The second half of the book looks inward, beginning with Duke University President Nannerl Keohane’s spirited portrayal of the liberal arts as the core experience of a fully empowering education, the markers of which include the “ability to read, write and converse with supple ease and interest.” The former Wellesley president warns, nonetheless, that such an education may not be appropriate for all students, given the need for “mental acuity, curiosity and intellectual stamina.” It also depends on committed teaching and, where the prevailing ethos is one of teaching loads and research opportunities, the incentives to teach—to equip students with Montaigne’s well-furnished “backroom of the mind” are subordinate to research.

Jack M. Wilson, now director of the UMass Online distance learning program at the University of Massachusetts, offers a thorough account of what IT can mean for higher education, especially the option to “mass customize” the “product.” Although not all readers will be as comfortable as Wilson with the potential impact of IT, his remarks are crucial to the debate. And his “Ten Commandments for Technology in Higher Education” are quite practical.

Indiana University higher education professor George Kuh provides a critical yet affectionate view of undergraduate education. Given the pressures brought on by growth and access, variously prepared entrants and the shift in perception concerning the value (let alone, value added) of higher education, Kuh cites studies that strongly suggest more than 40 percent of undergraduates “are not engaged in a reasonable balance of educationally purposeful activities.” Such an observation merits the attention of faculty and administrators, for the undergraduate years can (and should) be more than “seat time” and a credential. The strategies for engagement and persistence must be broad and enough to meet the task.

George Keller, former chair of higher education studies at the University of Pennsylvania, focuses on governance, citing “structural fault” that sociologist James Coleman saw in academic organizations. In Coleman’s words: “The effect of this structural fault is to create a status with special privileges, a status with the autonomy of a community member, the security of a corporate employee and the obligations of neither.”

Jules B. LaPlante, former president of the Council of Graduate Schools, examines the growth, transformation and international reputation of U.S. graduate education. Notably, he explores how best to prepare students so their career options are not restricted by the narrow confines of academic disciplines.

The pleasures and frustrations of the college presidency occupy the attention of Richard M. Freeland. The Northeastern University president notes that while patterns of influence on campus have changed, presidential leadership remains crucial to institutional development. Whether we could ever again see an Eliot transform Harvard, or a Harper transform the University of Chicago is uncertain. Yet we can surely cite institutions that have more recently enjoyed a remarkable evolution strongly dependent on a determined, resourceful and imaginative president.

Soton Hall higher education professor Martin J. Finkelstein attempts to dispel the notions that faculty have “scurrilous motives” and a “poor work ethic,” among other sins. Employing survey data, he concludes that given the pressures to accommodate a variety of agendas, faculty both work long and hard to meet their responsibilities; and, in opposition to the contrary, have only recently regained their economic status of 1970.

If this volume has a limitation, it is that none of the essays concerns itself with the competing claims as to what should be the core of liberal learning and the relationship of education to the idea of “truth.” (This change that has reshaped academic culture is admirably assessed by Louis Menand of the City University of New York Graduate Center in the Autumn 2001 issue of The Wilson Quarterly.)

Nevertheless, this collection of essays should prove of interest and value to practicing scholars, administrative officers, lay boards and others in higher education. The editors are to be commended for providing an opportunity to consider what conditions our condition is in.

Andrew G. De Rocco is the former commissioner of higher education in Connecticut.

Triple A
Jane Sjogren


These are tough times for states. A January Op Ed piece in the New York Times noted that: “the effect of the (current) recession on state finances is staggering.” Forty-three states report revenues below forecasts; an additional 20 face budget overruns.

This does not bode well for state support for higher education, especially because spending for higher education is too often considered discretionary and takes a back seat to more immediate spending priorities such as Medicaid and other social support programs. At a time when issues of affordability, access and accountability in higher education are increasingly important in the public’s eye, the nine expert essays pulled together in this book by University of Michigan higher education expert Donald Heller suggest that the outlook for state support of higher education is guarded at best.

Fully 80 percent of students in higher education attend public institutions. This means that what public colleges and universities do or don’t achieve in terms of both equity and efficiency is widely felt. Affordability, access and accountability, the topics du jour in
higher education are not really new, but they are pressing both in and of themselves and because of the uncertain economic climate. While good economic times may have improved affordability from both the student and institutional perspectives, issues of access and accountability—the bases for equity and efficiency—have fared less well. Contributors to the Heller book explain why.

The opportunity to get a college education has increased significantly in the past five decades. Despite rising costs, growth in enrollments is expected to continue. Why then the concern over affordability?

In the introductory chapter, Heller lays out the reasons, namely that despite increases in total student financial aid, a college education has become more expensive, both absolutely and relative to household incomes, thus pricing lower-income students out of higher education. Enrollment has grown nonetheless as a result of rising aspirations, increased college-going by women and older students and affirmative action, according to Heller, who notes that with increased demand, prices can and do increase. Battressed by a large and useful list of references, the chapter reminds us that markets do have a way of working, even if the outcomes are not as equitable as we might wish.

In the next chapter, Ohio University political scientist Michael Mumper explores the underlying reasons for the substantial increases in public tuition costs. (Along with Pennsylvania and New Jersey, New England is at the top of the list for pricey public colleges and universities—no surprise there.) He argues that state policies intended to address affordability reflect different state-level views of what causes college price inflation. His review of commonly used explanations elucidates the underpinnings of the various kinds of policies. But in the end, he arrives at the frustrating conclusion that the causes of rising public tuition are inherently political.

Arthur Hauptman, the independent consultant and co-author of The College Aid Quandary, points out that the three components of state higher education funding—tuition-setting, state appropriations, and state student aid—are not coordinated. This lack of coordination, Hauptman contends, results in initiatives such as merit-based student aid that may increase student choice but do little to increase affordability.

The section of the book on access, while interesting, is less coherent than the review of affordability. Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, cogently notes that a form of state (and federal) support which we have not yet seen in New England—the tax credit—helps those who are already going to college in high tuition states and who are from higher income families, but does little for those deciding whether to go to college at all.

Two other chapters on access offer detailed accounts of the Hopwood case in Texas and Proposition 209 in California, but say little about implications for public colleges and universities nationally.

The final section on accountability is the most interesting part of this book. "Accountability," as applied to public colleges and universities, is a slightly officious word for efficiency. Calls for accountability—which tend to come most frequently from state legislators voicing taxpayers' concerns—usually mean to express concern that public colleges and universities are spending public funds carelessly. Whether or not you crave accountability (certainly none of us wants to see inefficient resource use), this is an important concern considering the deteriorating fiscal condition of so many state governments.

A chapter by University of Washington higher education policy professor William Zuneta provides particularly good discussion of the issues around the movement for improved accountability. As Zuneta points out, we can't have accountability without some means of performance assessment (yet another A-word), a major conceptual and practical challenge as well as a potentially valuable endeavor. Efforts to incorporate various definitions and measures of accountability and apply them to funding have been undertaken in several Southern states as well as New York, but not tried (yet?) in any substantive way in New England. The chapter by Indiana University higher education professor Edward St. John and colleagues lucidly suggests that efforts to improve accountability by linking it to student choice and educational outcomes are likely to spread as public higher education increasingly operates in a market-based context that stresses efficiency. If the focus is on accountability rather than affordability, he argues, affordability may suffer unless it is consciously and explicitly incorporated into state policy.

While the final chapter by Heller is an interesting review of the increasing role of technology, I couldn't help wishing he had extended Zuneta's and St. John's discussions instead. More people want a college education than ever before. Affordability and access are so dependent on the availability and efficient use of resources. And those are the big issues for public higher education in the next five years.

Jane Sjogren is a Massachusetts higher education consultant and faculty member in the doctoral program in Education Leadership at Johnson & Wales University.