

## Chapter 9

# Increasing Access to and Success in Higher Education and the Role of Ethical Leadership

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter discusses the importance of access and success in U.S. higher education, particularly positing how marginalized students still, in some ways, fail to both access higher education and succeed in it and stresses the need for the fair inclusion of marginalized student population into higher education, giving them fair chances to succeed. The chapter holds culturally irrelevant pedagogy, educational policy handicaps, income inequities, dwindling education funds, and biased assessment criteria which favor native speakers of English over others responsible for this state and that these should be addressed immediately. The chapter, leaning on scholars like R.W. Rebores, also emphasizes the role of ethical leadership as indispensable to ensure the execution of different policies and actions that align with notions of equity and justice. This will, the chapter argues, help ensure that the disadvantaged student population gets to enjoy the rewards of higher education as much as their white colleagues do.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of higher education in the U.S. dates back to 1636, with the establishment of what they were collectively known as colonial colleges. Early colonial institutions like Harvard were founded to provide education to those going into the ministry. (Cleary University, 2016, n.p). In the early days, colleges favored white students over students of color, leading to a struggle for higher education equity. The struggle helped make “the academy more inclusive, focusing especially on the imperative to admit those from marginalized groups into the power, privileges, and pleasures of academic life” (Scobey, 2016, n.p). According to Scobey (2016), the struggle also helped in founding women’s and coeducational colleges, the proliferation of public universities and community colleges, the growth of minority-serving institutions, and affirmative-action policies in majority institutions. Thus, the pathway to higher education for traditionally marginalized groups became relatively more accessible. According to Dugan & Osteen. (2017), “Between 1860 and 1900, such historically excluded constituencies as women, African Americans, and Native Americans gained some access to higher education” (p.7).

However, despite the increase in higher education institutions, accompanied by increased state and federal appropriations, though often subject to dwindling, it would not be accurate to say that higher education in the U.S. is now within the realm of access and success for all. Access would mean higher education being within reach of students from all backgrounds, and success would mean the students being able to graduate from their programs, equipped with tools that would enable them to not just compete in the job market but also to climb the social ladder, assume leadership positions, and contribute to their society. However, student success and access are met with different hurdles, making it particularly hard for the students of color and those from lower economic backgrounds to make the best of their higher education. The enrolment and graduation figures exemplify this scenario. According to Miller (2020), “From 2014-15 to the 2018-19 academic year, annual undergraduate enrollment across all institutions of higher education fell by 1.25 million students, a decline of 5 percentage points. Moreover, during this period, undergraduate enrollment in public colleges dropped by 425,000 students—a nearly 2.5 percent decline”(n.p). Similarly, according to Fuente & Navarro (2020), “...especially when it comes to a bachelor’s degree. Indeed, the six-year graduation rate for white students is 25 percentage points higher than that of Black students” (n.p).

In fact, barriers to access and success in higher education persist to this day in different versions, making it quite difficult for students from low economic levels to reaping the benefits of higher education. Rodriguez & Wan (2010) state that “low income and first-generation students are at times dissuaded from continuing to college, even those who are high achievers. In addition, racial and ethnic disparities

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