

# CONNECTION

THE JOURNAL OF THE NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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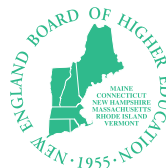
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## EDITOR'S MEMO

### Trendspotting

In this 20th anniversary year of CONNECTION, there could hardly be a more pervasive trend in higher education than the ever-growing tension between market impulses and social equity—between corporatization and public purpose.

Exhibit A: When taxpayers skimp on funding their state universities, those universities tend to respond by turning their backs on lower-income state residents and importing more affluent out-of-state students who can pay the substantially higher out-of-state tuition. Everyone knows that shift has been on for a decade or more. Now, Iowa higher education analyst and Pell Institute senior scholar Thomas G. Mortenson has had the nerve to quantify it.

According to Mortenson's analysis, public four-year colleges and universities in 28 states, including three New England states, have been dealing with their budget problems by increasing enrollment of out-of-state residents and decreasing their share of enrollment of lower-income Pell Grant recipients since the early 1990s.

It's "enrollment management at its worst," Mortenson writes in his February 2006 *Postsecondary Education Opportunity* newsletter, which is devoted to the analysis.

The campuses don't bear all the blame. They dig for gold in the applicant pool as a direct reaction to disinvestment by state governments. Nationally, state support of higher education per \$1,000 of personal income declined by 34 percent between 1980 and 2006. The New England states are particularly notorious for their low public funding of higher education, with all but Maine among the 10 stingiest states in the nation by this measure.

Mortenson's analysis suggests that the lower-income state residents shunned by four-year institutions, if they go to college at all, are tracked to for-profit colleges and underfunded community colleges, where the share of Pell Grant recipients rose in 39 states, including all six New England states. There's nothing wrong with community colleges; they are responsive, proactive institutions offering cutting-edge job training and, when good transfer policies are in place, a bargain entrée into higher education. But they weren't meant to be higher education's overflowing public housing projects.

"Most states are well on their way to building public systems of class-based higher educational opportunity," Mortenson says. But his blistering critique is not limited to public universities. In an earlier analysis, he writes of higher education's "gated communities," including more than a dozen selective New England private institutions from Fairfield to richly endowed Harvard and Colby where Pell Grant recipients now represent less than 12 percent of students.

The disappearance of Pell recipients from these campuses suggests another grim new reality: the lower-income students who are eligible for Pell Grants can't cobble together enough additional financial aid from other sources to cover tuitions that are streaking through the stratosphere. Many of them just stay home.

As always, the figures in this annual "Trends & Indicators" issue of CONNECTION paint the picture of a stunningly powerful higher education sector. We only wish it were for everybody.

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Undergraduate students may be the coin of the realm in New England higher education, but what has made the enterprise the envy of the world is just as much the knowledge residing in the region's faculties and research labs—indeed, its fabled capacity to generate new ideas. Yet New England's share of all U.S. university research and development has been shrinking, from well over 10 percent in the mid-1980s to well under 8 percent today—representing the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in hard cash and who knows what discoveries.

What if the six New England states made a concerted effort to reinvigorate that sagging research enterprise with some specific New England policy problems in mind? Energy woes? Set our world-class physics and biology departments loose developing biofuels. Transportation bottlenecks? Get engineering faculty working on high-speed rail. Health information systems, promising nanotechnologies, education reforms ... Hard sciences, soft sciences ... A new New England research agenda could juice the region's academic labs while the best minds get to work solving New England's most pressing policy problems. A win-win. More on this in future issues of CONNECTION.

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