

Features

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Editor

Recent and Relevant Research

Hannah, Susan B. "The Higher Education Act of 1992: Skills, Constraints, and the Politics of Higher Education," *Journal of Higher Education* 67(5)(September/October 1996): 498-527.

This timely article is riveting and recommended reading for all metropolitan university leaders as the Congressional season of 1997 approaches. The session will have as one of its features the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The results of the 1996 general election, and continuing pressure for deficit reduction, ensure that the reauthorization discussion will be lively and controversial. The HEA is seen by many as the most important legislation shaping Federal policy toward higher education and Hannah summarizes its extended effect on postsecondary institutions and students.

Reauthorization in 1997 will have many critical elements, at least

two of which matter deeply to metropolitan universities. First, HEA is the source of authorization for the vast majority of financial aid available to students, and changes in policies and implementation strategies affect metropolitan university students, many of whom rely on such assistance but who may not always fit the traditional characterization of college students that tends to drive Federal financial aid. Second, Title XI of the HEA, called the Urban Community Service Program, represents the only formal Federal legislative language that has resulted in specific investments in the mission-related work of urban and metropolitan institutions. Title XI was first added to the HEA in 1986, but no funds were appropriated until 1992. Since then, more than \$45 million has been awarded to institutions serving America's large metropolitan regions through university-community partnerships that address community needs. Eligibility for Title XI funds is restricted to institutions meeting specific criteria that document the nature of the institutional mission and the relationship to the metropolitan

community.

Hannah's article is a good primer on the origins of the Higher Education Act and focuses especially on the impact of the HEA on financial aid policies. She reminds us that the reauthorization debate in 1992 is critically important to understand because it resulted "in a significant shift in federal policy from an historic commitment to promote access to postsecondary education through grants based on need to a broader strategy of insured loans regardless of family income...the already widening gap between grants and loans increased exponentially with the adoption of HEA '92."

She points out that when HEA was created in 1965, the goal of a Democratic Congress and White House was to support civil rights and antipoverty strategies by promoting access to higher education through need-based grants. In 1972, amendments expanded eligibility and created larger loan programs that deliberately reached even into the middle-class income level. In the 1980s, Hannah's analysis cites an anti-education administration and a rapidly growing deficit problem as the motivation behind a series of amendments that gradually reduced access to grants, emphasized loans, and added

restrictions.

Hannah's premise is that the 1992 reauthorization not only failed to restore any balance between grant/loan policies, but actually made the gap larger because of several factors: concern over the deficit, a coming presidential election that promised to be very close, increasingly conservative views toward anything that resembled "handouts," and a growing public distrust of higher education.

Readers will better understand the cast of characters and organization roles in the coming reauthorization debate by reading Hannah's analysis of the key players involved in 1992: key legislators and their staffs; various leaders from the executive branch; and, especially interesting, the role of higher education interest groups and a coalition of financial organizations. She concludes that, although many leaders believed significant reform was necessary, power shifts among those key groups prevented the development of any sustained coalition that would have been necessary to support unified action. She concludes by reminding us that the federal policy process is a fragmented one, in which incremental change is far more common than dramatic shifts. The HEA '92 process was basically an accidental policy decision that has served to re-

inforce federal scrutiny of higher education performance. The coming debate in '97 will require carefully developed coalitions of influence to make any significant move away from the legacy of '92.

Regrettably for those interested specifically in metropolitan universities, Hannah does not mention the highly contentious and detailed struggle that was required to obtain reauthorization of Title XI and the subsequent appropriations. Her analysis of the financial aid aspects of HEA would no doubt apply, as the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities and several other higher education associations and metropolitan-based organizations worked effectively together as a loose coalition to successfully win support for Title XI. Reauthorization of Title XI in 1997 will require no less, and probably more.

"Recent and Relevant Research" provides short summaries of research articles from various scholarly journals that aren't usually widely-read outside a particular discipline, but yet may contain useful information of practical value to the leaders of metropolitan universities. The column reports some of the key findings of research publications as they may relate to metropolitan universities.

Knowing that such short summaries necessarily lack full findings or design details, the column always give the full citation so that the reader can locate the full article for additional details. Suggestions for appropriate research articles to review are welcome and may be directed to: Barbara A. Holland, Associate Editor of *Metropolitan Universities*, Portland State University, Box 751, Portland, Oregon, 97207.

Publisher's Advice to Contributors . . .

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Cavils notwithstanding,

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