

- THE STATES
- AND PUBLIC
- HIGHER EDUCATION
- POLICY

Affordability, Access,
and Accountability

Edited by Donald E. Heller

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press

2715 North Charles Street

Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363

www.press.jhu.edu

A catalog record for this book is available
from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The States and public higher education policy : affordability,
access, and accountability / edited by Donald E. Heller.

p. cm.

Results partly from a conference held in Ann Arbor, Mich.,
in June 1998.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8018-6494-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Higher education and state—United States—Congresses. 2.
State universities and colleges—United States—Administration—
Congresses. I. Heller, Donald E.

LC173.S65 2001

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INTRODUCTION: The Changing Dynamics of Affordability, Access and Accountability in Public Higher Education

DONALD E. HELLER

Affordability, access, and accountability are the three key issues facing public higher education at the start of the new millennium. With more than 80 percent of all undergraduates in the United States attending public colleges and universities, very few discussions on higher education take place without one or more of these issues being central to the debate. In an era when education at all levels is receiving increasing attention from policy-makers, parents, students, and the media alike, colleges and universities are under increasing scrutiny. What do these various parties expect from public institutions of higher education? In this volume we attempt to address this question by examining affordability, access, and accountability from a variety of perspectives.

Concerns about the affordability of college have existed for some time.¹ The President's Commission on Higher Education (1947), appointed by President Truman after the close of World War II, expressed its concern about the impact of affordability on the opportunity to attend college:

It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qual-ified ified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education. There must be developed in this country the widespread realization that money ex-pended expended for education is the wisest and soundest of investments in the national interest. The democratic community cannot tolerate a society based upon education for the well-to-do alone. If college opportunities are restricted to those in the higher income brackets, the way is open to the creation and perpetuation of a class society which has no place in the American way of life. (vol. 2, p. 23)