

Thomas Bailey

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Thomas R. Bailey is the George and Abby O'Neill Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is also the Director of the National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR) and the Community College Research Center (CCRC). Dr. Bailey holds a PhD in labor economics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His specialties include education, labor economics, and econometrics. Dr. Bailey's recent work analyzes access and student success at community college, with a particular focus on the experiences of low income and minority students. His articles have appeared in a wide variety of education, policy-oriented and academic journals, and he authored or co-authored several books on the employment and training of immigrants and the extent and effects of on-the-job training. His most recent book, co-edited with Vanessa Morest, is *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for quality access in higher education?

I don't think that there will be much change in higher education in the United States over the next few years. States will have other demands on their resources and it is easier to put off expenditures in this area than in many others. Moreover, colleges are going to have to figure out how to spend money more effectively and this is going to take some time.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

At least in the United States, most students have access to some form of higher education. Now we need to turn to a much greater focus on what they learn in college and whether they actually complete their courses of study. Over the last few decades, US colleges have focussed on access at most colleges and have assumed quality instruction, primarily because of the reputations of the top tier of elite colleges. The output of higher education produced by this "system" is now not considered adequate, so educators and researchers must now focus much more on the content of higher education. This is certainly true in the US, but I suspect also true in other OECD countries.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

Maintaining quality as higher education spreads to a larger proportion of the population gains access to higher education. As long as higher education was confined to higher income groups in society, they were able to work with students who come with significant academic, social, cultural, and financial capital—this made their job easier. As more students gain access, colleges must work with students who are less well prepared and have fewer resources to fall back on. Moreover, higher education expansion means more expenditures and in most countries, colleges must compete with other public demands.

In your opinion, what would be the worst, but possible, way to tackle these future challenges? Why?

As I said earlier, I do not think that there will be major higher education reform initiatives in the OECD countries (particularly the US) in the next few years. Colleges may try to improve their outcomes by increasing merit based financial aid to attract better students. This won't have much effect on the overall educational level but rather may simply shift good students around among institutions. It might increase inequality without doing anything to improve the underlying quality issues that need to be addressed in order to effectively expand higher education. Page | 9

What do you consider to be the best possible way to tackle the above mentioned future challenges? Why?

The solution (at least in the United States) involves a combination of reformed need based financial aid, better connections between secondary school and higher education, and a focus on the internal processes of higher education including pedagogy and student services. These reforms represent a departure from typical approaches to college improvement.