



Côté, J. and Furlong, A. (2016) Introduction: The history and scope of the sociology of higher education. In: Cote, J. E. and Furlong, A. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Higher Education*. Routledge. ISBN 9781138778122

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Deposited on: 01 April 2016

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction: The history and scope of the sociology of higher education**

James Côté & Andy Furlong

The present volume is the first handbook to be published that covers the current sociological approaches to higher education as currently found in Western societies generally, and those modeled on the Anglo-American model specifically. This handbook is timely because of the massive expansions of higher educational systems around the globe that are coming under increasing public, policy, and academic scrutiny. A good part of this scrutiny involves a questioning of traditional, non-instrumental forms of higher learning in terms of prevailing neoliberal ideologies that demand efficiency, short-term accountability, and cost-reduction. Consequently, traditional academic values of learning for learning's sake without a regard to costs are being questioned by a variety of stakeholders inside and outside of higher educational institutions. These conflicting values of 'instrumentality vs. expressiveness' are at the heart of many sociological, educational, and policy debates now taking place in many countries. The goal of this handbook is to put these and other related debates into focus. As such, this volume will be of great interest to a variety of stakeholder audiences, within academia as well as in policy circles.

Traditionally, educational institutions can be understood sociologically as status-conferring organizations, with myriad positional characteristics, experiences, and outcomes. Formally, higher-educational institutions (HEIs), in particular universities, have enjoyed widespread societal legitimacy based on beliefs that formal credentials are the preferred method of optimal personal and intellectual development, citizenship and leadership socialization, and in some ways preparation for highly skilled occupations and professions. This sociological understanding, which is shared by the public in many respects, derives from the period in which the 'higher' aspects of education were understood qualitatively, with the idea of higher defined in terms many of that word's synonyms, such as superior, difficult, advanced, sophisticated, and the like. As such, attendance was ostensibly limited by the superior abilities of students. Students of lesser academic abilities were weeded out, by self-selection or prior attainments that demonstrated those abilities. The term 'élite' is often associated with this form of higher education. This form of education is also historically rooted in the liberal arts, dating back a millennium. It is only within the last century that vocational (applied/professional) forms of higher education were integrated into liberal arts institutions. However, the relationship between the liberal arts and vocational education has since become a source of tension on a number of levels, foremost of which are the status-competitions between the two forms of education, especially in terms of funding priorities.

Increasingly, however, the 'higher' aspects of education have come to be understood quantitatively, in terms of being the upper stages of a sequence that cap off primary and secondary education as part of a normative progression. As many of the contributions to

this volume suggest, 'tertiary education' is perhaps a more apt term for contemporary mass higher education systems. This is the case to the extent that progression to this tertiary level has been increasingly commonplace, not on the basis of superior performance at the secondary level, but on the basis of average performances (in the case of 'mass' education) or below average ones (in the case of 'universal' education). Thus, in many HEIs it is no longer an expectation that students matriculated will have superior academic abilities in the subjects of their choice, or even that they will have a great interest in learning. The implications of this transformation are crucial to understand because HEIs have attempted to maintain a revered status based on their original reputations of academic excellence in which only the cream of the crop in the various fields offered were admitted and/or graduated. As we see, this contradiction between current realities and outdated beliefs about the status-value of university-level education is at the heart of many of the difficulties currently facing mass HEIs and those who participate in them.

The process that transformed HEIs from those that ostensibly maintained standards of excellence into institutions with other, less lofty characteristics is referred to as 'massification.' The process of massification can be identified as beginning first in the US in the 1950s, led by the GI Bill which sought to integrate WWII veterans into the labour force (Clark, 1973). The US thus provided the model for other countries seeking to expand their white-collar labour force. More recently, beginning in the 1980s, an additional force began to affect HEIs. This is the economic ideology of neoliberalism,

which in the educational sphere has since focused on the instrumental aspects of higher education.

As a result of these developments, the *instrumental aspects* of HE are increasingly being stressed in terms of extrinsic, vocational goals, which are seen to be more important than the intrinsic goals of a liberal or general education. These developments also seem to be transforming certain *expressive aspects* of HE. For example, the socializing functions of the collegiate experience have become in many ways more important than the academic functions to the extent that students are treated as customers and HEIs are seen as businesses. HEIs now provide students with ancillary coming-of-age social experiences that are in many cases more important to these students than is their knowledge acquisition, intellectual development, and credential-attainment (e.g., Arum & Roksa, 2011).

At the same time, internally, HEIs constitute status hierarchies among the ranks of students, faculty/staff, and administrators. Numerous conflicts and competitions can be observed among these hierarchical relations. Externally, HEIs compete with each other in terms of informal and formal prestige rankings, and are placed under intense scrutiny with respect to their 'accountability' in spending from the public purse and/or the value of their services offered to stakeholders. These stakeholders place numerous pressures on HEIs, and these pressures have shifted over time, with some intensifying.

Current sociological and policy debates concern the legitimacy of the statuses conferred, including the continuing debate regarding the role of HEIs in legitimating social class reproduction, through to a questioning of how reliably the status of ‘graduate’ is (any longer) backed up by standards guaranteeing that certain skills and capacities have actually been acquired. Thus, on the one hand, there are calls to make the conferring of higher-educational status more ‘democratic’ by granting more credentials, whereas on the other hand, there are warnings that attempts to make these institutions more democratic risks diminishing their capacities to uphold standards and therefore reduce their instrumental utility. This tension constitutes the *equity vs. standards debate* in education.

The nascent field represented in this handbook has been previously characterized and documented by Burton Clark (1973) and Patricia Gumport (2007), both of whom took their points of reference from the American higher-educational system. The present volume builds on these pioneering works, expanding them to include the ‘Anglo-American’ system—essentially as found in English-speaking countries. At the same time, this volume expands this coverage by examining how educational systems in many other regions around the world compare to Anglo-American systems. This comparison is also extended to analyses of higher-educational policies on the global stage.

In characterizing the sociology of higher education, Clark and Gumport emphasized, among other things, the topical focus on inequality and diversity, outcomes for graduates, experiences of faculty, internal characteristics of HEIs and external demands placed on them, and the policy implications of these factors. The current volume finds a similar

pattern in the broader, more global Anglo-American system and those affected by, or contrasting, it. Accordingly, the chapters are grouped into five topical sections, reflecting (1) the history and scope of Anglo-American systems, (2) current internal and external forces pushing and pulling mass HEIs in various directions, (3) inequality and diversity in Anglo-American systems, (4) contrasts of other national and regional systems with Anglo-American ones, and (5) global policy perspectives of mass higher educational systems.

Of course, the field of the sociology of higher education is more than simply a series of topics. Running through each of these topical areas sociological concerns over social evolution and stability (functionalism), social conflict and change (conflict theories), and social policy. In the current era, we find that each of these three sociological initiatives is, at the most general level, concerned with the equity vs. standards debate; namely, just how well mass educational systems are functioning as the ‘great equalizer’ while still maintaining elite academic standards. As systems have expanded to include more of the population (increasing their diversity) in an attempt to be more democratic, there is evidence that standards have slipped, especially as those mass systems have come under greater outside managerial control along with lower levels of funding from those managers.

Thus, we can find in much of the sociological research on higher education, and in the chapters in this volume, three distinct sociological approaches to understanding the equity vs. standards debate: functionalist, conflict, and social policy. Functionalist approaches

tend to focus on the status characteristics of the groups involved in HEIs, including how these come into competition, as well as the instrumental vs. expressive functions of higher education in general. Conflict approaches tend to counterbalance the functionalist concerns with the practical utility of higher education (manifest functions) with the ways in which HEIs work in the service of certain interest groups (latent functions), especially in terms of social class reproduction. Conflict approaches also focus more on the various stakeholders who have competing interests in the management and funding of educational systems as well as in the outcomes for graduates of those systems. The ascendance of neoliberalism has focused conflict theories on how market logics have undermined higher-educational systems that have been attempting to meet equity principles in increasing their diversity of students, instructors, and administrative staff. And, social policy approaches tend to address more directly and concretely the equity vs. standards debate in terms of monitoring empirical indicators of student access and outcome, and what these tell us about how well HEIs are doing in reducing inequality and increasing diversity, with the ultimate goal of reducing social class reproduction.

### **Anglo-American Higher Education Institutions through Time and Place**

In this first section of the handbook, four perspectives are offered on the history and scope of Anglo-American systems, and ways of understanding them through sociological lenses. Each chapter picks up the prominent themes in the field of the sociology of higher education, along with the sociological and policy debates to which this field contributes. Within each contribution, we can see how the evolution of Anglo-American systems is



associated with various tensions and cross-pressures as they have grown from serving small and select portions of the population to servicing large, and diverse segments of society.

George Fallis opens the first section with an examination of the historical roles of universities in the West as a way of understanding current status and policy conflicts among various stakeholders. These conflicts involve the fundamental functions of modern universities, foremost of which are the students pushed into ‘universal’ systems who are at the mercy of other stakeholders with the status and power to define and redefine higher-educational missions. University students, and the programmes in which they enrolled, are buffeted by ‘the conflicted pluralism of the multiversity’ (Kerr, 1963/2001), wherein the competing instrumental and expressive roles of higher education are being played out, with the stakeholders of the instrumental (vocational) roles now winning most of the battles, if not the war.

Lesley Andres follows with a review and analysis of the sociological theories that have defined the field in the Anglo-American context. She highlights the debates among these theories, which have focused on the functional rationality of higher educational systems and the status competitions among groups in society, including conflicts based on class, gender, and other stratification characteristics. In this chapter, we see the influence of functionalism in early understandings of the role and promise of higher education in modern societies, as well as the influence of functionalism on government policy through such organizations as the OECD. In spite of governments’ preference for the conservative,

status quo implications of functionalism, Andres notes the proliferation of conflict-based theories in challenging the complacency of functionalist theory and policies based on it. Proponents of stratification theory, status attainment theory, reproduction theory, and feminist theory make note of the role that status competitions play in the benefits derived from the higher education of already-advantaged groups, particularly the higher social classes.

In the chapter to follow, Sarah Pickard then takes us on a journey through the literature on the changing missions in the US and UK as these systems passed through the evolutionary phases proposed by Martin Trow in his well-known typology of élite-mass-universal systems. She notes how this evolution has brought with it problems associated mission complication and drift, as well as the status competitions among institutions that historically service students in each of the three systems, with problems of funding and quality being very apparent among the mass and universal system-based institutions. At the same time, the expanding missions of these massified and universalized systems have increasingly favoured instrumental, vocational missions as the new student body has become more interested in concrete monetary benefits of their educational experiences. There are still voices in favour of the expressive, knowledge-for-knowledge-sake role of higher education, but the momentum toward universal systems militates against these voices in all but those universities that can maintain their élite heritage in favour of that tradition.

Scott Davies and Roger Milian round out this section with an examination of how higher status, élite institutions have been able to shield themselves from the effects of massification and universalization. These authors underscore the advantages these institutions have in the current educational marketplace by analyzing the status competitions among HEIs in terms of the challenges associated with new technologies that introduce online learning as a way of accelerating vocational education. They note that established institutions, especially historically élite ones, have ways of adapting to these challenges while at the same time winning in status competitions with massified institutions. Many of these élite institutions are simply not affected by the pressure to diversify and lower standards in the process; in fact, Davies and Milian argue that élite institutions have increased their status in relation to those mass institutions that had no choice but to expand and diversify their enrollments.

From the entries in this section, we see how mass higher-educational systems are now commonplace in Anglo-American societies, and either are, or are fast, becoming universal systems accommodating more than half of the youth population in their transition to the labour force. These transformations have introduced numerous stakeholder pressures, status conflicts, at the core of which are debates about the purposes of higher education, and the relationship of this level of education with the wider economy. Kerr's (1963/2001) characterization of contemporary Anglo-American HEIs in terms of a 'conflicted pluralism' continues to be an apt one.

### **How Mass Higher Education Institutions have Taken Shape**

This section examines HEIs as formal institutions that are subject to public pressures and expectations, while at the same time often operating as autonomous, or semi-autonomous organizations. As the entries in the preceding section underscore, the mission Anglo-American higher learning has changed over time, and is currently under intense scrutiny by various stakeholders. The first three chapters in this section discuss a variety of models with which to understand how the Anglo-American system has adapted to the pressures to massify and universalize. In addition, these chapters focus on the status implications and competitions among mass higher-educational institutions, particularly as they have responded to bureaucratic and corporate pressures. Accordingly, relations between mass HEIs and internal/external stakeholders have changed in significant ways that are examined in each chapter in this section. The remaining two chapters in this section examine the impact of these changes on faculty members and students, respectively.

In the first chapter, Donald Fisher, Amy Metcalfe and Cynthia Field focus on the rise of marketization over the past few decades. Increasingly, public mass education has been viewed in economic terms and a neoliberal ideology of educational markets has emerged along with a set of market-based practices. These forces affect the stratification characteristics of HEIs internally and externally. Internally, status hierarchies have widened in the professoriate as a result of increasing attempts to reduce labour costs (with casual labour) at the same as these universities have responded to prestige rankings by recruiting academic superstars who can command high salaries in this academic

marketplace. Externally, these same institutions compete with each other to reach the highest ratings on these international rankings. The authors examine several theoretical models that have been proposed to describe and account for the transformation of higher education into a private commodity and have pushed HEIs to monetize knowledge. These models are referred to as the Enterprise University, Academic Capitalism, the Entrepreneurial University, and the Exchange University. Fisher, Metcalfe and Field then present evidence from the Canadian case for their model of the Exchange University.

Focusing mainly on the UK, in the chapter to follow, Dennis Hayes and Robin Wynyard update the thesis of their well-known book *The McDonaldization of Higher Education*. That book focused on the marketization and bureaucratization of mass higher education, wherein mass universities have come to be dominated by the logics and processes of efficiency and control. Paralleling the models discussed in the preceding chapter, the McDonaldization thesis posits that neoliberal influences have turned students into consumers who buy degrees. In these mass institutions, students purchase credentials from market-driven universities that (internally) have pressured professors to become facilitators of the ‘student experience’ while at the same (externally) universities seek to outdo each other on the various national and global league tables that have proliferated in recent years. In this chapter, these authors extend their critique of these neoliberal influences by arguing that these changes have led to the ‘therapeutic turn’ in which universities have adopted the therapeutic narrative from the wider culture in which students are seen as potential or actual victims, and in the process these students are deprived certain forms of agentic personal development. Because of these students’

fragile state, mass universities protect and coddle students in various ways and shield them from normal stresses, even if academic standards must be compromised; consequently, many students do not learn much and they forego important forms of personal and intellectual development.

The next chapter in this section examines an additional interpretation of the changes brought on by neoliberalism that updates the ‘multiversity’ model characterizing American universities in the 1960s. This newer model portrays contemporary universities as ‘postmodern’ ones. Whereas the multiversity proposed by Kerr (1963/2001) had multiple and conflicting missions, Claire Donovan notes that the model of the postmodern university is of a mass/universal institution characterized by top-down managerial control in which academic staff are subject to an auditing culture. At the same time, there is no coherent academic mission that would cohere an academic community, and no claims to shared knowledge or truths. Life in these institutions is said to be fractured and dysfunctional, lacking an organizing principle. Donovan contrasts the two models with three examples (the university community, university governance, and the role of the university within wider society), finding problems with claims that the postmodern model supersedes the multiversity model; she also finds empirical problems with elements of the postmodern model itself.

In the fourth chapter of this section, drawing largely on the Canadian experience, Claire Polster drills down into impact on academic careers of the influences discussed in the previous chapters in this section. She documents various informal and emotional aspects

of academics' lives that are often overlooked in more macro analyses of corporatization and marketization. Instead, she adds to the preceding analyses by identifying the concrete consequences of the processes described in the preceding chapters. Paramount are the objective and subjective insecurities experienced by faculty that result in discontent, stress, alienation, and fear, and which diminish the experience of the 'academic calling.' In addition, Polster examines how the defensive reactions of threatened faculty can worsen their situation, individually and collectively. This chapter underscores the personal difficulties faced by those attempting to resist or reverse the negative impact of neoliberalism and its consequences.

The final chapter in this section shifts the focus to the effect of massification and marketization in the US on students, where there is increasing emphasis on them as consumers whose subjectivity has become a paramount concern. Josipa Roksa and Karen Robinson argue that the model of student as consumer has in many ways replaced the *in loco parentis* model that prevailed for over a century. Echoing Hayes and Wynyard's concerns (this volume) with the 'therapeutic turn,' American institutions now focus more on student social adjustment and well-being by providing more non-academic activities. As a commodity that HEIs compete with each other to provide, the promise and delivery of the 'student experience' has made the collegiate social sphere indispensable, diverting resources away from academics and deflecting attention away from academic life. Some schools even provide a 'party pathway' as a viable adjustment to university life. Echoing other chapters in this handbook, Roksa and Robinson argue that the undergraduate credential has become another commodity for purchase with tuition fees, rather than

something earned with effort and academic ability. They also argue that the student consumer model is found throughout all levels of the highly stratified and differentiated American higher education system. Within the American system, a market logic prevails because students of all ability levels can find some school to matriculate them. Consequently, students shop for schools just as schools shop for students. At the same time, schools at that the top of the status hierarchy seek students with 'good metrics' who can boost their institutional ranking and prestige, and thus their financial well-being. Roksa and Robinson maintain that students and their parents are aware of these status differences among institutions and the relative value of the credentials they sell; employers are aware of these distinctions as well, completing the circle of instrumentality of higher education in the transition to the labour force.

### **Inequality and Diversity in Higher Education**

Until relatively recently, the study of higher education was somewhat peripheral to the field of sociological enquiry. The sociology of education, primarily focused on primary and secondary education, has always been one of the core components of sociological investigation; higher education has not held the same appeal, partly because the opportunities to study processes of social reproduction were regarded as limited. Historically, higher education has been the preserve of the élite groups; the sifting and sorting and processes of exclusion that are clearly visible in primary and secondary education led to a relatively homogenous intake to universities and privileged access to the most desirable positions in the labour market awaiting graduates.



While the shift to mass systems of higher education resulted in a much more heterogeneous university intake and led to much more differentiation in labour market opportunities, sociologists have been relatively slow in shifting their attention to what has become a crucially important arena for social reproduction. Of course, despite very significant increases in levels of participation, higher education remains selective; depending on the country in question, a large minority will not experience higher education. The latest figures from the OECD suggest that around six in ten people in OECD countries will experience university level programmes at some point in their lives; four in ten will not (OECD, 2014). In this context, primary and secondary education is still crucially important in determining who will progress to higher education. Debates on inequalities of access to higher education frequently conclude that the blame for the continued skew towards the middle and upper classes in student populations represents a differentiated pattern of secondary school performance rather than any significant bias in university admissions procedures.

As Mike Osborne makes clear in the first chapter of this section focused on access to higher education, to a great extent, such assumptions are correct: the most disadvantaged populations tend not to possess the grades or credentials that will secure access to higher education. However, for the large sections of the population who will experience higher education, access policies are significant. Osborne, however, reminds us that in many countries higher education is provided by the private as well as by the public sector, and many elite institutions are under private control. Consequently it can be difficult for

governments to influence the policies of institutions that it does not directly fund. As Osborne argues, ‘the actions of the most elite of institutions are determined by the missions they set themselves and the nature of their leadership’.

Cultural capital represents a significant barrier to access that plays out in a range of different ways. Firstly, there is the extent to which admissions tutors in elite institutions or representing high status courses are culturally biased towards students from upper middle-class families, especially those who attended the country's top private schools. In a study of access to medicine in the UK, for example, Osborne refers to research showing that working-class students with top grades were less likely to gain admittance to medical school than their middle-class peers with equivalent qualifications. It is also true that, for certain courses, admissions tutors require evidence of experiences that can be difficult for working-class students to acquire. For example, Vet Schools in the UK often expect students to evidence experience working with animals, thus favouring those with families already in the profession or those who own farms.

There is also a degree to which those from working-class families feel ill at ease in institutions or on courses that are heavily dominated by students from upper middle-class families. Several studies have shown how young people from working class families have been put off attending elite institutions on meeting ‘posh’ students at open days (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2009). In the second chapter of this section, Diane Reay highlights the ways in which working-class students attending Oxford and Cambridge regarded their fellow students as either ‘weird’ or out of touch with the world at large. Such cultural

issues tend to lead to a process of ‘self-deselection,’ whereby well-qualified working-class students opt to attend less prestigious institutions where they will be able to mix with fellow students with whom they share social and assumptive worlds.

These processes mean that despite very significant increases in the numbers of working-class students attending university and despite huge advances made by women, these groups and others may experience a second-rate higher education and find that they have access to an inferior set of opportunities beyond university. Indeed, as Reay notes, the expansion of higher education has probably benefited less able young people from middle-class families much more than the bright offspring of working class families; meaning that the expansion of higher education has had a negligible, even negative, impact on social mobility. Furthermore, she argues that elite universities can be ‘both intellectually stifling and socially limiting’ and recognizes that while working class students may gain academically from attending elite universities, they are aware of the social costs.

In the third chapter of this section, Marion Bowl and Anne-Marie Bathmaker focus on non-traditional students—students from diverse economic and academic backgrounds whose presence in higher education increased as systems expanded. They focus on the extent to which higher education caters to the needs and expectations of changing student populations, noting that while elite institutions have been resistant to change, non-traditional students have largely been diverted towards lower-status institutions, particularly those providing training for mid-level professions.

Continuing with this theme, in the fourth chapter, Patricia McDonough and Carrie Miller focus on minority groups in higher education using the idea of ‘contested admissions’ to explore the ways in which policy makers frame debates around equal opportunities and advance notions of merit to legitimize the under-representation of minorities in elite institutions. According to McDonough and Miller, ‘higher education in every country around the world began with the original sin of exclusion, namely to serve one social group, the ruling elite, regardless of whether this exclusion was based upon race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or religion.’

In the fifth chapter, with a focus on the UK, Tehmina Basit and Tariq Madood question why most ethnic minority groups in the UK have come to enjoy a proportional representation in higher education that exceeds that of the general population (although recognizing that ethnic minorities are under-represented in elite institutions). They introduce the concept of ‘ethnic capital’ to capture the idea that this over-representation is linked to parents’ high ambitions for social mobility and is achieved through ‘constant verbal motivation-building and disciplinary practices, even where parents’ own educational background means that they are able to give limited concrete academic advice and support.’

With a focus on North America, in the sixth chapter, Kathleen Gabriel highlights the lack of success of students of colour and low-income students, and she looks at ways of improving retention. In particular, Gabriel argues that among those gaining access to

higher education completion rates are low, especially in two-year community colleges where ‘for Hispanic, Black, Native American, and low-income students ... nearly half entering in the fall term drop out before the second fall term begins.’

In contemporary higher educational systems, patterns of differentiation are complex and often subtle and a focus on entry can often fail to capture the ways in which access is stratified. As Berggren notes in the seventh chapter of this section, expansion of higher education resulted in new forms of stratification between disciplines and between institutions. Thus, in the new landscape of higher education there are a wide range of ways through which students from poorer families, those lacking forms of cultural capital and those that have to contend with restrictions that arise from things like caring responsibilities, disabilities, or remote residence, are disadvantaged. These new divisions involve distinctions between high and low status, as well as between those courses that provide easy access to elite professions such as medicine and law, and other courses where job outcomes are much more variable.

As Berggren argues, universities are in competition with each other to attract students and are constantly being ranked and evaluated against their national and international competitors. With a wide range of league tables ranking universities using criteria such as levels of student satisfaction, degree outcomes, and levels of graduate employment, middle-class parents are more likely to be concerned to use all of the information their disposal to help choose what they regard as the best university for their son or daughter. In contrast, even when informed, many working-class parents may lack the means to

finance geographical mobility for an offspring in search of a top-class university education.

Governments in many Anglo-American countries have pursued policies that actively encourage increased university attendance due to a belief in the economic benefits to be derived from a highly educated populace. However, a cynic may also draw attention to another set of economic and political benefits involving, on the one hand, the significant reduction in youth unemployment that is achieved when large sections of the young population are removed from the labour force and, on the other hand, when this student population is personally forced to finance their absence from the labour market. Where students accrue debts, and in countries such as the UK and the US, the debt burden is significant, young debt-ridden graduates are forced to put up with poorly paid and unrewarding work in order to service loans.

One of the issues that we must recognise is that we are producing a highly educated generation that has made sacrifices taking on debts. These debts will have a detrimental effect on the ability to make housing and family transitions, especially as the supply of graduates far outstrips the demand for qualified labour. In most advanced societies, labour market growth is concentrated in low-skill service sectors and often involves part-time working and insecure contracts: labour projections suggest that future growth lies in such areas.

In the final chapter in this section, with a focus on Europe and North America, Phillip Brown looks at changes in the relationship between higher education and the graduate labour market. While noting concerns about high rates of graduate underemployment, he highlights the ways in which employers' interpretations of social competencies help limit mobility. In particular, many major graduate employers place a value on 'soft currencies,' such as social confidence, in ways that further the advantages of middle and upper class graduates.

### **Anglo-American Systems Contrasted**

The chapters in this section focus on how HEIs in several strategically selected countries and regions—based on their size and influence globally—compare with those governed by the Anglo-American (AA) model. As argued in the previous sections, Anglo-American institutions have been buffeted by competing stakeholder pressures as they have expanded through the mass and universal phases of development under the influence of neoliberal economic ideologies. We see in the seven chapters in this section how other countries and regions have shared these experiences, in varying degrees, sometimes because of AA colonial influences and sometimes as in response to global status competitions with AA institutions in a neoliberal climate.

This section opens with several chapters on European HE models that provide instructive contrasts with the AA model, even as these other models have come under the influence of neoliberalism and associated status competitions exemplified in global prestige

rankings. The opening chapter by Alan Scott and Pier Paolo Pasqualoni focuses on the prevailing model in Germany and Austria, both of which have been heavily influenced by Humboldtian philosophy, which promotes the idea of education as a means of pure (non-instrumental) intellectual and personal development, through which the (unique) individual can achieve full potential as part of transformative educational experiences. In this tradition, which influenced earlier AA institutions, higher education is ideally an inherently expressive activity and thus a model that is incompatible with the neoliberal turn that has enveloped the globe over the past several decades. Consequently, universities attempting to follow the Humboldt model currently face numerous contradictions, foremost of which is central control by neoliberal governments, but also status competitions with AA institutions that now dominate the global landscape, even though they lack the ‘scholarly cachet’ of Humboldtian institutions.

The French system, the subject of the next chapter in this section, shows a striking contrast to the German model. Sarah Pickard describes the French system as one rife with internal contradictions in a nation founded on the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. The French system is still rigidly stratified, while at the same resistant to reform, perhaps because its patriotic ideals blind citizens from current realities. Thus, Pickard observes a ‘striking paradox’ in an internally stratified and hierarchical system that preserves elite institutions and is thus the bulwark of a high level of social reproduction. The highly selective elite institutions (including the *grandes écoles*) charge high tuition fees and cater to about 20 percent of the student body. Some 80 percent of students attend the more recently built mass publically funded institutions, which have very low standards of



admission (following the democratic ideal). Although they have very low tuition fees, these non-selective institutions have very high incompleteness rates. Perhaps as a result of efforts of neoliberal governments' attempts to reduce incompleteness by vocationalizing universities, while at the same time underfunding them, over the past decade, public universities have become a less popular option in France than other forms of more direct vocational educational paths. France is also unique in legally forbidding data dissemination in terms of students' ethnic group and religion, so it is difficult to analyse its HE system's efforts at democratizing HEIs, and it is consequently not possible to institute affirmative action programmes. Still, in terms of the equity vs. standards debate, Pickard paints a picture of France seeking a restricted form of equity that does not threaten elite interests, while at the same time excessively lowering standards of mass university education because of a lack of true commitment to those ideals.

The chapter to follow illustrates how the Nordic model has fared through the massification process and neoliberal turn. Ari Antikainen describes how the wider social-democratic political systems and learning-oriented cultures of the Nordic countries contrast those of the market-based, hierarchical Anglo-American system and the academically focused Continental system (specifically in Germany and France, as described in the preceding two chapters). In the Nordic countries, universities are publicly funded and state controlled, providing free tuition and a lower-pressure academic environment for students. Antikainen argues that by largely sticking to their fundamental principles of social democracy, Nordic countries have moved from welfare to workfare policies that have helped them adapt to neoliberal pressures with varying

degrees of success. These successes include maintaining less stratified, yet standards-based, educational systems within less stratified societies—societies that themselves continue to open to changing environments while maintaining equity principles.

The Russian case provides an interesting contrast and comparison, as outlined by Anna Smolentseva in the fourth chapter of this section. The Russian system has a tumultuous history of a series of rises and falls through the Czarist, Soviet, and then post-Soviet eras. Based on the European idea of university, throughout this history the Russian system has been distinctive in its focus on state-defined needs, centralized control, a greater focus on teaching over research, and a preference of STEM disciplines. At the same time, it has experienced the evolution through mass to universal systems and, in the post-Soviet era, neoliberal pressures. Status issues have also seen unique configurations, with preferences for academic credentials in the Soviet era even though there was no greater economic reward for these credentials. In the post-Soviet era these positional-status competitions can now be found with a vertical stratification of higher education institutions, in which lower-level mass institutions suffer in terms of funding and faculty recruitment, along with the quality of mass education. HEIs at the bottom of this stratified hierarchy are disproportionately servicing lower-income students, as is the case in the AA system. In Russia, we thus find the same questions being asked about the value of higher education beyond its positional advantages over lower forms of education and among the vertically stratified HEIs. In accord with observers of Anglo-American systems, Smolentseva calls for a greater recognition in Russia of the value of non-instrumental forms of higher

education that are not judged in market terms and which nurture the expressive aspects of education that build individual, group, and societal capacities.

Siri Hettige offers another thought-provoking contrast in the chapter to follow on higher educational systems in South Asia. Hettige observes that the liberal arts system, once modeled on the élite British system and popular during the colonial period, has declined considerably in legitimacy in South Asian countries and is even targeted by some governments for vocationalization or elimination. Higher-educational institutions in this region once provided a means of upward mobility for natives who were recruited into élites and who acted as role models for other aspiring citizens, while also setting in motion expansions of these systems. Currently, higher learning is dominantly an instrumental activity in this region, in a polarized system where expensive, private institutions provide training largely for corporate positions, and inexpensive, publicly funded institutions (considered of low quality) train students for low-level white-collar work, to the extent that such opportunities are even available locally. In many cases, university degrees are considered worthless in local economies, even in countries with low literacy rates and very low attendance rates in tertiary institutions (rates in most of these countries are below 10 percent of the youth population). At the same time, because of quality and status problems, brain drain is a problem as élite Anglo-American universities continue to draw children from wealthy families seeking lucrative careers in vocationally oriented fields elsewhere. Neoliberalism has exacerbated these problems rather than correcting them, as income inequality has contributed to a further polarization in HEIs.

The remaining two chapters in this section focus on two major Asian economic powers that have developed systems that both reflect and compete with AA institutions. Hiroyuki Takagi describes how Japan has been affected by internationalization since the beginning of its commercial contact with the West. The current model is a unique combination of the Anglo-American and German systems. Although Japan was never a Western colony, there have been efforts dating back to the 1800s to parallel Western institutions as part of modernization efforts. These efforts have included inviting Western academics to teach there, as well as inviting Western students to study there. More recently, however, as Western countries have become interested in internalization to further market their educational products, Japanese universities have stepped up efforts to improve their international competitiveness, especially as measured by global rankings. These developments have ushered in an imitation of Western neoliberal managerial practices in which the government has compelled selected university to compete globally in order to achieve rankings about the top 100 world universities. A recent development is for an elimination of liberal arts programmes in most universities in favour of vocational programmes (Dean, 2015).

In the final chapter of this section, Qiang Zha, Jinghuan Shi, and Xiaoyang Wang examine the question of how distinctive Chinese universities are in light of the massive economic transformations that have taken place there over the past few decades. On the one hand, Confucianism appears to have been a potent and driving force in the creation of world-class universities in China. On the other hand, the current system seems to be a

hybrid of Western models and Confucianism within a context of political authoritarianism and economic liberalization. These authors also note that China expanded its university system into a mass one at a rate faster than any Western country. This has been accomplished under the auspices of close state control and monetary support that sought to avoid the quality problems endemic to Western mass systems. On the basis of many quality and output measures, the Chinese model of tight state control (the ‘Beijing Consensus’) appears to have a number of advantages over the neoliberal, market-driven model (the ‘Washington Consensus’). Cognizant of the tendency for central control to stifle initiative and creativity, various state-sponsored experiments are underway in China that model Western models of professional and academic autonomy, including the promotion of the liberal arts and a broad curriculum that dovetails with the humanistic aspects of Confucianism. Developments in China appear to bucking many of trends globally, examined throughout this handbook, in which mass higher education has become synonymous with a decline in funding and standards.

### **Higher Education in a Global Policy Perspective**

In recent years universities have been transformed from a set of atomized institutions largely operating within national boundaries to global businesses recruiting students and staff from a wide range of countries and forming global alliances in order to grow and protect their markets. The growing market for higher education has created unparalleled business opportunities to exploit and profit from this global demand. The business of education though, operates in a slightly different way from other businesses:

to an extent universities have to operate within the constraints of the national contexts in which they grew and are regulated and, unlike other businesses, do not engage in hostile takeover bids in order to become key players on a global stage. At the same time, some universities have successfully established themselves as global brands, setting up outposts in other (frequently less-developed) countries and entering into global alliances in order to boost their competitive advantage.

While they operate as global businesses, universities use a different language, recognising that both their staff and students like to think of universities as having a higher purpose than the raw pursuit of profit. One of the mechanisms through which universities lift their operations onto an international stage is through partnerships and alliances. On a national level, alliances tend to be formed as exclusionary mechanisms through which elite institutions attempt to make public claims regarding their superior status and develop common strategies to influence national policies. In the UK, one such alliance would be the Russell Group of research intensive universities; in the US ,the Ivy League and; in Australia, the Group of Eight. What began as national alliances soon led to the establishment global alliances: Universitas 21, for example, sells itself as the leading network of research universities and has members in sixteen countries across six continents.

In the first chapter of this section, Carolyn Ford and Julie McMullin look at the process of internationalization from an historical perspective and examine what universities mean when they talk about internationalization. Ford and McMullin argue that universities are

often confused by the term internationalization, frequently focusing on international student recruitment rather than being committed providers of intercultural education or becoming truly intercultural institutions. For these authors, ‘internationalization ... is the process through which universities become more global, more international, and more intercultural in everything that they do, from business processes for financial transactions, to research that transcends national borders, to the delivery of curricula that embrace international, global, and intercultural learning.’

In the second chapter of this section, Felix Maringe and Hans De Wit highlight the growing importance of partnerships in higher education. While there are cases of high-status institutions choosing lower-status partners in developing countries, Maringe and De Wit claim that such ‘partnerships’ are primarily exploitative rather than altruistic and can be regarded as a mechanism through which the stratification of higher education becomes entrenched.

League tables have also become increasingly important as universities seek to evidence their claims global elite status in order to expand their markets. Moreover, universities that occupy the top 50, or top hundred, positions in world league tables seek to protect their status by restricting strategic partnerships to the institutions occupying similar positions in these league tables.

The huge growth in higher education is not a phenomenon found exclusively or primarily in more economically active countries, but is a global trend. Worldwide, young people

are making linkages between the desire for fulfilling and well-paid work and good living standards with participation in higher education. In the third chapter this section, Maria Barbosa and Tom Dwyer highlight changes that have taken place in China and Brazil, but acknowledge that similar changes can be observed in countries like India and across many parts of Asia. Barbosa and Dwyer remind us that in 1900, worldwide there were just half a million students in higher education: a hundred years on, numbers had reached around a hundred million. Much of this expansion has taken place over the last couple of decades: in China in 1998 there were around 3.5 million students in higher education; by 2009 this had almost reached 30 million (see also the chapter on China in section 4 of this volume).

As global businesses, the growth of many universities in the Global North has been fuelled by international recruitment as the growing middle classes in countries within the global South aspire to be educated in elite northern institutions, which they hope will boost their own career prospects. Here, Barbosa and Dwyer argue that those young people from wealthy Chinese families who fail to gain entry to the top Chinese universities will seek alternatives overseas. However, while the growth of higher education has been fuelled by aspirations for a brighter future, in the global North and South rewards can be elusive. Barbosa and Dwyer, for example, argue that in China the earnings of some university graduates will be below the typical earnings of peasants.

Clearly there is much potential for intercultural learning and understanding that can be linked international student mobility for both incoming students and for the local



population. The problem is that many of these aspiring students are being sold a false dream by institutions that may have a close eye on their balance books but perhaps care less about the prospects of the students returning to countries in the global South.

In the fourth chapter of this section, Sue Bennett explores the potential for digital technologies to transform higher education, to remove barriers to participation and to transcend national borders. While new forms of delivery clearly provide opportunities to build greater flexibility into the curriculum and to reach those whose commitments make traditional forms of participation difficult, Bennett argues that there is a clear gap between ‘the rhetoric and the reality,’ with little evidence of technology having driven major changes. Focusing on MOOCs as a current ‘hot topic,’ Bennett argues that while MOOCs offer the potential to democratise higher education through the provision of free courses with no entry requirements, in reality content delivery is poor with MOOCs representing ‘a retreat to the simplest, and most instrumental forms, of teaching available in higher education’.

In the fifth chapter in this section, Miriam David draws our attention to gender inequalities in higher education. David argues that there are clear ‘contradictions between the expansion of global HE with gender equality as an integral part of student growth in numbers and continuing rampant gender inequality in academe, especially at the highest levels’. Arguing that the culture of higher education is misogynistic, she contends that female academics remain ‘subordinate and subservient’ while the academic success of female graduates tend not to translate into the labour market position.

Kate Purcell and Charoula Tzanakou continue the focus on labour market outcomes in the sixth chapter. They argue that forecasts of the skills necessary to drive economic growth underlie the expansion of higher education in a wide range of countries. While recognizing that people with degrees are less likely to be unemployed than those without experience of higher education, they argue that higher education maybe becoming far less reliable indicator of labour market outcomes. Indeed, while there are clear differences in labour market outcomes that relate to subjects studied (graduates in the STEM subjects have advantages, as do those with vocational degrees), graduate underemployment is high and rising. Drawing on figures from the European Union countries, Purcell and Tzanakou show that 30 to 40 per cent are in ‘non-graduate’ jobs (i.e., jobs not requiring knowledge, skills or expertise normally associated with undergraduate degrees). And, echoing other chapters in this volume, they note that higher-educational outcomes are not tightly linked with upward social mobility, but rather are mediated by the choice of subject, type of institution attended, and participation in co-curricular and work experiences during undergraduate study, all of which give advantages to those from more privileged backgrounds.

In the final chapter Frank Fernandez and David Baker argue that any analysis of higher education should not limit itself to a focus on processes of stratification, qualification inflation, or labour market outcomes. Instead, analyses need to begin with the recognition that education has transformed the workplace: higher education shapes the ‘experiences, expectations, and demands of society itself ... [it] transforms the nature of work and

leads countries to adopt different policy frameworks.’ They endorse a ‘neo-institutional perspective’ that ‘higher education is both influenced by and influences changes in broader society,’ with more educated workers transforming the nature of work they undertake, and even those graduates who are underemployed can transform the nature of their jobs with their newly acquired skills. This perspective helps to focus our attention on what is common among seemingly disparate higher education systems around the globe, and points to a continuing global expansion of tertiary education and the myriad status conflicts examined in this volume. Thus, whereas from the neo-institutional perspective the various theories pointing to problems of individual and institutional inequality do not provide an adequate understanding the relationship between higher education and society, they are important because each has different implications for government policy in terms of the problems they highlight.

Through the various chapters in this section, we can see how sociological perspectives on higher education open up various avenues of enquiry into the competitive nature of HEIs with each other at the macro level, but also how older inequalities persist within institutions across regions, even as global trends point to an emerging global system of higher education.

## **Conclusion**

The sociology of higher education is a promising field that sheds light on the past, present, and future of Anglo-American systems as well as other systems around the globe. A look

at the past finds that the US led expansions of higher education systems in the 1950s under conditions that were much more favourable economically than has been the case since the 1980s. What happened in the US over this time-period thus provides a bellwether of mass/universal systems and how these will evolve elsewhere. The hope at the beginning of the massification process, when mass institutions were better funded, was that these expansions would be the ‘great equalizer’ of societies, reducing social and economic inequalities. Events from the 1980s on, however, have made this hope less and less likely to be attained.

A neoliberal ideology of instrumentalism, corporatization, and free markets now dominates the governance of HEIs in the US and UK, and in many other countries around the world, redefining the equity–standards problem in ways that undermine original ideals. On the one hand, equity has not been achieved because the élites have many ways of preserving their advantages in free-market economies. On the other hand, academic standards have not been maintained in mass/universal systems for a variety of reasons traceable to neoliberalism, rendering a lower-quality, lower-status product in the credentials these systems produce. These two development have created a cycle that maintains social class reproduction: less advantaged groups are more likely to attend HEIs with lower standards and reputations, which place them at a disadvantage in relation to those from more advantaged groups who can attend more élites institutions. Consequently, in many cases, the price of entering the white-collar labour force has simply been ratcheted up, at the expense of the disadvantaged, who must now achieve higher credentials for essentially the same positions in the status hierarchy. The greater

expense of credentialism is less of a problem for those from advantaged backgrounds who have the resources to finance longer educational careers and who then have higher status credentials to take to the labour market.

It is fair to say that many higher educational systems around the globe are a crossroads or watershed in terms of the ideals represented by the original justifications for massifying these systems (Côté and Allahar, 2007, 2011). It is instructive to look back at how the architects of the mass system viewed these ideals in the 1950s. From this perspective, we can quote from a 1957 book titled, *Canada's Crisis in Higher Education*, published during a previous watershed before the system in that country was massified. In that book the President of the University of Toronto warned:

‘there are two watchwords for the universities in the next ten years: flexibility of structure and tenacity of purpose. ... We cannot meet the country's needs for university graduates by *dropping our standards, taking everyone in and shoving everyone through. That would be simply an attempt to fool ourselves and to cheat the public.* We will have to stand by our standards without standardization, and *develop masses of graduates by other than mass-production methods.*’ (Smith, 1957, p. 19, emphasis added)

It appears that those who responded the crisis of the 1950s and who created the political will to expand higher educational systems foresaw the crisis now faced by these expanded institutions when they came under neoliberal rule and turned to mass-production logics. It is anything but clear today, however, that the stewards of the current

system are aware of the nature and scope of the problems faced by mass/universal systems, and by those students, faculty, and staff who must function in those systems. This issue surfaces in each section of the present volume. In the chapters from the first section, it is apparent that the increasing vocational focus in mass/universal systems is playing into social class reproduction, with elite institutions maintaining their status advantages while mass/universal institutions experience a crisis of purpose and direction. Chapters from the second section clearly lay out how mass/universal systems lower standards when pressured by neoliberal governments to increase participation rates while those governments withdraw funding. Consistently, mass systems expand at the expense of standards when they are starved for funds, even as they attempt to be more instrumental in relation to perceived labour-market needs. In the third section, the dimensions and consequences of inequality are examined in depth, leaving little doubt about the scope of the problem, and the multitude of barriers faced by those who might benefit from a quality higher education, especially one that is less set in the confines of traditional, elite cultural settings. Chapters in the fourth section provide some hope for alternatives to the neoliberal model that leaves HEIs at the mercy of 'free' markets, particular in the Nordic case, but also surprisingly in the case of China, both of which provide central management oversight that mitigates the more counter-productive market influences. And lastly, the fifth section of this volume provides chapters that move to more macro-level status competitions, as countries compete with each other for shares of the growing global trade in university credentials. In these competitions, regional inequalities are paramount, while common problems persist within institutions across

regions. It is clear that a global system of higher education is emerging, the dimensions of which are not fully appreciated.

One promise of the sociology of higher education is to take on a leadership role in helping to develop mass higher education systems that are worthy of the designation 'higher' and which are delivered equitably. Sociological perspectives can provide correctives of myopic policy analyses that are too focused on current economic pressures. The neoliberal era is just that, an era, and will not last forever. At the same time, the sociology of higher education must take on global dimensions that include the myriad systems around the world as part of an increasingly interrelated set of subsystems, replete with persistent problems and promising prospects.

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