

## Bruce Johnstone



D. Bruce Johnstone is Distinguished Service Professor of Higher and Comparative Education Emeritus at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His principal scholarship is in international comparative higher education higher education finance, governance, and policy formation. He directs the International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project, an eight-year examination into the worldwide shift of higher education costs from governments and taxpayers to parents and students. During a 25-year administrative career prior to assuming his professorship at the University at Buffalo, Johnstone held posts of vice president for administration at the University of Pennsylvania, president of the State University College of Buffalo, and chancellor of the State University of New York system. Johnstone was the *Distinguished Scholar Leader* in 2007-08 of the Fulbright *New Century Scholars Program*. In the 2006-07 academic year, he was a part-time *Erasmus Mundus* lecturer in higher education administration at the Universities of Oslo and Tampere. He has written or edited more than 115 publications and is best known for his works on the financial condition of higher education, the concept of learning productivity, student financial assistance policy, system governance, and international comparative higher education finance. His newest book (2006 by Sense Publishers) is *Financing Higher Education: Cost-Sharing in International Perspective*. Johnstone holds Bachelors (in economics) and Masters (in teaching) degrees from Harvard, a 1969 Ph.D. in Education from the University of Minnesota, and Honorary Doctorates from D'Youville College, Towson State College, and California State University at San Diego.

### **In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario for financing of higher education?**

The most desirable future for the financing of higher education is that governments recognize the importance of public (tax) revenues in recognition of the role of higher education for the social, political, and economic good of nations - but that students and/or parents also contribute in recognition of: (a) the very considerable private benefits that accrue to both students and parents; (b) the inherent limitations in most countries on tax revenues and the socially and politically compelling competing public needs; and (3) the equity or "fairness" of some cost-sharing in light of the fact that taxes in almost all countries are proportional or regressive (only rarely are truly *progressive*) and the recipients of higher education are disproportionately from middle and upper classes.

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

[The limitation of the answer to only one is a foolish constraint as the objectives are inherently multiple.] If I am forced to cite only one objective, it would be to maximize human potential - in a cost-effective and equitable manner - for the benefit of the individual and the greater society.

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

1. The already high and annually increasing cost trajectory, which in almost all countries exceed the trajectory of likely or even possible public revenues, and exceeds possible private revenues as well.
2. The tendency of higher education to perpetuate or even to widen inequalities: that is to accelerate the intergenerational transmission of status, wealth, and influence.
3. The politicization of higher education - including its faculty, leaders, curriculum, financing, standards, and admittance of students.

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

In the matter of higher educational finance, the worst way is to accede to pressure from students and/or politically influential families to preserve the pretence of free higher education - meaning higher education for themselves or their children paid for by the average taxpayer / consumer - with the resulting austerity and consequent impoverishment of the institutions themselves and/or the fierce and totally inequitable limitation on accessible capacity.

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

To support substantial university (and other institutions of higher education) autonomy in the hiring and compensation of faculty, admission of students, setting of curricular standards, and allocation of budgetary resources; to require a reasonable accommodation of student numbers with real efforts to accommodate socio-economic, ethnic, and linguistic diversity; to be accountable for student progress and scholarly output.

The risks, of course, are that all of these imply considerable subjectivity, and are inevitably subject to the distortions of politics, ideology, and self-interest.

In the end, countries must fall back on the established tradition of academic integrity: our main hope, which must be recognized and nurtured by governments.