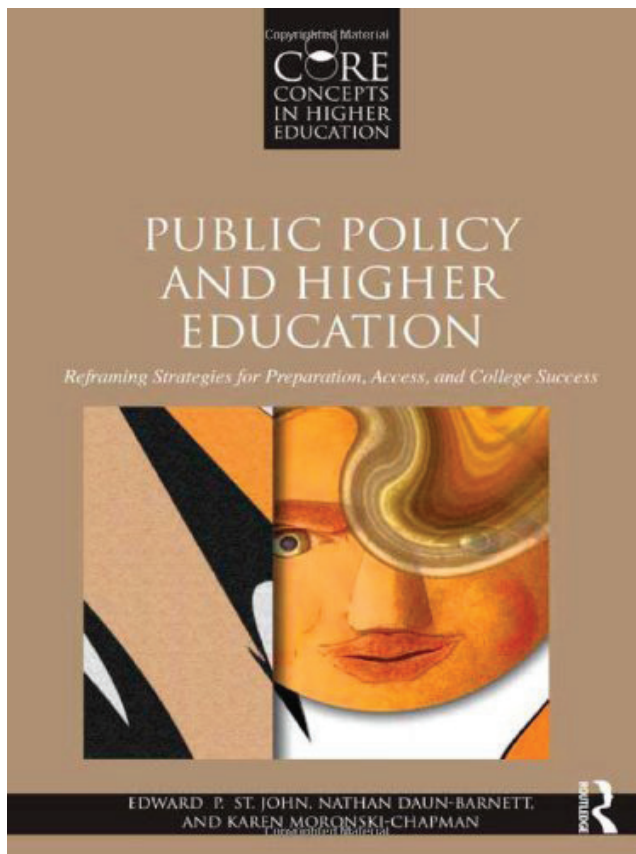


BOOK REVIEW

Review by Lisa Romero, Sacramento State University



Public Policy and Higher Education: Reframing Strategies for Preparation, Access, and Success (Core Concepts in Higher Education)

by Edward P. St. John, Nathan Daun-Barnett and Karen M. Moronski-Chapman

Routledge, 348 pp.

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At few times in our nation's history has higher education faced the breadth of policy challenges that we see today. Edward St. John, Nathan Daun-Barnett, and Karen Moronski-Chapman (2013) provide an insightful and timely analysis of the sociopolitical environment facing, and shaping, higher education in *Public Policy and Higher Education: Reframing Strategies for Preparation, Access, and College Success*. The authors detail the profound shifts in political ideology, beginning in the 1980s and continuing today, that have impacted higher education and the implications for college preparation, access, success, and degree completion. The authors contrast the national, progressive framework that dominated 20th Century higher education policy with the current global, market-driven framework that dominates today. Whereas the progressive paradigm viewed education both as a social good and as important to economic development, the current paradigm views education as an individual good with individual choice and economic entrepreneurialism paramount (Harvey, 2005; Polyani, 2001; St. John, 2003). Using a policy frames approach and state case studies as archetypes, the authors argue compellingly that this "radical" shift in ideology and discourse implicitly breaks the social contract (Rawls, 1971) and has translated into federal and state policy with outcomes that have increased inequities in higher education.

Geared primarily to graduate students and scholars of public and higher education policy, this book can also be instructive for policy makers and useful for policy analysts concerned with the effects of policy on higher education outcomes. Additionally, it can serve as a resource for higher education activists and others seeking to understand the relationship between political ideology, policy decisions, and outcomes affecting college opportunity, access and success.

The book is divided into three sections. The first chapter introduces the reader to the central premise of the impact of changing sociopolitical ideology on higher education policy and outcomes, as well as providing an outline of the organization of the book. Part I (chapters 2 through 6) addresses “The National Policy Discourse” about higher education. Part II (chapters 7 through 12) provides case studies of six states: California, Minnesota, Florida, Indiana, Michigan and North Carolina. These case studies provide an evidence-based approach to illuminate how federal policy and finance influence state decision-making as states respond to federal incentives, pressures, and mandates. The case studies also make clear the importance of context and how state ideology and policy frameworks result in divergent higher education policy, and outcomes in each state. Finally, Part III (chapters 13 and 14) turns to “Reframing Strategies,” and suggests ways to move forward and reincorporate notions of social uplift and equal opportunity in spite of the prevailing global economic, market-driven paradigm.

The first two chapters of Part I (Chapters 2 and 3) provide important historical context about the federal role in higher education policy, especially the federal funding of institutions and students. The authors describe the nature and repercussions of the shift in political ideology from social progressive values to contemporary neoliberal and neoconservative values. They explain, for example, how the switch from a “national progressive” framework to a “global corporatization” framework manifests itself in college access, affordability, and equity. Under the progressive framework, student tuition was subsidized by taxpayers through scholarships and grants. Under the global corporate framework, student loans have replaced student grants, effectively shifting the burden from broad and diffuse support by taxpayers to a heavier burden on students and their families. Chapters 4 thru 6 cover issues of preparation, access, and degree completion, respectively. Each of these chapters provides an overview of the policy discourse surrounding the topic, followed by a review of the research literature.

In Part II (Chapters 7 thru 12) the authors provide case studies of six states -- California, Minnesota, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, and North Carolina -- with a chapter devoted to each state. The case studies show the variety of state responses to growing federal involvement in education in the form of policy and financing. The chapters contextual-

ize state education policy at the collegiate level and importantly consider state secondary school policy that impacts higher education outcomes (i.e. requirements that students take upper level math or science classes in high school). The authors then evaluate each state based on trends and common outcome indicators, including measures of preparedness, completion and diversity.

The authors move from case studies back to a macro-view in the third and final section of the book (Chapters 13 and 14). Chapter 13 focuses on reframing policy decisions, drawing on social justice theory from Sen (2009). They also urge that higher education policy be evaluated based on outcomes rather than intention. Correspondingly, in Chapter 14 the focus turns to reframing the social good. Here St. John et al. argue for a new, broader understanding of the social good, incorporating a human capabilities approach proffered by Nussbaum (2011). The final chapters explore avenues to reframe higher education discourse and policy in order to reincorporate vital notions of social uplift, social good, and equal opportunity into the current global, corporate paradigm.

This book has much to recommend. It provides critical historical context, links prevailing sociopolitical ideologies to federal and state higher education policy, and ultimately to student outcomes. Where some studies of public policy read like a chronological laundry list of legislation and court cases, St. John and his colleagues provide a strong theoretical framework that makes sense out of what we are seeing. It provides an accurate and much needed critique of the prevailing market model, and its consequences -- intended and unintended -- for higher education outcomes, students, their families, taxpayers and the greater social good. More specifically, they point to the growing inequities in higher education that have stratified the academic community, both racially and economically. The result is that community colleges and less prestigious four-year universities serve students of color and those with limited economic resources, while the more prestigious four-year universities serve a more elite, predominantly white and Asian, population.

Another strong aspect of this book is its purposeful consideration of K-12 state policy. The authors make clear the incontrovertible link that quality secondary education and policies such as graduation requirements have on higher education issues such as student preparedness, equal opportunity and postsecondary success. The au-

thors are to be commended on their union of state higher education policy with secondary policy. It is a refreshing and much needed break from the siloed world in which educational scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners typically dwell. As the authors clearly show, outcomes are not neatly siloed, and K-12 policy has important implications for higher education, and for students and families with plans and aspirations for their children.

The authors also present a useful array of indicators that can be used to quantify the effects of higher education policy. Using nationally available data, the authors constructed indicators of high school preparation for college, continuation and completion rates at both two-year and four-year institutions, and equally important, student diversity. These indicators make it possible to assess policy outcomes and examine the effects of new policies, as well as compare outcomes across states. An appendix documents how these indicators are calculated, making it possible for students, scholars, or concerned policymakers to evaluate their own states. Although this book offers much to recommend, it could benefit from a more thorough editing and vetting process. For instance, within the discussion of "Current Issues in California," the authors offer a critique of the California DREAM Act that is misleading. In analyzing the legislation, the State of California is criticized for not providing a path to citizenship. The authors write:

In 2002, the state legislature passed a version of the federal DREAM Act that provided access to in-state tuition at the California State University (CSU) and the California Community College (CCC) systems. *It did not, however, go as far as to provide undocumented students a path to citizenship, which was the language proposed at the federal level.* (p. 148, italics added)

This assertion is repeated in the following paragraph:

California's commitment to the DREAM Act is consistent with its liberal approach to college access and opportunity. However, failure to open state financial aid to undocumented students and *the omission of a legal path to citizenship* are both notable limitations. (p. 148, italics added)

While surely the authors are aware that citizenship is granted by the federal government and not under the purview of states, students and other readers may not be so sure. Additionally, it leaves one wondering what else the authors might have gotten wrong.

Overall, St. John, Daun-Barnett and Moronski-Chapman provide a compelling and well documented argument about changes in higher education that currently have, and will continue to have, consequences for our nation. Notably the book provides a needed bridge between K-12 policy and higher education outcomes. The case studies also add value by providing context, making clear the variance in state higher education policy, and also by providing outcome indicators based on publicly available data. In spite of its occasional lapse, the book adds value to the literature on higher education policy. Increasing stratification cannot be a long-term benefit for a diverse nation that preaches opportunity for all and that relies on an educated citizenry to be competitive in the world.

Further Reading

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

About the Reviewer

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