

**The Truman Commission and its Impact on Federal Higher Education Policy  
From 1947 to 2010**

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# **The Truman Commission and its Impact on Federal Higher Education Policy From 1947 to 2010**

## **Introduction**

The report of the President's Commission on Higher Education (1947) has been called "prescient" (Reuben & Perkins, 2007, p. 265), audacious (Kennedy, 1952, p. vi), and "stirring" (Havinghurst, 1948/1952, p. 62) as well as "confused, confusing, and contradictory" (Hutchins, 1948/1952, p. 81). The sweeping recommendations the report made about higher education in its six volumes were both celebrated and reviled. Its pages generated debate in the higher education community over philosophy, policy, access, and much more. However, despite the vigorous deliberations that swirled around the report among leading intellectuals of the era, its immediate destiny was to be held in limbo at the federal level because it "had neither the precedent nor the presidential clout to work its way into Congressional subcommittees" (Thelin, 2004, p. 270).

Nonetheless, the Truman Commission created, arguably for the first time, a national rhetoric on higher education (Hutcheson, 2002). This is not to say that all, or even a majority, of the Commission's recommendations have been adopted to date, but its long-term impact on higher education has been substantial. Indeed, although the Truman Commission's emphasis on access, equality, and democracy have been gradually supplanted by a focus on higher education as a means of fueling the nation's economic engines, it undeniably set the stage for subsequent examinations of higher education in the United States (Hutcheson, 2007).

Though scholars have reviewed the degree to which the report's recommendations have been implemented in a general sense, or focused upon its implementation in certain areas (e.g., Hutcheson, 2002; Hutcheson, 2007; Kim & Rury, 2007; Reuben & Perkins, 2007), there is a dearth of comprehensive analyses conducted on a recommendation-by-recommendation basis of the Commission's impact and the manner of its implementation. Our paper aims to contribute to the scholarship in this area. The Commission offers us a lens through which we can view and understand the trajectory of U.S. thinking about higher education from the end of World War II to the present day. In reviewing this trajectory, we trace the movement from idea to policy of many of its recommendations and ideals. By analyzing the development and evolution of U.S. federal policies since 1947, as well as investigating the scholarly and public debates surrounding the report, current higher education policies, and past and current educational philosophies, we are able to form conclusions about the report's impact, degree of implementation, and potential for future adoption.

Ultimately, the manner in which some recommendations were implemented and others discarded, whether consciously in relation to the Commission or not, has strong implications for the way in which higher education in the U.S. has evolved since 1947, and for its future. Given the financial crisis and the resulting instability and uncertainty facing higher education in both the public and private sectors today, it is especially important that we understand the manner in which this founding document has been utilized, adapted, or disregarded.

In spite of the Commission's exhortations, little movement on implementing its recommendations occurred on a federal level in the first decade following the issuance of its report. Although it did not happen within the timeframe the Commission envisioned, eventually federal involvement in higher education did begin to increase. In this paper we describe the Commission's recommendations in three key areas: 1) improving college access and equity; 2) expanding the role of community colleges; and 3) restructuring and expanding the federal government's role in funding higher education institutions. For each recommendation we then analyze how subsequent federal policy initiatives have evolved in response to these recommendations.

## **Access and Equity in American Higher Education**

A key recommendation of the Commission with respect to college access was that the college-going rate in the U.S. should double by 1960 (Vol. I, p. 41). Commission members strongly believed that at least 49 percent of the population had the ability to complete a minimum of two years of higher education, while 33 percent had the ability to continue to an advanced liberal degree or specialized professional education. The Commission realized, however, that the cost of college, even in 1947, was a barrier to many students. If the higher education system continued the funding status quo, the Commission members understood that this aim was probably not achievable.

As a result, they argued fervently that the nation was depriving itself of a vast pool of potential leaders and socially competent citizens by allowing access based on economic status to be perpetuated. To move toward a solution to this disparity, in one of its most controversial recommendations that led to accusations of totalitarianism (Farrell, 1949/1952), the Commission suggested that it was time for the federal government to play a more prominent role in higher education and provide a large amount of financial assistance to help level the playing field for access. The Commission's recommendations about increasing access were also tied to its concern over making public education equally available to all students regardless of their race, creed, sex, or national origin.

### *The Commission's View of Access Issues*

Much of the Commission's motives were driven by its findings that access to higher education in the post-World War II era was not equitable, and was too heavily dependent on student ability (with a strong bias toward the upper end of the ability spectrum), family and community circumstances, race, gender, and religion. There were also concerns that the capacity of higher education, both in the number of seats in colleges and universities and the location of the institutions themselves was insufficient to meet growing demand.

The Commission was clear that equity in access did not mean that every potential student should receive the same higher education opportunity. It acknowledged that different forms of postsecondary education should be made available, based on the skills, prior training, and capabilities students brought with them. It was clear in stating, however, that criteria used for admitting students into colleges and universities should be justifiable and related to the academic program, and not be used to discriminate based on the characteristics described above.

While acknowledging that students' preparation for and ability to enroll in higher education was directly related to the quality of their elementary and secondary education, the Commission emphasized that finances were the primary barrier faced by students from lower-income families: "This Commission concludes that the decision as to who shall go to college is at present influenced far too much by economic considerations" (Vol. II, p. 16). It decreed that the only factors that should limit enrollment were the ability and interest of the student.

In contrast to much of the focus of higher education's role in society today, which is dominated by the economic development imperative of colleges and universities, the Truman Commission emphasized at least as equally – and arguably even more so – the equity arguments for improving college access.

It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education. There must be developed in this country the widespread realization that money expended for education is the wisest and soundest of investments in the national interest. The democratic community cannot tolerate a society based upon education for the well-to-do alone. If college opportunities are restricted to those in the higher income brackets, the way is open to the creation and perpetuation of a class society which has no place in the American way of life (Vol. II, p. 23).

The language here is quite clear; it evokes the relationship between investments in higher education and economic development. But it also emphasizes the risk to equity and opportunity of continuing a system where the economic status of a student and her family is the critical factor in determining whether or not she goes to college.

### *Specific Recommendations for Expanding Access*

The Truman Commission established specific benchmarks for how rapidly enrollment in higher education should grow at each level. As described earlier, it based its recommendation on the determination that at least 49 percent of the population had "the mental ability to complete 14 years of schooling with a curriculum of general and vocational studies that should lead either to gainful employment or to further study at a more advanced level" (Vol. I, p. 41). In addition, 32 percent of the population was determined to have had the talents to be able to attain a baccalaureate degree or advanced degree.

Using these data, the Commission recommended that by 1952 and 1960, enrollments in higher education should grow to a level of at least 3.9 and 4.6 million students, respectively, from a level of 2.4 million in 1947, of which approximately 1 million were veterans returning to college under the G.I. Bill (Vol. I, pp. 25, 43). The 4.6 million students in 1960 should include 2.5 million students in the first two years of postsecondary education, 1.5 million in years 3 and 4 of college, and 600,000 students in graduate programs.

The Commission made a number of recommendations that it foresaw would serve to increase enrollments and help the nation achieve these goals. The major recommendations included:

- Ending discrimination based on race, which at the time was largely defined as “Negro” students who suffered from segregated educational systems in most of the southern states. At the time of the report, although these students represented 10 percent of the population of the country, they comprised only 3.1 percent of enrollments in higher education, and 85 percent of whom attended segregated institutions (Vol. II, p. 31);
- Ending religious discrimination, which during the era of the Truman Commission was focused on Jewish students;
- Eliminating “antifeminism” (Vol. II, p. 40), which the Commission noted was largely rooted in graduate and professional education;
- Eliminating financial barriers through the development of national scholarship (for undergraduate education) and fellowship (for graduate education) programs.

Actual enrollments in higher education fell short of this goal, however. There are two sources of data on college enrollments during the 1960s: 1) the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (the predecessor to the Department of Education); and 2) the Current Population Survey (CPS), a nationally representative survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau and begun in 1955. The CPS data indicate that in the fall of 1960, enrollments in higher education totaled 3.57 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Department of Education does not provide enrollment data for the fall of 1960, but the average of the fall enrollment figures from 1959 and 1961 was 3.89 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Table 189).<sup>1</sup> While the nation did not reach these targets by 1960, accomplishment of these enrollment levels was not far off. The CPS data show enrollments reached 4.6 million by 1964, and the Office of Education data by 1963.

What caused the nation to miss these targets, albeit by only a few years? There are a number of factors that influence enrollments in higher education, so it is impossible to point to a single reason for the shortfall.<sup>2</sup> But we can examine progress made on the recommendations noted above which the Commission had felt were necessary prerequisites for college enrollment to grow as it recommended.

**Ending racial discrimination.** Unforeseen by the Truman Commission was the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which overturned the doctrine of separate but equal public education that had been the law since the Court’s ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).<sup>3</sup> While *Brown* applied to public higher education institutions as well as elementary and secondary schools, the reality is that desegregation of the higher education systems in many of the southern states dragged on for decades. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 during the Johnson Administration, along with aggressive enforcement of both this law and the *Brown* decision as they applied to public higher education during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, helped to provide more opportunities for African American and other racial minority students who historically have been underrepresented in postsecondary education.<sup>4</sup>

Even with these actions, however, minority students still remain underrepresented in college and university enrollments and educational attainment. Figure 1 shows the proportion of high school graduates enrolling in college within a year of graduation by racial group, beginning in 1973, the first year of data available. Between the time of the Commission’s report and 1973, great progress had been made in equalizing educational opportunity for African American students, to the point where their enrollment rate lagged behind that of white students by only six

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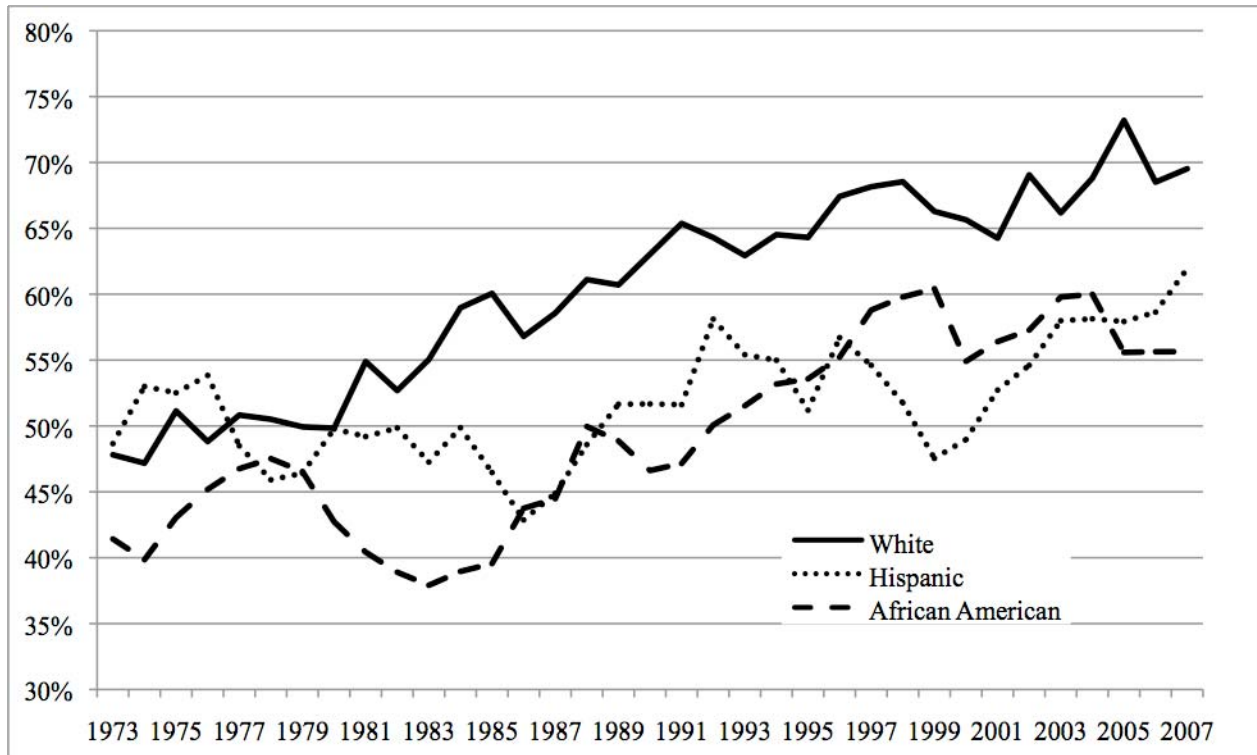
<sup>1</sup> Neither source provides the distribution of enrollments by level, i.e., lower division, upper division, or graduate.

<sup>2</sup> See Goldin and Katz (2007) for a history of postsecondary participation in the country from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present time.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Commission issued its report seven months before President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which integrated the military and mandated equal treatment by race (Truman Library & Museum, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> In an interesting side note to the Commission’s report, in the section on racial discrimination, four of the Commission members included a “statement of dissent” (Vol. II, p. 29). It included these words in response to the Commission’s recommendation about ending racial segregation in higher education: “But we believe that efforts toward these ends must, in the South, be made within the established patterns of social relationships, which require separate educational institutions for whites and Negroes. . . . a doctrinaire position which ignores the facts of history and the realities of the present is not one that will contribute constructively to the solution of difficult problems of human relationships” (Vol. II, p. 29).

percentage points. Hispanic students attended college in the 1970s at approximately the same rate as white students. Over the ensuing three and a half decades, both African American and Hispanic student lost ground to whites. While the college-going rates of all three groups rose, the gap between white and African American and Hispanic students increased to approximately 14 and eight percentage points, respectively, in 2007.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2010), Table 201. African American and Hispanic rates are 3-year moving averages, due to smaller sample sizes.

**Figure 1: Enrollment rate of high school graduates in college, 1973 to 2007**

Another way of looking at racial progress is to compare the Truman Commission’s proportionality measure that Negroes represented 10 percent of the nation’s population in 1947, but only 3.1 percent of college enrollments. In 2008, African Americans represented 13.5 percent of postsecondary enrollments, the same proportion in which they are represented in the population of the country. So by this measure, they have achieved proportionality in comparison to their status during the post-World War II era. But this progress has to be considered in light of other measures that show that African American (and Hispanic students as well) are not as likely to graduate from college once enrolled (Carey, 2005).

**Ending religious discrimination.** The Commission noted that

Jewish students, however, do not have equal opportunity with non-Jewish students in the choice of institutions and in certain fields of advanced study. This situation has been aggravated in recent years. The obstacles created by private institutions of higher education are manifested in tacit or overt quota systems (Vol. II, p. 37).

The Commission was responding to what at the time had been well-documented evidence of this discrimination against Jewish students throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even in the most elite private institutions, however, this practice had begun to be abandoned during the second World War because of a shortage of applicants. Karabel (2005) showed that the percentage of Jewish students at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – three of the nation’s most elite institutions – climbed during the War. By the post-World War II era, and in some cases prompted by state laws banning religious discrimination in college admissions, private institutions began to eliminate their practice of

asking for students' religion on applications for admission (Karabel, 2005; Freeland, 1992). These actions, more than the prodding of the Truman Commission, most likely were successful in eliminating systematic discrimination against Jewish students.

**Eliminating “antifeminism.”** The Commission indicated that barriers to women existed primarily at the graduate level of postsecondary education. During World War II, women represented a large proportion of the undergraduate population, but veterans returning to college under the G.I. Bill pushed female enrollment down to just 32 percent of the total in 1947 (Vol. II, p. 40).

The enrollment of women in college was no doubt aided by passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which besides prohibiting discrimination based on race, as noted above, also prohibited discrimination based on gender. While not targeted specifically at students in postsecondary educational programs, the Act nonetheless brought to the forefront of society issues of gender discrimination in general. The ability of educational institutions to discriminate against women was statutorily prohibited through passage of Title IX of the Higher Education Act (HEA), included in the 1972 amendments to HEA.

The growing enrollment and success of women in higher education in recent decades has been well documented (see for example Karen; 2002). Data from the Department of Education indicate that women represented 57 percent of all college students in 2008, with their proportional enrollment in graduate education even higher, at 59 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Table 194). These aggregate numbers, however, mask the fact that women remain well underrepresented in degrees awarded in key STEM disciplines such as computer science, physical sciences, engineering, and math (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Table 275).

**Eliminating financial barriers.** None of the Truman Commission's recommendations regarding expanding access to higher education received more attention – and arguably, subsequent policy response – than did that of eliminating the financial barriers to higher education. The opening of the quotation from Volume 2 of the report printed earlier – “It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education” (p. 23) – set out the responsibilities for achieving this recommendation.

Later in this paper we outline how the federal government moved forward in providing assistance to higher education institutions in order to help them develop the capacity to accommodate a growing population of students. Here we describe how assistance was provided to students in order for them to be able to overcome the “financial barriers” to college attendance.

In the first decade following the issuance of the Truman Commission's report, the only major federal initiative in providing financial assistance to students remained the G.I. Bill. The impact of the G.I. Bill should not be understated (and has been well documented by Greenberg, 1997, and Bennett, 1996, for example), but its benefits were of course available only to veterans of the Second World War. And while the bill has been shown to have played a large role in the increase in college enrollments after the war, there is also evidence that its effects were not equal for all groups. Turner and Bound (2003), for example, demonstrated that for black veterans of the war residing in the South, the G.I. Bill benefits were of little value because of the limited postsecondary options for blacks in that region.

Beyond the GI Bill, the first major federal initiative in funding for students in higher education was the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. In response to the Soviet Union's launching of the Sputnik satellite and the concern that the U.S. was losing ground to the Soviets in the space race, the Congress passed and President Eisenhower signed into law legislation to fund scholarships for students studying in science and foreign languages, areas deemed critical to the national defense. While the NDEA had limited impact on the goals laid out by the Truman Commission, because its aid was targeted at students studying in only some disciplines, it nevertheless had symbolic impact. As Mumper (1996) describes, the preamble to the NDEA legislation describes college opportunity and access in general as being important to the security of the country. He notes that, “While such a statement is a long way from a federal promise to remove price barriers for all lower-income students, it provided an important symbolic breakthrough by articulating a clear national interest in achieving equal educational opportunity” (p. 76).

It was not until eighteen years after the Commission's report, and the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, that the federal government initiated a broad-based effort at addressing the Commission's access goals by working to erode cost-based barriers to college (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). The structure of the HEA is intrinsically tied to the way in which the role of the federal government in higher education policy was finally defined. Title IV of the HEA clarified the role the federal government would play in higher education. The language in the preamble to Title IV echoed the language of the Truman Commission report that was cited earlier:

Truman Commission (Vol. II, p. 23):

“It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education.”

Higher Education Act of 1965 (§ 401)

“It is the purpose of this part to provide, through institutions of higher education, educational opportunity grants to assist in making available benefits of higher education to qualified high school graduates of exceptional financial need, who for lack of financial means of their own or of their families would be unable to obtain such benefits without such aid.”

As the most extensive of the HEA measures, Title IV began the first widely available program of postsecondary student aid through grants and federally-insured loans. The Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG) were awarded to institutions via the states, with determination of who would receive the grants left in the hands of the higher education institutions. The legislation also created guaranteed student loans that were offered directly to students to be used at the institution of their choice. While the structure of the grant and loan programs was designed to be fairly universal, funding for the EOG program was very constrained, so the impact of the grants on access was minimal.

The 1972 reauthorization of the HEA replaced EOG’s with Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG) that were given directly to the student. Along with this change was created a federal evaluation of need that moved the assessment of financial need away from institutionally-based criteria to a centralized federal process to make it more equitable and standardized. The BEOGs were very successful, with funding expanding quite rapidly in the early years after their introduction, helping to solidify the federal government’s role in ensuring equity in postsecondary education access (Heller, in press).

The 1978 HEA reauthorization saw the creation of the Middle Income Student Assistance Act (MISAA), which increased the income limits on BEOG grants and removed income caps entirely on federally subsidized loans, resulting in greatly increased rates of borrowing in the student population. This was a signal that Congress was moving away from the original access goals of the Truman Commission, as well as the HEA, and focusing more on affordability of college for middle- and upper-income students. After the government subsequently rolled back MISAA because of the massive spike in costs in order to limit the loan program, the 1992 reauthorization enabled borrowing even further with the creation of the unsubsidized Stafford Loan Program and increase in the borrowing limits on subsidized Stafford loans (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005).

Thus, what has emerged and been emphasized over time via the HEA is a form of federal involvement in higher education that emphasizes direct student aid to students, with an increasing emphasis on loans over grants. This is a far cry from the federal takeover of academic institutions the Truman Commission wished to avoid (see below for more on this issue), and certainly meets its desire for a vastly expanded federal involvement in higher education, especially in providing financial support to students. However, the increasing emphasis on loans is probably not what the Commission would have wanted, given its belief that an increase in loan aid would not serve to actually equalize opportunity for students (Vol. II, p. 46). Therefore, although part of the philosophy and actualization goals may have been achieved, it has not been in the manner that the Commission members likely imagined and comes with an orientation toward loan-based funding that is not in line with their aims.

The introduction of direct lending during the Clinton administration, where the federal government provides the capital for student loans, may indicate a philosophical shift back toward a heavier federal role in directly funding higher education. Previously, banks had been solely involved in the student lending process, distributing and managing loans that were guaranteed by the federal government (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). In March 2010, however, the Obama administration and Congress passed a health care reform bill that included measures to end the system of bank-based student lending and move completely to direct lending, thereby entirely cutting the banks out as intermediaries in the student loan process (Mettler, 2010). In addition to the cost savings direct lending will offer (Mettler, 2010), this transition necessitates a greater level of federal involvement in higher education. While the emphasis here is still on loans, the direct role the federal government will now play in all HEA-affiliated student loans is reminiscent of the Commission’s desire to see the federal government move into direct and consistent support of higher education (Vol. V, p. 54).

The economic crisis of 2008 also caused a tremendous influx of federal funding to higher education via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which can be seen as a further commitment to higher education. The act offered billions of dollars worth of provisions for higher education ranging from tuition tax credits to state fiscal stabilization financing intended to provide for facilities upgrades and compensate for state-level budget cuts (“Higher education receives,” 2010). These funding allocations, along with the move to direct lending, suggest that

the Commission's conception of a heavily involved federal government is not only entrenched within the national mind but may also be undergoing a renaissance of re-investment.

### **Expansion of Community Colleges**

Any hope of achieving the Commission's recommendations on improving access and exponentially increasing the overall number of students within the system of higher education would have been impossible without a commensurate expansion of higher education to meet the demand the Commission hoped would occur. The arena where the Commission expected this expansion to occur was within the two-year college system (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). The Commission strongly believed that its other recommendations could not be carried out without a massive expansion in both the number of community colleges and the activities in which such colleges engaged (Vol. I, p. 67). Community colleges were particularly appealing as a means of handling student expansion because the two-year colleges could be constructed quickly and were generally viewed as being more cost-effective (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). In its recommendations for community colleges, the Commission managed to:

- Articulate a new sense of purpose and new functions for these schools
- Envision radically different tuition structures
- Propose ways in which these schools could be planned and designed

#### *Purpose and Functions of Community Colleges*

In conjunction with a general recommendation that the number of community colleges should increase (Vol. II, p. 22), the Commission crafted a new definition of their purpose, which included re-conceptualizing junior colleges as community colleges. It was the Truman Commission that introduced this term into the national higher education lexicon (Hutcheson, 2002) because members felt that the term "junior" did not actually express the purpose these schools were serving—junior college implied that students would be moving on to four-year colleges, but one of the principal tasks in which the two-year colleges were engaging was terminal vocational education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Furthermore, the Commission wanted two-year colleges to be fully integrated into the life of their communities (Vol. III, p. 5), which made the term community college more appropriate than junior college.

Along with this redefinition of the two-year college as a community college intimately engaged in the life of its community, the Commission imagined a variety of new functions and programs that these schools could offer to meet the total post-high school needs of their communities (Vol. I, p. 67). At a macro level, the Commission felt that community colleges should be primarily public in nature. While they expected that private institutions would extend their offerings to include programs for the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> years of schools, they firmly expected that most community colleges would be public undertakings (e.g., Volume I, p. 67), and that community colleges should be located such that one was within reach of most people within each state (Vol. III, p. 9). However, they wanted this to be accomplished in a manner that kept the overall number of schools low enough that efficient administration of the system and its colleges was possible without having to develop complicated control mechanisms (Vol. III, p. 14).

Based on these suggestions, the picture we develop of the Commission's conception of community colleges is one of schools that are: 1) primarily local or regional in scope; 2) locally controlled; 3) deliberately organized such that they fit into a statewide system of higher education; and 4) able to serve the interests of the entire state as well as their respective communities.

#### *Rethinking Tuition and Financing Structures*

The other reason the Commission expected that most of these schools would be public in nature had to do with their dramatic tuition recommendation: the Commission argued that education to the 14<sup>th</sup> grade should be tuition free with additional provisions of financial assistance made for students in the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> grades who would be unable to continue education without it (Vol. I, p. 37). In other words, the Commission expected that public community colleges would be as free and accessible to students as other parts of the K-12 school system (Vol. III, p. 15). However, in the Commission's conception of funding structures for the two-year colleges, this free tuition would be accomplished not through federal support, but through financing by local communities with supplemental aid provided by the state (Vol. I, p. 67).

## *Planning and Design*

Once a clear path was created for community college financial support, the Commission argued that what was needed was a statewide planning effort dedicated to planning the location and curriculum of colleges within the system being developed (Vol. I, p. 70). This, members felt, would enable states to avoid costly duplication of efforts while still offering comprehensive vocational training on a statewide basis (Vol. III, p. 9). Although the Commission was comfortable leaving to the states the determination of specific locations for schools and the educational needs of their citizens, they did have some general recommendations about the scope of educational activities in which community colleges should engage. One of their main concerns was that community colleges take direct responsibility for surveying and monitoring the educational needs of their communities so that their programs could be adapted to the needs of both general and vocational students at a local level (Vol. III, p. 6). This recommendation came on top of their plan for statewide surveys of educational needs because the Commission wanted community colleges to be closely articulated with local high schools—ideally, they felt that programs at the community college level should dovetail with the work students did in their senior year of high school in order to correct what they saw as a problem with inefficiency and loss of time when students transitioned from high school to college (Vol. III, p. 12).

On top of these broad educational directives, the Commission wanted community colleges to stress programs of terminal education, serve as administrative centers of comprehensive adult education programs, and consider how they might offer apprentice training so that older students could engage in alternate periods of attendance at college and compensated work (Vol. III, p. 9-10). However, this emphasis on terminal and adult education did not mean that the Commission ignored the role of community colleges as preparatory education for the four-year schools. Their expectation was that community colleges would also find ways to meet the needs of students who wanted to continue to a more extended general education or who intended to engage in specialized or professional study elsewhere (Vol. III, p.10). In fact, the Commission noted that they had no objection to some community colleges offering four-year programs—most, they thought, should only offer education through the 14<sup>th</sup> grade, but it was not unreasonable to anticipate that some would offer four years of postsecondary education (Vol. I, p.67).

Our focus in this paper is primarily on federal policy, but it is worth noting that the Commission also offered a variety of specific state-level policy recommendations that encouraged a significant level of state involvement in the development and maintenance of its educational systems. For example, in addition to the Commission's recommendation that states should determine their educational needs through an extensive statewide survey (Vol. I, p. 70), they also felt that the states should assume responsibility for approving community college curricula (Vol. III, p. 15) and ensure that enough state-level control was maintained over educational systems such that that no education program could function without the approval of state education authorities (Vol. III, p. 22).

## *Policy Outcomes and Impact on Community Colleges*

At the time of the report, two-year colleges in America, which numbered around 600, were uncertain of their mission and faced an unclear future (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). In these recommendations for two-year colleges, the Truman Commission was able to envision a clear purpose and future for these schools that would turn them into a keystone of American higher education (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). In spite of the fact that no federal legislation was passed based explicitly on the Truman Commission's recommendations (Freedland, 1992), a good deal of the Commission's vision of community colleges has been realized. Indeed, the Commission's recommendations about the establishment and encouragement of community colleges have been hailed as the most enduring legacy of the Truman Commission (Forest & Kinser, 2002).

As of 2006-07, there were 1,045 community colleges in the nation (Provasnik & Planty, 2008), and they have become the most frequently utilized approach to college by students (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). As the number of students enrolling in higher education burgeoned after WWII, community colleges expanded rapidly, managing to spring up at a rate exceeding one per week from 1965 to 1972 (Geiger, 2005). Today, "community colleges are everywhere. There are systems with branches in inner cities and rural districts and with programs in prisons and on military bases" (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 30). This massive expansion, although it occurred almost two decades after the report's publication, as well as the nature of the expansion—into all types of communities across the nation—is strongly reminiscent of the Commission's suggestions and conception of community colleges as locally oriented and fit into a state system of higher education.

In addition to institutional numbers, we can see the importance of these schools in the form of the students they attract. The dramatic achievements seen in the realm of community colleges since the report's publication in

1947 would not have been possible without the vast increase in the number of students entering the higher education system discussed in the previous section, and the number and demographic composition of students at community colleges nicely matches the Commission's vision. Today, approximately 35 percent of all students in higher education are found within community colleges, which constitutes a 741 percent increase from the number of students enrolled in the system in fall of 1963 (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). The sector is predominantly female, with 59 percent of students falling into this category, and also attracts comparatively large populations of minority students when contrasted with other sectors of higher education. Furthermore, since the 1970s, more than half of students at community colleges have attended on a part-time basis, and the median age at these schools tends to be older than in other sectors—24 years versus 21. Students attend these institutions for varied reasons, but 43 percent reported that their intention was to seek an associate's degree while 42 percent stated that they were hoping to obtain job skills (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Thus, not only do community colleges fulfill the Commission's aim to reduce racism and antifeminism within higher education, but a significant majority of the students these schools attract are seeking vocational or terminal education, both of which were educational programs the Commission felt such schools should emphasize (Vol. III, p. 9-10).

Interestingly, the rapid expansion and diversification of these schools was accomplished more or less without federal assistance. Federal support for community colleges has been slow to develop in general, and today the primary funding of community colleges still comes from the states (Cohen, 2001), an outcome in line with the Commission's recommendations. It was the states that completed the major legwork needed to craft their respective community college systems: states commissioned studies, wrote master plans, passed legislation, and otherwise worked to build these systems so the major growth of the 1960s could be accomplished (Cohen, 2001).

However, although the states played the major role in the development of community colleges, the federal government has also participated in promoting the survival and expansion of community colleges, both explicitly and by proxy through other legislation. Shortly after the publication of the report, the Office of Education made an effort to review the Commission's recommendations and, at the request of the White House, conducted a detailed analysis of the report as it related to community colleges (Kerr, 1989). Based on this study, the Office of Education concluded that funding should be given to states in order to assist them with the creation of community college systems. However, Truman was concerned with other educational priorities (Kerr, 1989), and the political climate at the time was such that none of his relatively lackluster attempts to pass educational reform measures saw any success (Chintala, 1998). Ultimately, it was federal legislation like the G.I. Bill, the HEA, and other access-creating policies (covered in the previous section) that enabled students to attend school, and thus fill the seats of community colleges. While it is not necessary to rehash our previous discussion of federal policies that improved access, it is important to understand that the primary means of federal support for community colleges comes via students who receive funding through HEA provisions in the form of Pell Grants, supplemental educational opportunity grants, guaranteed student loans, and work study assistance (Cohen, 2001).

Amendments to the HEA have also impacted community colleges. The most direct impact of HEA amendments upon community colleges identified by Cohen (2001) occurred in 1992 via legislation that established a Community College Liaison Office within the Department of Education and created a Presidential Access Scholarship for two-year students. Other HEA adjustments, such as modifying Pell Grant eligibility to make the grants available to part-time students, impacted community colleges in a less direct manner (Cohen, 2001). Finally, the 2008 reauthorization of the HEA included provisions related to the creation and encouragement of articulation agreements, such as the establishment of a grant program that provides funding for postsecondary partnerships that support the creation and implementation of these agreements (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2010).

The federal government has also become involved in community colleges via their curricula, primarily in occupational areas (Cohen, 2001). Vocational programs created and funded at the federal level emphasize the type of education that the Commission believed community colleges should provide (Vol. I, p. 68), and serve as another link between the Commission's vision and our modern system. For example, Cohen (2001) notes that community colleges have enjoyed a great deal of funding from the Vocational Act of 1963 and its subsequent amendments, which provide federal financing for occupational programs in postsecondary institutions. Cohen also observes that while some community colleges take advantage of programs outside of vocational education such as the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, these programs are less utilized and provide less funding than federal programs such as Job Training Partnerships, Job Opportunities and Basic Skills, Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness, Worksite Literacy, and Cooperative Education, all of which are focused on vocational education funding. The predominance of these types of curricular funding for community colleges in the federal sphere exemplify the philosophy of community colleges espoused by the Commission.

Additionally, while some have critiqued the tendency of elected officials to push incessantly for the extension and expansion of community colleges without making efforts to actually allocate money for such undertakings (Breneman & Nelson, 1981), recent federal policy developments indicate that community colleges may be enjoying a resurgence of federal attention. In 2009, President Barack Obama proposed a plan to pump nearly \$12 billion into overhauling the community college system, targeting \$9 billion toward improving academic programs and raising graduation rates and \$2.5 billion to upgrading community college facilities and the development of open source online courses (Beam, 2009). This proposal came as part of Obama's larger goal of bringing the United States back to having the highest graduation rates in the world, an aim which Obama suggested would partially be achieved by increasing the number of graduates of community colleges by an additional five million within the next decade (Jaschik, 2009). As part of the announcement of this proposal, Obama explicitly criticized the way in which community colleges have been treated as second-class citizens within the realm of higher education (Jaschik, 2009). The Commission felt community colleges were going to play a central role in the future of American higher education at the time of the report, and Obama's proposal, combined with his criticism of a national tendency to place these schools on the back burner, strongly echoes that emphasis.

To date, this \$12 billion goal has not been achieved, although the administration has had success passing some legislation that is financially beneficial to the community colleges. In our previous section, we discussed the student-lending overhaul legislation passed in conjunction with health care reform in 2010, and in addition to the general benefits that will accrue to community colleges from the availability of increased Pell Grant funding, community colleges will benefit directly from a \$2 billion allocation for job training (Fuller, 2010). At the signing ceremony for the legislation, Obama also announced a community college summit to be held at the White House in the fall of 2010 (Fuller, 2010), an event that was held on October 5, 2010 (Moltz, 2010). Although no major policy or legislative announcements have not yet come out of the summit, it did provide Obama a chance to reaffirm the importance he feels community colleges hold for the future of American higher education (Moltz, 2010), which perpetuated the resurgence of Commission ideals.

One area where the Commission did not see policy success lies in its tuition recommendations. Although the Commission wanted free education through grade 14 (Vol. I, p. 37), almost all the newly founded schools in the time after the report charged tuition (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). While today's community college tuition and fees are less than half of those at public four-year institutions and approximately one-tenth those of private schools (Provasnik & Planty, 2008), this is not the tuition-free K-14 model the Commission imagined. However, even this more outré recommendation has resurfaced from time to time in the public policy sphere—for example, while nothing came of it, President Bill Clinton did propose the idea of implementing free education for the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> grades again in 1990 (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). He argued that the passage of the Hope and Lifetime Learning tax credits operationalized this notion of free tuition for the first two years of college, but subsequent research has demonstrated that this did not occur, at least for students from low- and moderate-income families (Long, 2003).

Aside from tuition, in these examples of the federal emphasis on community colleges over time, both in terms of rhetoric and actual programs and financing, it becomes evident that much of the Commission's vision beyond mere expansion has been realized. First, their redefinition of purpose for these institutions as locally focused within a state system of higher education matches the way that community colleges developed across the nation in the decades following the report. Second, the schools are still primarily state supported, which also aligns with the Commission's plan. Third, the statewide planning the Commission advocated as part of the creation of new colleges and a state system of higher education was realized in most states as these schools developed within their respective states. Fourth, the emphasis placed on vocational education via federal funding is well in line with the Commission's conception of what these schools should emphasize. Finally, all these achievements, in conjunction with the large and diverse enrollments of these schools, point toward an overarching importance of these schools to the nation—a result that readily connects with the Commission's recommendations.

### *The Role of Community Colleges in the Postsecondary System*

At the time of publication the Commission's recommendations for community colleges generated both delight and controversy within higher education. Brubacher and Rudy (1968) argue that the major impact for higher education was not the symbolic name change proposed by the Commission, but a more substantive one of justifying a prodigious increase in the importance of community colleges within the system of American higher education. Leaders of junior colleges were thrilled with the attention of the Commission—by placing them at the crux of higher education's future, the community colleges were offered public recognition that they had sought for years, and given the feelings of insecurity and marginality that those in the community colleges had experienced from the outset, this was a momentous change (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). Additionally, the name change stuck. Academics were happy

to accept the move away from the negative connotation term “junior college” (Brint & Karabel, 1989), and the national rhetoric shifted to incorporate the new phrase (Hutcheson, 2002).

It was not only community college personnel who embraced the Commission’s ideals—after the publication of the report, there was general enthusiasm within academia for the expansion of community colleges as a means of increasing educational attainment in the country (Farrell, 1949/1952). More broadly, the Commission’s strong support of community colleges stirred interest within the higher education community about how the possibilities of the re-conceptualized institutions might be best achieved (Koos, 1950). This is not to imply that there was universal support of the Commission’s product. Not only did the community college suggestions of the Commission dovetail with other ongoing debates over the report’s recommendations, but some authors specifically questioned the Commission’s conception of these schools.

Hollinshead (1948) felt that junior colleges tended to conceive of *themselves* as extensions of secondary education, and did not see a justification for the Commission’s sweeping changes. Hutchins (1948/1952), on the other hand, believed the Commission had looked to the expansion of community colleges as a panacea designed to rectify the cost barrier to higher education without really understanding the purpose, organization, or functions of community colleges. Still others expressed concern that decreasing the selectivity of higher education through the expansion of community colleges would result in a watering-down of the student body and curriculum (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968).

There was also a concern over whether community colleges would begin to constitute competition for the four-year schools—a fear the Commission itself addressed in the report, arguing that liberal arts colleges were so well-established in America’s educational conventions that community colleges should not be viewed as a threat (Vol. I, p. 70). This at least can be an important issue still today (Breneman & Nelson, 1981), which seems logical given that almost half the undergraduate student body is currently enrolled in community colleges rather than four-year institutions (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

Lastly, the Commission’s exhortation to make public education through the 14<sup>th</sup> year free tied into a heated debate over what many in academia saw as a privileging of public education over private that would result in the demise of private colleges (e.g., Farrell, 1949/1952; Hollinshead, 1949/1952). This is a debate that we will discuss in more depth in our next section, but it is worth mentioning here as a facet of the debate over community colleges.

While there were mixed reactions to the recommendations for community colleges initially within the higher education community, the ultimate trajectory of these schools has been rather monumental. These schools have increased vastly in number and student enrollments, and community colleges today constitute a major sector of higher education. Although some of the most sweeping recommendations of the report have not, and may never, come into being—e.g. free education at the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> grade levels—the Commission’s aim of greatly increased numbers of public community colleges with a primarily local or regional scope that take as their purpose the provision of educational services to their entire community has largely been realized.<sup>5</sup>

This rapid expansion, although it occurred almost two decades after the report’s publication, as well as the nature of the expansion—into all types of communities across the nation—are strongly reminiscent of the Commission’s suggestions. Obama’s repeated attempts to enact policy beneficial to community colleges and his ongoing rhetoric in support of these institutions indicates that, at the very least, community colleges are enjoying a re-emphasis as a keystone of higher education. Even if the additional financial support desired by Obama does not materialize, community colleges may enjoy at least a rhetorical throwback to the heady days after the report’s publication in 1947.

### **Funding and structures: Means to implement previously discussed reforms**

Although the Commission was criticized for being confusing and even incoherent at times in its recommendations (Hutchins, 1948/1952), members did attempt to outline a plan for how to bring their recommendations into reality. Our analysis thus far has been focused on the Commission’s conceptions of the problems of access and equity, and their perception of the need for an increase in the number and functions of community colleges. Here, we consider some of the recommendations outlined by the Commission that would

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<sup>5</sup> One could argue that federal financial aid today does provide free education for the first two years of college for the poorest students, at least in community colleges, because the maximum Pell Grant exceeds the tuition cost of most community colleges (College Board, 2010). But this limited status does not reach the level expressed by the Commission.

move their ideas about access, equity, and community colleges from a pipe dream into something potentially achievable.

Recommendations of the Commission analyzed in this section are those that relate to:

- The role of the federal government in relation to higher education
- Suggestions for general institutional funding mechanisms
- Federal organizational recommendations

### *Philosophy Regarding the Role of the Federal Government*

Commission members understood that if the higher education system continued its funding status quo, their major aim of increasing the number of students within the higher education system was probably not achievable. As we have discussed, they felt that allowing access based on economic status to be perpetuated caused a host of problems for the nation (Vol. I, p. 29), and that resolution of this problem would depend upon the federal government stepping into higher education and providing a large amount of financial assistance to help level the playing field for access (Vol. V, p. 4). In part, the Commission accomplished this by articulating a federal interest in higher education tied to the aim of producing a strong democratic citizenry (e.g., Vol. I, p. 8), a philosophy that was important in other dialogues about higher education at the time (Gladioux & Wolanin, 1972). However, the report was also attempting to provide a framework for how state and federal agencies would view the role of higher education in America in addition to institutional leaders (Hutcheson, 2002), and part of this involved describing a more detailed philosophy about the role they felt the federal government should play in the future of higher education.

In Volume V of the report, the Commission clearly takes a stance by stating: “the time has come for America to develop a sound pattern of continuing Federal support for higher education” (Vol. V, p. 54). Along with this establishment of federal support, the Commission wanted a broader national realization that money used for education is the best possible investment in the nation’s interests (Vol. II, p. 23). However, with these stated aims, the Commission did not mean to indicate that the federal government would be taking over the higher education system in the country, or that such funding and emphasis on higher education should come at the expense of lower levels of education. Perhaps imagining the protests such fears had the potential to raise, the Commission directly addressed these two items.

With respect to federal control over higher education, the Commission stated:

The principal function of government in the field of higher education is to facilitate the free exercise of initiative and self-direction by educational leaders and institutions under their own devices. Government, both Federal and State, can best safeguard the vast stake it has in the development and maintenance of the strongest possible system of higher education by exercising leadership rather than by authority (Vol. III, p. 3).

This philosophy of maintaining the autonomy of higher education from the federal government was further emphasized elsewhere in the report when the Commission explained a desire for the maintenance of a real balance of power among the federal, state, local, and institutional governments such that the federal government operated within a framework where local and institutional initiative were cultivated and state responsibility for higher education promoted (Vol. III, p. 36).

Nor, as noted, did the Commission wish to imply that any of this should result in a de-emphasis on lower levels of education. Their position was that federal support for higher education should necessarily presuppose a well-built and effective system of elementary and secondary education (Vol. V, p. 56) and that the means they were suggesting to improve higher education should not be at the expense of other levels (Vol. III, p. 43). The Commission believed that one of the primary interests of the federal government in relation to education is the maintenance of high standards for all levels so that students reach a satisfying level of personal achievement and participate effectively in the political, economic, and social aspects of national life (Vol. III, p. 40), so even though K-12 was not the focus of the report, the Commission did not wish to undercut its ultimate importance.

## *Funding*

Defining a clear philosophy for the role of the federal government in education was one way for the Commission members to explain how they expected their visions to be achieved, but they also offered concrete recommendations that detailed how they wanted this new funding role of the federal government to play out. We have discussed the Commission's recommendations related to access and equity, but the Commission offered general institutional funding recommendations, as well.

The Commission wanted a massive national investment in higher education that began at 1.19 percent of the annual gross domestic product (GDP) and increased proportionally as the GDP increased (Vol. V, p. 26). The Commission recognized that the federal government needed to provide funding to institutions of higher education so that they could prepare for the desired influx of students. It is within these recommendations for higher education funding that the Commission's emphasis on public institutions becomes especially apparent. The Commission wanted vastly increased federal support for higher education institutions, much of which it specified should come in the form of funding for operating costs and capital outlays for the upgrading and maintenance of physical plants, but it wanted these things specifically relegated for use by public institutions (Vol. V, pp. 5-6). The Commission did suggest providing low-interest loans for non-instructional purposes and had extended repayment periods to both private and public institutions (Vol. V, p. 45), but it expected that federal funding outside of loans would be allocated to public institutions only and that these appropriations would be designed to respect the sovereignty of the states when it came to the administration and control of educational programs within their boundaries (Vol. V, p. 56). This facet of the report generated acrimonious debate within academic circles, but it was controversial within the context of the Commission as well—two members of the Commission wrote a strong dissent, included at the end of Volume V, that disparaged the majority's decision to only fund public institutions at the expense of private and religious schools (pp. 65-68).

The Commission also had several stipulations related to the dispersal of federal funding. Unsurprisingly, given their concern for promoting access and equity, one of its primary concerns was that federal aid be distributed in proportion to need, which meant, in its conception, that states would receive funding on an equalization basis such that most of the funding would go to states that could provide the least for themselves (Vol. V, p. 56). More generally, the Commission suggested that the federal government establish safeguards to ensure that the aid given to higher education was used for its intended purpose (Vol. V, p. 56) and it developed a number of possible criteria states should meet to be eligible to receive funding, such as mandating that state laws require federal funds to be used in a manner that equalized opportunity (Vol. V, p. 62).

Finally, many of the Commission's implementation-oriented recommendations related to governmental support structures at both the federal and state levels. Our focus is on the federal-level recommendations, but the Commission did understand that its aims could not be achieved without cooperation from state-level agencies, many of which they felt needed to be significantly strengthened (Vol. III, p. 25). The same, the Commission members thought, was true at the federal level, and their recommendations in relation to the Office of Education reflect this: they wanted the status of the agency to be raised and argued that the funding structure of the office should change such that the financial support provided to it was actually commensurate with the tasks it faced (Vol. III, p. 41).

## *Policy Outcomes*

In making its recommendations, the Commission was wiggling a particularly sore tooth. Federal involvement in higher education had been complicated since long before the Truman Commission by the Constitution itself. The Constitution has no provision for education, and under the stipulations of the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment any powers not specifically assigned to the federal government are reserved to the states. As a result, the federal government has generally left it to the states to establish and fund public institutions, and states have consistently provided the majority of institutional funding over time (Cook, 1998). Thus, the role of the federal government has been unclear and uncoordinated. However, the Commission was established at least in part to confront the threat of nuclear confrontation and the increasing importance of international relations, and, as we have discussed, the aspiration to change higher education into a more inclusive system, all of which seemed to point toward the need to redefine the role of the federal government in higher education (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). While other factors besides the Commission prompted changes, the role of the federal government did change significantly in the decades following the Commission.

Federal involvement in higher education policy has been built little by little, with funds coming from a wide range of agencies and programs, and "there is still no comprehensive federal policy regarding colleges and universities" (Cook, 1998, p. 5). Still, federal involvement has undeniably increased over time. In 1930, federal

expenditures for higher education totaled 0.6 percent of the GDP, but by 1967 this number had risen to 2.2 percent (Schrader, 1969), well above the 1.19 percent the Commission recommended in 1947 (Vol. V, p. 26). The previously discussed federal policies promoting access and equity through legislation such as the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) are one means by which this federal relationship with higher education was firmly established in the decades following the report's publication (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). This funding, as well as research support, are the primary forms of federal support for higher education, but general institutional assistance constitutes a third category of aid (Cook, 1998).

The Housing Act of 1950 was one means by which federal involvement in general institutional assistance was established. The Housing Act provided long-term loans to institutions of higher education for the construction of housing and was highly utilized—by 1955, \$200 million in loans has been approved (Schrader, 1969). The Housing Act was followed in 1956 by the Health Research Facilities Act, which supplied nonprofit institutions with \$90 million in grants over three years for the construction and expansion of laboratories and research facilities focused on the health sciences (Schrader, 1969).

While the general institutional aid flowing into higher education in the 1950s was certainly a sign of increasing federal involvement, it was the 1960s that truly witnessed a sea change in the federal attitude toward funding higher education (Schrader, 1969). Specifically, prior to the 1960s, federal support occurred on a *quid pro quo* basis – Congress and federal agencies would determine a goal they wanted higher education to achieve and funds would be awarded to schools with the expectation that they would use the funding to reach the desired goal (Schrader, 1969). The increased federal support in the 1960s prompted a shift in the federal government's mindset on the matter—higher education began to be viewed as a national goal for its own sake (Schrader, 1969), and acts like the HEA demonstrate this more welcoming attitude. In terms of direct institutional assistance, the 1960s saw the beginning of National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants for general improvement of science programs at the discretion of qualifying institutions, as well as the passage of the 1963 Higher Education Facilities Act (Campbell & Boyd, 1970).

The Facilities Act, amended in 1966 (Schrader, 1969), was particularly beneficial to higher education and managed to evade the debate over public vs. private funding: both public and nonpublic institutions could make use of funding provided by the act (Campbell & Boyd, 1970). Title I of the act provided funds for the construction of facilities, 22 percent of which were reserved specifically for community colleges, Title II reserved funds for graduate school and cooperative graduate center facilities, and Title III authorized the dispersion of loans to schools and building agencies (Campbell & Boyd, 1970).

From the standpoint of federal involvement, it is worth revisiting the impact of the passage of the HEA in 1965 because it was the HEA and its reauthorizations that firmly established the federal government as a key participant in the higher education policy arena. In terms of general institutional aid, the 1965 HEA provided funding assistance for libraries, allocated funds to developing institutions, and provided general financial assistance for the construction of educational facilities to ameliorate the overcrowding caused by the anticipated enrollment of baby boomers (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). Title III of the HEA in particular offered general institutional aid for developing and encouraging schools which enroll students who encounter societal barriers such as first-generation, minority, or low-income students (Wolanin, 2003). Schools eligible for this type of institutional aid include those that have limited resources and serve a large number of low-income students, American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs), Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), graduate-level HBCUs, and schools that are seeking to increase the number of minorities going into science and engineering fields (Wolanin, 2003). Additionally, Title V of the Act gives grant provisions for institutions that enroll high proportions of Hispanic students—a feature that many community colleges utilize (Cohen, 2001).

Such funding measures hardly constitute the federal takeover of academic institutions the Commission wished to avoid, and certainly meet its desire for a vastly expanded federal involvement in higher education, especially in the form of financial support. Indeed, in spite of the massive expansion in federal involvement that occurred as a result of the HEA, “the clear intent of federal policymakers was that higher education remain a federal concern by a state responsibility” (Prisco, Hurley, Carton & Richardson, 2002, p. 3). The act was designed with this intention in mind: the legislation noted that the federal government did not have authority over the curriculum, administration, staff, or library resources of higher education institutions (Prisco, Hurley, Carton & Richardson, 2002).

On the structural side of things, the same concerns that drove federal involvement in higher education after the report eventually impacted the Office of Education, as well. It took until 1979, but in October of that year Congress passed the Department of Education Organization Act, which created the Department of Education (ED) at the federal level by combining the offices of several other federal agencies to establish the ED as a cabinet level

agency (Department of Education, 2009). The ED notes on its website that it began in the 1860's with a budget of \$15,000 and a total of four employees and in early 2009 had a budget of \$67.3 billion with an additional \$100 billion set to be provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, as well as nearly 4,200 employees. The department estimates that it serves more than 11 million postsecondary students through federal programs (Department of Education, 2009). The Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) is charged with policy creation and program administration, which it accomplishes through three primary sub-groups: Policy, Planning, and Innovation (PPI), which works on policy development, budget creation, and other legislative matters; Higher Education Programs (HEP), which oversees international education, graduate fellowships, school capability building, and access programs; and Accreditation and State Liaison (ASL), which manages items that influence state participation in federal programs and works on accrediting matters (Prisco, Hurley, Carton & Richardson, 2002). The significant financial role of the ED in higher education and its operations through its OPE signify a vastly more developed organization than the Office of Education known by Commission members. While it took over 30 years for the Office of Education to morph into the ED and become a cabinet level agency with significant responsibilities, this facet of the Commission's recommendations has, eventually, come to pass.

### *Reactions of Colleges and Universities to the Recommendations Regarding Federal Government Involvement*

On the federal policy front, a pattern of support for higher education was established and the philosophy codified over time. However, the way in which the Commission visualized the role the federal government should play in higher education and the financial means by which this would be accomplished were hotly contested within the realm of higher education after the publication of the report. Indeed, higher education's standpoint on federal funding in general remained ambivalent for decades after the federal government actually began to take a role in financing higher education.

When the report was published, educators struggled to understand how private and denominational colleges would be impacted by the public focus and whether the program of massive federal aid the Commission recommended would follow lock-step with a system of federal control over higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). Indeed, one of the primary reasons that the report's proposals did not gain wide acceptance lay in the Commission's seeming favoritism toward public higher education (Axt, 1952). Axt (1952), in his analysis of this facet of the Commission's report, boiled the concern down to a question of whether the federal government should assist private institutions in expanding along with the public schools as part of its public policy. He argued that the Commission did not directly engage the question in a meaningful way, but that the clear answer was that the members appointed by Truman, with the exception of the two dissenters, did not think so.

Naturally, this belief was not particularly popular with advocates for private and denominational schools. Two examples of the objections raised to this facet of the report come from Farrell (1949/1952) and Hollinshead (1949/1952). Farrell was highly antagonistic, claiming that the aid recommended for public institutions was so overpowering that, if it were implemented, private schools would be so affected that a form of statism would result because only schools receiving federal funding could survive, and this, in essence, would constitute totalitarianism. Hollinshead (1949/1952) raised his own impassioned objections to the public-focused funding recommendations, noting that the diversity provided by having different kinds of institutions is vital to the well-being of the country because thought is formed and influenced by competition among doctrines—something that is only possible when there are many different kinds of institutions that offer different conceptions of truth. Indeed, the arguments over how federal financing should occur were sometimes more emotionally fraught than those over the Commission's recommendations to end segregation (Chintala, 1998). While these are only two of the plethora of arguments that came out surrounding the Commission's recommendations regarding federal financing and its relation to public education, they point to how revolutionary the idea of federal support for higher education was at the time, even within the higher education community itself. The debate over public-private financing was inherently entangled with the conception of the role of the federal government. The thought process was that federal involvement, as conceived by the Commission, would result in a functional monopoly of the public sector, and this sector, being utterly beholden to the federal government for its continued existence, would toe the federal line on all issues, at the risk of forsaking academic freedom.

Ultimately, the host of fears expressed by educators about totalitarianism, the demise of private and denominational colleges, and a general federal takeover of higher education proved unfounded—the structure of the HEA ensures that students can take their federal funding where they wish, and general institutional funding from HEA has not been restricted to public institutions (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). However, this fear of federal involvement has also played out on a larger scale in terms of the overall relationship of higher education

to the federal government—rather than the converse philosophy of the federal government’s relationship to higher education that we discussed in the context of the Commission’s recommendations.

Specifically, this concern about federal involvement can be seen within the arena of higher education lobbying. While the vastly increased role of the federal government in financing higher education has had a significant impact on the lobbying efforts of institutions and higher education organizations, this has not always been so—as we can see from the debates over federal involvement within the higher education community after the report came out, there was a great deal of ambivalence among scholars and academic leaders as to what role the federal government should play. This uncertainty played out on the national level as well. Cook (1998) observes: “the higher education community participated only sporadically in the political process as early federal policy was being crafted” (p. 25). Higher education was generally uncertain whether it wanted aid in the first place, and lobbying frequently took the form of opposition to federal involvement—some representatives even opposed the GI Bill when it was first proposed because they feared unqualified students would inundate higher education (Cook, 1998). The higher education lobbying associations were similarly reticent during the proposal and enactment of the HEA, and the 1960s were so favorable for higher education that it was possible for the associations, and the community in general, to sit back and watch the money flow through the door without having to take any particular action (Cook, 1998).

A shift in thinking around the question of lobbying occurred in 1972 when the associations unsuccessfully attempted to prevent Congress from changing the HEA to allow for direct student aid (Cook, 1998). This lobbying position made the associations look greedy, domineering, and politically incompetent, and prompted the main umbrella organization, the American Council on Education (ACE) to conduct an internal study on its government relations attempts. The ACE considered its options during the 1970s after the lobbying failure and its commissioned studies, and decided to alter the way in which the subject of federal relations was approached. This change involved seeking improved coordination among the associations, an effort to engage in more comprehensive policy analysis to justify lobbying positions, and augmenting the visibility of the associations in Washington. This last endeavor led to a rapid growth of personnel in the associations as well as an expansion into campus-based federal relations personnel (Cook, 1998).

These advancements were well-timed, as the administration of President Ronald Reagan was somewhat hostile toward federal support for higher education, and the 1980s and 1990s were primarily focused on attempting to increase funding for the student aid programs (Cook, 1998). Until 1995-1996, however, the associations seemed unable to overcome a fundamental uncertainty about the act of advocacy—in spite of growth over time in terms of quantity and quality of their lobbying efforts, there was always an underlying concern that lobbying was somehow not appropriate for what they viewed as a community that was offering a public good of unquestionable value (Cook, 1998). However, the Republican takeover in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1994 prompted a reconsideration of these values, and the associations concluded that staying on the agenda was more important than losing support from those who felt political involvement was inappropriate. A shift to active and enthusiastic lobbying ensued, and the community that was slow to take up the mantle of advocacy began to seriously engage in the Washington lobbying scene (Cook, 1998).

As Cook (1998) notes, it has become ever more difficult to identify areas of higher education activity that remain unaffected by the federal government in some capacity, and given the importance of federal funding and regulations it has become crucial that institutions of higher education have representation in Washington. Thus, while many in higher education had an ambivalent, or outright hostile, attitude toward federal involvement in the field after the report’s publication, understanding and acceptance have grown over time—perhaps because the funding provided by the federal government is vital to their survival—and higher education has begun to develop its own relationship with the federal government, rather than waiting for the federal government to develop a relationship with it. We can see that both sides of the coin—higher education institutions and the federal government—had reservations about involvement and did quite a bit of foot-dragging on the road to heavy federal financial involvement. However, the two are firmly enmeshed today, and the continued support offered by the Obama administration indicates that this will likely continue to be the case during his tenure.

## **Conclusion**

While no legislation has been passed explicitly based on the report (Freedland, 1992), when viewed from the perspective of 2010, the Truman Commission’s vision of expanded access, the development of a comprehensive system of community colleges, and a vastly more involved federal government has largely come to pass, though not necessarily in the time or manner the Commission intended.

With regard to access, the Commission argued for a major expansion in the number of college-going students, a goal which members felt would be facilitated by resolving some of the ongoing access issues at the time of the report. Namely, the Commission wanted to see barriers based on economic fortune, race, sex, and religion eliminated in the United States. Many of these aims have arguably been achieved. The number of college-going students met the Commission's overall numbers target in either 1963 or 1964 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Table 189), depending on the dataset, which constituted a massive and enduring expansion of the overall number of students within the system of higher education. In part, this was enabled by the reduction of these access barriers. Discrimination based on religion in higher education has been largely eradicated, and out of the four barriers listed it is this one that has been most effectively addressed thanks to state legislation and the need for additional students during WWII (Karabel, 2005; Freeland, 1992). Access barriers caused by financial constraints have also been thoroughly addressed, although this issue is far from resolved within higher education. Students may receive sufficient federal aid via the HEA to attend college, but the form of aid that has come to attain prominence in the federal system is loan-based assistance. This type of aid is not what the Commission members desired for students, though it has greatly increased the number of students who are able to attend college. Similarly, while the Commission's recommendations for access equity for black and female students have been met on the surface, this parity masks continuing issues with the graduation rates of black students and a serious dearth of female involvement in the STEM disciplines. While the substantial changes that have occurred since 1947 should not be understated, the continuing financial, racial, and sex-based disparities in higher education signify that although the letter of the Commission's recommendations may have been achieved, the spirit has not.

Community colleges, on the other hand, have succeeded in both the letter and spirit of the Commission's aims. Aside from the question of officially tuition-free status, the Commission's recommendations about community colleges have largely been realized. In line with the Commission's vision, these schools have undergone a tremendous expansion and redefinition since 1947, becoming parts of statewide systems, focusing on local communities, and emphasizing terminal and vocational education. All of these achievements are in accordance with what the Commission wanted, and community colleges have also played a major role in promoting access for students—as we discussed, these schools attract large numbers of part-time, minority, and female students, and in general serve almost half of the postsecondary student population at any given time (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Certainly this indicates that community colleges play a significant role within the national framework of higher education, and Obama's recent emphasis on the importance of these schools points towards a resurgence of interest and emphasis on them at the federal level. Commission members would likely bemoan the tuition situation at community colleges, but the firmly situated presence in the postsecondary institutional system that these schools have attained, and the increased attention they have received as part of the current administration all match Commission ideals.

Finally, federal involvement in higher education has become an accepted concept, and institutions of higher education now rely upon the federal assistance that comes in through individual students and general institutional funding. The consistent pattern of federal involvement imagined by the Commission has not necessarily been accomplished—federal support tends to occur haphazardly over time and no cohesive policy has emerged over time (Cook, 1998)—but this vagueness has served to preserve the autonomy and authority of the states, which was a serious concern of the Commission. Although it took decades for both the federal government and institutions of higher education to accept the need for mutual commitment, the evolution of the Department of Education and higher education lobbying associations, as well as the massive expansion of federal financial investment in higher education, have resulted in an entrenched arrangement of federal support. The recent economic crisis, in conjunction with Obama's general emphasis on the importance of higher education to the nation, also appears to indicate an increase in federal support for, and interest in, higher education. Thus, while the overall degree of federal involvement imagined by the Commission may not have come to pass, and despite the fact that federal involvement on more than a quid pro quo basis took a long time to evolve (Schrader, 1969), the nation has experienced a real evolution in federal involvement and emphasis on higher education that continues to this day.

Through an examination of these three facets of the Commission's recommendations, we can see that regardless of whether the report has been explicitly adopted into legislation and policy, its ideals and many of its specific recommendations have been incorporated over time. The dialogue that the Commission created on higher education laid the groundwork for subsequent federal involvement and spurred a great deal of debate and interest within the higher education community (Hutcheson, 2002; Hutcheson, 2007), and recent developments and rhetoric at the federal level point towards a potential realization of even more of the Commission's aims. In these times of institutional and economic uncertainty, it is helpful to remember how far higher education has come, and how far it may yet go, towards achieving the goals of possibly the most idealistic and forward-thinking Commission postsecondary education has encountered.

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