



Congressional Briefing

History of the Higher Education Act

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With Congress currently considering sweeping changes to the Higher Education Act of 1965, this is a useful time to consider the reasons for the original act and its impact on higher education. Two leading educational historians will examine how the federal government has helped to shape the structure and financing of higher education over the past half-century, reflecting on the implications of this history.

Patricia Albjerg Graham (patricia_graham@gse.harvard.edu) is the Charles Warren Professor of the History of Education Emerita at Harvard University. Graham taught at Indiana University and Columbia University before Dean of the Radcliffe Institute and professor of history of education at Harvard in 1974. She was named dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1981 and served till 1991 when she became president of the Spencer Foundation until 2000. In addition, she served as Director of the National Institute of Education in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare from 1977 to 1979. She has written four books, including *Schooling America: How the Public Schools Meet the Nation's Changing Needs* (2005) and *The Knowledge Economy and Postsecondary Education* (2002).

John R. Thelin (john.thelin@uky.edu) is University Research Professor at the University of Kentucky. Prior to that he was Chancellor Professor at the College of William & Mary and Professor of Higher Education & Philanthropy at Indiana University. As Research Director for the Association of California Independent Colleges & Universities, he worked with university officials and congressional staff in analyzing legislation dealing with higher education. He is the author of *A History of American Higher Education* (2004) and other books. Since 2006, Thelin has been a charter member of the American Enterprise Institute's working group on the future of higher education.

Arnita Jones is the Executive Director emerita of the American Historical Association, where she was active in founding the National History Center as well as initiatives that relate to the role of history in higher education. A graduate of Vanderbilt University (BA) and Emory University (MA, PhD) she has most recently been active in establishing the International Federation for Public History. Jones has written widely on history and education issues and has served as a consultant for nonprofit associations, corporations and government agencies.

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Origins of the Higher Education Act

- Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944 (G.I. Bill)
 - o Fearing high unemployment if GIs entered labor market too quickly, GI Bill diverted them for a time to college
 - o Many vets did well, demonstrating that those not considered "college material" could succeed
- Growth of American higher education from 1945-1965
 - o Increased enrollment in colleges and universities
 - o Rise of research university as valuable to society
 - o Graduation from college became norm for middle class white males

Higher Education Act 1965

- Original provisions were fairly limited in scope
 - o Funding for teacher education scholarships, some student loan programs, and other linkages with Civil Rights Act

Reauthorization and Amendments of 1972

- The amendments of the 1972 reauthorization established student financial aid (as opposed to direct federal monies to institutions) as the dominant emphasis of the Higher Education Act. The centerpiece consisted of Pell grants.

Effects of 1972 changes

- BEOG/ Pell grants fueled "student consumerism"
 - o Colleges now motivated to compete for applicants who could bring their portable federal grant to the institution
 - o Admissions and financial aid transformed into a pro-active process dependent on increasingly sophisticated data for decisions
- Problems: 1) Ceilings on scholarship awards were insufficient to pay for college; 2) Criteria used in setting limits on family income lagged behind realities of most American families
- A decade of double digit inflation and stalled income changed conventional attitudes about college prices and costs, marking the start of an enduring debate over "rising college costs"

Middle Income Student Assistance Act of 1978 made low interest loans readily available

- o Between 1978 and 1980, federal student loans were praised as a "good thing"
- o The popularity of the program set into motion increasing emphasis on loans rather than grants
- o Soon, loan programs were increasingly depicted as source of student debt rather than access to higher education

HEA programs helped to make student financial aid critical to "going to college" in American life

- Federal aid was determined and assembled in conjunction with scholarship aid from state programs and from college and university awards
 - o For students and families, this meant "packaging" became central to the balance of "costs" and "prices" in terms of access, affordability, and choice in the college experience