

PREFACE

Why most states chose to create public universities in the mid-1800s and, in essence, to reject a model of private institutions solely fulfilling the higher education needs of the United States marks a profound shift in the course of the nation's development. It is a choice that relatively few historians have broached in much detail. Yet the character of our contemporary public universities and, arguably, much of the nation's economic growth and its relatively high rates of socioeconomic mobility relate directly to this powerful movement.

The route to mass higher education in the United States came through the progressive attempts of state governments to create public universities, buttressed and prodded at key moments by federal funding aid and influence. Although it began slowly, no other nation embarked with such enthusiasm on a model of widely accessible higher education. A remarkable aspect of this early push to establish public universities was the relatively low initial demand. The actual number of Americans enrolling in some form of higher education would remain small well into the twentieth century. Government and public university leaders ventured to nurture and encourage this demand; the charters of these institutions and their subsequent admissions policies sought wide participation among America's population—although with many ugly caveats—that formed a *social contract* that grew more expansive and more complex over time.

Research for this book began as I was completing another on how California developed its pioneering higher education system, *The California Idea and American Higher Education* (Stanford University Press, 2000). More than midway through that effort, I was asked by the University of California's academic senate to develop a series of policy briefs on the development of admissions policy at the university focused on the question of authority for "setting the conditions of admission": the faculty, the university's board of regents, or the administration. This request came just after the board of regents decided in 1995 to effectively end affirmative action and,

more specifically, the use of race and ethnicity as factors in admission, hiring, and contracting. These reports helped support ideas for alternative approaches to admissions and successfully advocated a greater faculty role in setting not only admissions standards but in overseeing the actual process of admissions—a revival of the senate’s historical responsibilities.

As I delved into the university’s early efforts to set the conditions for admissions and to broaden participation in California higher education, and assessed the highly charged political environment surrounding university admissions, I sensed there was an important need to tell a tale central to the American experience; my hope was also to enlighten contemporary policy-makers and the public on the historical purpose of public universities.

Archival resources form the basis of most of the early chapters in this book, including extensive use of the University of California’s main archives located at the Bancroft Library on the Berkeley campus, the records of the University of California board of regents located in the University of California Office of the President in Oakland, the records of the university’s academic senate, the California State Library, and the California State Archives in Sacramento. I also made trips to the archives of a number of major universities, including Pennsylvania State University and the University of Michigan, and I made use of a growing body of digital resources that include original charters and other documents related to the University of Virginia, the City University of New York, MIT, the University of Wisconsin, and other institutions.

The work of previous historians also greatly informed and shaped my analysis, particularly Harold S. Wechsler’s *The Qualified Student* (1977) and Marcia Graham Synnott’s *The Half Open Door* (1979). These and other important works reflected to some degree a fascination with the admissions policies at Ivy League and similar selective private institutions. But there is a dearth of analysis regarding the unique history and mission of public universities and a general lack of understanding regarding the complex and very different political world in which they must operate. As I argue in later chapters of this book, and while reserving an important role for the nation’s collection of private colleges and universities, the future of America’s democratic experiment and its global economic competitiveness are tied directly to the future vitality of its public universities.

Over the course of my research, I interviewed or discussed admissions policy and the role of public universities with a number of higher education leaders, most whom reviewed various chapters or related articles, including Clark Kerr, David Gardner, Albert Bowker, Jack Peltason, Michael Ire Heyman, Karl Pister, Robert Berdahl, and Richard Atkinson (all were, at

one time, a University of California chancellor or president of the system), David Ward, and Katharine C. Lyall. Various colleagues read portions of the manuscript and offered their criticisms and constructive comments as well. They include Marian Gade, who offered many important critiques and corrections, Pat Hayashi, C. Judson King, Philo Hutchinson, Bruce Leslie, Todd Greenspan, and Pamela Burdman. John R. Thelin, in particular, provided me with perhaps the most beneficial overall review of the evolving manuscript.

I was also influenced by discussions and written works by a host of colleagues, including Martin Trow, Tom Kane, William G. Tierney, Warren Fox, Bruce Hamlett, Bruce Johnstone, Norton Grubb, Philip Altbach, Brian Pusser, Robert Shireman, Sheldon Rothblatt, Arnie Lieman, Daniel Simmons, Keith Widaman, Duncan Mellichamp, Steven Brint, Margaret Miller, Roger Geiger, Calvin Moore, Richard Flacks, Rudy Alvarez, and Dennis Galligani. Particularly in reference to the last two chapters related to higher education policy among competitor nations, I gained the input of a number of non-American scholars, including David Palfreyman and Ted Tapper at the Oxford Centre for Studies in Higher Education, Sarah Guri-Rosenblit, Guy Neave, Michael Shattock, Gareth Perry, Clark Brundin, Roger Brown, Celia M. Whitchurch, Marijk van der Wende, and Christine Musselin. Final work on the manuscript occurred while I was a visiting professor at Science Po, and discussion with faculty and graduates there and with colleagues at the OECD on the path of reform in the European Union helped fashion additional observations in these final chapters.

Kate Wahl and others at Stanford University Press provided much needed guidance and an enthusiasm for the topic and content of the resulting book. My thanks to Andy Sieverman for his assistance in the final production of the manuscript.

Finally, it appears a cliché but it is an irrefutable truth that family and friends make all the difference in a large and time-consuming venture. My deepest of thanks and indebtedness to my wife, Jill Shinkle, who patiently and critically read numerous reiterations of chapters; a smile for my two daughters, Claire and Aubrey, who watched as I toiled in my home office through a number of ups and downs. I also have been informed by friends and acquaintances with children who, captured by the modern competition to get their child into the right college or university, regularly conversed about the dynamics of admissions practices at selective institutions.

Attesting to the primacy of higher education in the postmodern world, many students in the United States, and increasingly throughout the world, are intensely vying for a place at a brand-name college and university. For

public universities in the business of, essentially, dispersing a highly sought public good, this means increased scrutiny and political pressure. How these essential institutions have made these choices, and how they may do it in the future, is the subject of this book.

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