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Fair Access to Higher Education: Global Perspectives ed. by
Anna Mountford-Zimdars, Daniel Sabbagh, and David Post
(review)

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The Review of Higher Education, Volume 41, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 143-145
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2017.0037>



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their mission, local ties to community, and funding differences, like the ability to have local taxing districts in some states necessitating the participation in the voting/elections process. Any discussion of higher education is not complete without the inclusion of the community college system in the U.S.A., further education in the U.K., and similar systems worldwide.

Despite this omission, Austin and Jones have authored a valuable resource in *Governance of Higher Education: Global Perspectives, Theories, and Practices*. Faculty teaching governance in higher education should consider adopting the book as a text in a seminar course. Scholars may want to consult one or more chapters as a starting place before constructing a literature review, theoretical framework, or empirical design. Austin and Jones should revisit the subject in a few years and consider updating the current content and expanding topics identified as new issues and challenges. Much will change about governance in the coming decade, and the topic will continue to be of interest to scholars and practitioners.

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Anna Mountford-Zimdars, Daniel Sabbagh, and David Post (Editors). *Fair Access to Higher Education: Global Perspectives*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014. 270 pp. Paper: \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-226-25092-2

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As higher education is traditionally considered the main channel of upward social intergenerational mobility (Holsinger & Jacob, 2008), it has undoubt-

edly given rise to great debate on who is accessing it, how they are accessing it, and whether this access is “fair.” This book features ten articles that explore different global perspectives on access to higher education, and in a comprehensive introduction, the editors present the main question driving this work: What does “fairness” mean with respect to the distribution of access to higher education?

This book is organized in three sections. The first section includes two chapters that present research on university admission mechanisms: one from the United States and the other from the United Kingdom. In Chapter 1, Samson conducts a laboratory experiment to test whether demographic changes at The University of California affect individuals’ evaluations of college applications. Students are asked to play the role of an admissions officer. The overarching question guiding the research is: Can a drop in relative group-position for whites in relation to other ethnic groups affect how whites (as the dominant demographic group) evaluate applicants in a meritocratic contest over scarce and desired educational opportunities? This experiment is developed at a time when the proportion of whites in the US population is declining and the landscape and meaning of diversity for US higher education admissions is changing. The research findings suggest there are reactions among dominant individuals within groups, that is white in-group favouritism, that go against the diversity universities promote.

In Chapter 2, Jones engages with the composition and language of “personal statements.” These admissions essays for entrance into UK universities are analysed using Bourdieu’s (2000) theories of field, habitus, and capital. “This study finds that nonacademic indicators, such as the personal statement, may disfavor young people from certain educational backgrounds” (p. 61). As such, this first section highlights important insights into the interplay of different sources of bias within higher education admission processes.

The second section of the book contains three case studies situated in Georgia, Denmark, and France that examine the influence and interplay of location, class, and ethnicity on achieving equitable and equal access to higher education. The first one is a mixed-methods study on rural disadvantage in Georgian higher education. With interviews from a sample of families and policy makers and data on the entire population of applicants from 2005 to 2009, Chankseliani seeks to illustrate the consequences of the state’s equal treatment of applicants in the face of their unequal experiences and prior educational opportunities. “Rural disadvantage in the admissions process is linked with economic and cultural aspects of rural life” (p. 87). Chankseliani’s research uncovers the existing tension between a biased definition of merit and efforts to expand

higher education. As such, this study illustrates that a higher education admissions model may strive to guarantee equality but be inequitable at the same time. As their educational system solely considers standardized tests scores instead of prior schooling opportunities (or the lack of them), rural students are left out.

The second case study offers an insight into how—and to what extent—Danish students' choice of program, educational strategies, attitudes and behaviours, and sense of belonging are influenced by social class. "From an international perspective, Denmark is an unusual case because of the relative lack of financial constraints on students" (p. 98). However, Thomsen, Munk, Eiberg-Madsen, and Hansen present a well-built, in-depth piece of qualitative research exposing students' perspectives, student life, and home resources as part of their choice of education. Their study found Danish students do not refer to their class-cultural background nor to a collective working-class identity as either an advantage or constraint. "The lack of identification with a working class or working-class culture may also be a result of the Danish welfare state model and of the relatively prominent discourse of equity in Denmark" (p. 117).

In the third case study, Brinbaum and Guégnard examine the access of second-generation immigrants in France to higher education as well as their trajectories, such as drop out and labour market entry. Chapter 5 exposes the complex paths of youth of Portuguese and North African origin, both in comparison to each other and to their French-origin counterparts. Through quantitative research, the authors seek to answer questions such as if the difficulties encountered by second-generation immigrants on the labour market can be explained by their ethnic origin, their educational level, or whether they are they linked to their more chaotic previous educational careers. "For second-generation immigrants, there remains a strong correlation between class background and ethnic origin and the type of studies chosen, on the one hand, and educational attainment, on the other hand" (p. 138).

The third section of the book introduces macro-level analyses of admission policies within the national higher education systems of Bulgaria, Egypt, Poland, United States, and Ireland. Chapter 6 discusses the policies of admission to higher education during the Communist regime in Bulgaria, from 1946 to 1989. It discusses how the Communist perspective on higher education, as a tool of social transformation, also allowed power to be exercised and maintained. Boyadjieva successfully documents the corruption of admission policies through exclusionary practices, such as the expulsion of students considered untrustworthy based on their political views or those of their parents,

prompting downward social mobility for those targeted. At the same time, the upward social mobility of those young people with a working-class or peasant background was promoted. This research provides a rich illustration of the context of access to higher education, not only within Bulgaria, but in other countries under Soviet influence after the Second World War, where similar measures of social engineering were applied.

Chapter 7 addresses Egypt's expanding higher education system. Buckner uses a sociological approach to focus on the inequalities in access to higher education. An important dissociation between the public and the private sector is presented, including how each one is based on different logics. For example, the authors describe how "the majority of new private universities are widely perceived as 'selling' their degrees" (p. 173). Besides this counterposition within the two separate sectors in Egyptian higher education, Buckner's findings also reveal the pivotal role of secondary exit examinations and the pressure this places on families to provide private tutoring, thus exacerbating inequality.

In the next chapter, Poland's case, presented by Kwiek, narrates the growth then decline of higher education in Poland after the end of communism in 1989. This chapter outlines the complex dynamics at play between the private and public sector in the Polish higher education system. As stated by the author, "The increasing differentiation of higher education institutions along the 'client-seeking' and 'prestige-seeking' lines is what happens when the system expands" (p. 200). This chapter discusses the effects of changing demographics (e.g., falling birth rates) on the dynamics of private and public education sectors in Poland and demonstrates that even though debates around 'fairness' in access to higher education are more often produced during the expansion of an educational system, they can also arise when the system contracts. Kwiek also explores new dilemmas that may arise and the impact these may have in the European Union's post-communist new member states.

Chapter 9 provides insight into how higher education admissions systems in the United States have included affirmative action and the legal challenges that have come with it. Espenshade and Wright Fox open a debate regarding financial aid and how this impacts the number of students from modest economic backgrounds in higher education. Few of them attend the most selective schools in America. Through simulation modelling, the authors answer the question: What would happen if we eliminated racial affirmative action and substituted economic affirmative action?

In Chapter 10, Stone engages with the oft-disputed strategy of admission lotteries, discussing how they have been used in Ireland and elsewhere.

Stone states, "Lotteries may be controversial, but this controversy should not obscure how essential lotteries are to ensuring fairness in admissions" (p. 250). So far, lotteries in the Irish case have been used as a tiebreaker between students scoring an equal number of points in the Irish Leaving Certificate examination. Stone's arguments are finely developed and evidenced. Stone provides a very detailed clarification of complex factors coming together within the principle of fairness in admission to higher education. He reviews merit, strength of the claim to higher education, the 'general good' (the contribution educated individuals make to the well-being of society), the precision of the best instruments available for distinguishing claims, and the distribution of claims within the population.

The book opens up an interdisciplinary – sociology, philosophy, linguistics, social psychology, public policy – discussion about the complex and evolving dynamics within higher education access. The material presented is accessible and well referenced. It brings together various perspectives on fair access to higher education in several contexts. If there is one criticism of this book, it is that, besides Egypt, it does not include reference to higher education in the Global South. The continued dominance of western models of higher education has given rise to significant restlessness amongst academic debates (Alvares & Faruqi, 2012). Given that equal access to higher education has been included for the first time within global development goals, greater efforts to acknowledge a truly global perspective would have strengthened the scope and critique of this book further.

Overall, this is a collection that we highly recommend; it is a very useful compilation of well-developed chapters that successfully illustrate some of the key issues in higher education access. This book is timely and relevant, addressing debates regarding the extent to which existing inequalities of class, race/ethnicity, and gender impact higher education access (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; Hayden & Thy Li, 2015; Noden, Shiner & Madood, 2014). It is clear that the editors thoughtfully designed an interdisciplinary anthology that would serve as an inspiration for reflection on

similar higher education contexts and challenges. Higher education administrators, policy makers, faculty, and students who are interested in current debates within higher education access will find this book worthwhile. All in all, the authors shed light on how complex is the task of achieving "fairness" in higher education admissions systems, especially when considering the open debates on equity, equality, and social justice that are associated. As a whole, this book not only adds to knowledge in the field of higher education, but also contributes to epistemological debates about how we know what we know.

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