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**Author**

BASTEDO, Michael N.

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Michael N. Bastedo ; Patricia J. Gumport

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**Abstract**

Academic policy initiatives have long been a powerful lever for mission differentiation within U.S. public higher education. Although the higher education literature has examined basic issues in the design of public systems, the tension between access and differentiation has not been explored. Drawing upon comparative case studies of public higher education in Massachusetts and New York, this article examines recent policy initiatives to terminate academic programs, eliminate remedial education, and promote honors colleges within each state system. The analysis depicts how these policies contribute to increased stratification of programs and students within a state system as well as within particular campuses in a system. The authors argue that policy analysis in higher education should develop a more refined conceptualization of access that examines the cumulative impact of contemporary policies on the stratification of student opportunity. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

Bastedo, Michael N., E-Mail: [bastedo@uiuc.edu](mailto:bastedo@uiuc.edu)