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Review of *What's Happening to Public Higher Education?* edited by R.G. Ehrenberg

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cal turn of the book at times gives the impression of an entirely different intellectual thrust but is nonetheless thought provoking. For example, we found the discussion of the new pedagogy and social learning stimulating, but we wanted to know more about how new pedagogies grounded in constructivist and postmodern theory might contribute to educational policy in transitional and developing societies.

To their credit, the final chapters—9 and 10—return to the primary thrust of the book, refocusing on educational policy, development, and the new knowledge economy. The concluding chapter—"Educational Policy Futures"—includes some well-grounded policy points, departing somewhat from the theoretical orientation of the preceding chapters. Overall, we see *Building Knowledge Cultures* as one of the more significant works on the new knowledge economy and the relevance of higher education.

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Ronald G. Ehrenberg (Ed.). *What's Happening to Public Higher Education?* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006. 381 pp. Cloth: $59.95. ISBN: 0-275-98503-2.

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Robert Ehrenberg, who serves as the director of the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute (CHERI), noted that "public higher education appears to be in a state of crisis" (p. 1). He therefore devoted the spring 2005 (CHERI) conference to providing a detailed description and analysis of public higher education at the beginning of the 21st century. Revised papers presented at this conference by more than two dozen authors evolved into the bulk of *What Is Happening to Public Higher Education?,* which Ehrenberg edited.

The first of the book's three parts is aptly titled "Setting the Stage." In this section, various authors provide background data on national trends occurring in public higher education, the forces that have led to these trends, and the effects of these trends on students. Each of the four chapters in this section offers a detailed, empirically based study addressing topics such as "why public higher education institutions find themselves in the precarious budget situations they are in today" (p. 3), the impact of the growth in part-time or full-time non-tenure-track faculty on undergraduate student graduation rates, the relationship between the increasing use of adjunct professors and reductions in undergraduate students' persistence from their first to second year, and the effect of institutional funding cuts on baccalaureate graduation rates.

As Ehrenberg notes, the first section of the book is more technical than the other two sections; therefore those interested in only a summary of the major findings from the studies presented in the first part of the book will find the introduction beneficial.

The most valuable contributions are in Part 2, "Individual State Experiences," which includes Chapters 5 through 14. These chapters provide case-study analyses of how higher education has evolved in 10 states (one chapter per state) and how public higher education in these states has been affected by these changes. The states examined are California, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Chapter authors note that some states are prioritizing access despite reductions in state funding while other states are raising tuition at the expense of access because financial aid is not keeping pace with tuition increases. Similarly, although some state institutions have increased the number of part-time and full-time, non-tenure-track faculty as a cost-saving measure, other institutions are guarding the high number of full-time, tenure-track faculty and instead are cutting costs in other ways. Despite the varied approach taken by the authors, one theme that emerged from the chapters in this section is the steady decline in state appropriations for higher education and the steady increase in tuition levels. This resounding theme reinforces the magnitude of the challenges facing public higher education nationally in the 21st century.

The final section of the book, "Looking to the Future," comprises Chapters 15 and 16. In Chapter 15, John Wiley, Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison presents a detailed argument on the infeasibility of public universities being able to adapt to the funding structure of private universities. In the final chapter F. King Alexander, President of California State University-Long Beach, asserts that more than 40 years have passed since the last national dialogue on public higher education occurred and that the time is ripe for another one.

The book's strengths clearly reside in the second section where various authors provide an overview of current economic challenges facing higher education and how individual states

have responded to these challenges. The unique programs that states have initiated to address student affordability issues provide snapshots of possibility for state and federal policymakers who aspire to maintain or increase access. Furthermore, the diversity of states examined provides a comprehensive look at the complexity involved with understanding public higher education at the state level, as there is great variability in how each state structures and funds public higher education. Those seeking a better understanding of how different states are responding to challenges facing higher education—and policy analysts, in particular—may find that the second section depicting individual state experiences is more accessible and likely more useful.

Yet the most valuable aspect of the book is also one of its weaknesses. Because each chapter was written by a different author, the breadth and depth with which public higher education is described varies greatly, with some authors choosing to focus solely on the flagship institution of the state while others were more inclusive, exploring the community colleges and comprehensive institutions in addition to the flagship campuses of their state. However, if the reader remembers that the bulk of the book is the compiled papers presented by more than two dozen authors at a national conference, the lack of coherence between chapters is understandable and expected.

Another weakness of the book is that the analyses are almost exclusively from an economic perspective, overshadowing other challenges faced by public higher education. Again, the economic emphasis is understandable given the current national dialogue regarding funding issues; however, it should be made more explicit in the title of the book, since readers may expect more diversity in perspectives from the current title.

Overall, *What Is Happening to Public Higher Education?* is timely, especially given the release of the Spellings's Commission report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education,* the first significant federal document to focus on higher education in the past 20 years (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006). The book situates current discussion and debate on the future of higher education in a context that helps readers understand that the "crisis" in funding for public higher education is not new, but rather is a result of the erosion of state support over time.

Reference

U.S. Department of Education. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education.* Washington, DC: Author.