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A comparative look at the challenges of access and equity: changing patterns of policy making and authority in the UK and US higher education

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Abstract

This essay compares and contrasts approaches to access and equity in these two nations, focusing largely on higher education (HE) in England and public HE in select states in the US. Three general themes are offered in the following narrative. The first is the transition of admission policy making from an internal academic decision to an increasingly external and politically driven process, and linked to the drive to develop mass systems of HE. Seven general phases are identified in the effort to expand access, and to increase the diversity of students, particularly within public universities. A second theme compares the cultural differences between the UK and the US and their influence on policymaking. A third theme relates to the contrasting organization of HE and the influence on admission policies. There are significantly different sources of power and authority in the US and in the UK. Even with these differences, however, one sees a pattern of convergence in policy goals, and in the type of initiatives intended to broaden access and to increase the participation rate of designated

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