spots) is exceptionally high while thousands of spots in private universities in Brazil end up vacant due, in part, to the quota policy mentioned above (244, 221). While both countries are hoping to construct more equitable societies by widening access to nontraditional students and both are dealing with unique, highly charged histories of racial politics, there are many ways in which they differ.

If these case studies demonstrate such discrete situations, what aid can a volume investigating the varied approaches in multiple different locales provide? While each location demands attention be given to the unique social, political, racial, and cultural contexts of their programs, the problems these equity programs encounter are remarkably similar (political resistance, retention, cost of remedial or developmental programs, ambiguous markers of success, class discrimination in the form of vague terminology, and so forth). Wisdom can be gleaned from such studies, despite the idiosyncrasies of their contexts.

Some with vested interests in HEIs fear that widening access means lowering academic standards. Many responding scholars in this volume question the motivation behind such fears as well as the vague terminology deployed in service of these fears. Southgate, Grimes, and Cox, in their chapter on high status professions, explore how vague terms like "quality" and "polish" act as "middle-class proxies" in the gatekeeping of high status programs and professions (medicine, law, and so forth) (301). A number of the contributing authors also challenge the myth of meritocracy, the class hierarchy reflected in access to the most prestigious HEIs, and the numerous hurdles nontraditional students encounter just to get access to selective medical programs.

Considerable attention is also given to the issue of cost of tertiary education. Again, there are no easy answers or quick fixes to be found here. If cost is a deterrent to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, we might assume that Scotland's free-tuition would be a panacea to all the access ills. However, research shows that "the greatest beneficiaries of free tuition" are those from more advantaged backgrounds (269).

This volume provides much needed context for anyone invested in higher education (staff, faculty, lobbyists, politicians, nonprofits, and anyone committed to equity in education, and social justice). These studies demonstrate that while widening access is a first necessary step towards equity in HEIs, it has proved to not be sufficient.