Richard Arum

Richard Arum is Professor of Sociology and Education, New York University; and Program Director of Educational Research, Social Science Research Council. He received a Masters of Education in Teaching and Curriculum from Harvard University in 1988 and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley in 1996. He is author of *Judging School Discipline: The Crisis of Moral Authority* (Harvard University Press, 2003). His international comparative work includes co-directing with Walter Müller *The Reemergence of Self-Employment: A Comparative Study of Self-Employment Dynamics and Social Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2004). He also recently co-directed with Adam Gamoran and Yossi Shavit a comparative project on expansion, differentiation and access to higher education in fifteen countries, recently published as *Stratification in Higher Education: A Comparative Study* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario with regard to social equity and higher education?

The most probable scenario in developed economies is that we will see greater overall access to higher education, related to the continued expansion of higher education supported by both public and private sources. This expansion will be accompanied, however, by increased differentiation of higher education experiences across and within schools. The qualitative differentiation will be associated with decreased social equity in terms of the association between educational opportunity and social backgrounds; the expansion will be associated with increased equity in educational attainment. Women will continue their historic advancement relative to men as these educational trends related to gender are produced by larger structural forces.

Similarly, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for quality assurance in higher education?

In the United States, the most probable scenario is that we will see increasing attempts to improve both oversight and quality assurance, given the growth in both public and private investment in higher education. It is likely that quality assurance schemes will focus on monitoring organizational efficiency in instructional inputs, research productivity and student retention. Quality assurance related to measurement of student learning *per se* will lag due to both institutional resistance and psychometric obstacles, but eventually will emerge given the increasing share of public and private resources invested in this sector and the likelihood of growing public concern over the skill sets demonstrated by college graduates.

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

The most important objective is to develop for as many individuals as possible their full potential as productively employed, democratic citizens. I define this as the most important objective, because the quality and character of the enterprise is as important to social progress as is its scale and scope.

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

The greatest challenge to higher education systems is the increasing commodification of higher education and associated threats to student and institutional academic cultures that are conducive to high quality learning. Given the high rate of economic returns for individuals with college diplomas, other significant challenges, such as identification of adequate resources to provide expanded access, will in advanced economies – with the combination of public and private investment – likely be more easily resolved.

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

The worst way to handle the challenges to positive school cultures conducive to student learning would be to further accelerate the differentiation in higher education that is occurring and increasingly restrict access to elite high quality programs to those with the greatest aptitude, motivation and resources. This response to the existing challenge is highly likely to occur (particularly in decentralized systems like the U.S.) and unfortunately will detract from system level goals of increasing social equity.

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

The best way to deal with this challenge is to modify the organizational cultures in schools so that educators' responsibility and authority to define academic culture in terms of a moral imperative is restored and institutions are discouraged from being responsive to student preferences emerging from the privileging of students' institutional role as consumers and clients.