and interviews of Indiana students (primarily in high school) and their parents. One set of data is the results of a survey, begun in 1986-87, that was responded to by almost two-thirds of nearly five thousand ninth-grade students enrolled in twenty-one high schools of varying ethnic, socioeconomic, and community characteristics. In subsequent surveys, the response rate was lower. Another set of data relates to a subsample of 56 students who, with their parents, were interviewed nine times between 1989 and 1994. The study also compares the postsecondary plans of a subset of students with what they actually did after graduating from high school. Multivariate statistical techniques were used to analyze the survey data. The data collection process was undoubtedly onerous, even though all the persons from whom data were solicited lived in the same state.

The authors give detailed descriptions of the decision-making processes of eight students as they pass through the three stages of the choice process. These rather lengthy stories are used to provide background for a discussion of the statistical results and, as the authors state, to “provide the context around which most of this study was based.” They are interesting, helpful in many ways, and highlight the volatility of teenagers’ decision-making processes.

The stories make it clear that the students in the population studied differ in grade point averages, college aspirations, and postsecondary plans. By the end of his senior year, an A student who was college-bound in ninth grade had settled on a small liberal arts college in Florida, partly because of the scholarship offered. Two students with C averages were enrolling in Indiana’s only public two-year college. One student was still uncertain about her college choice. Another student planned to find “a good job locally,” after being rejected by the military for physical reasons. One student had dropped out of high school, and the other two remained unfocused in their postsecondary objectives. Regardless of the differences (and combined with the statistical results) it is evident that the support and encouragement of parents is a strong, propelling force, especially during the early years of high school, for those students who choose college.

Researchers interested in studying strategies for increasing the overall enrollment of college students might want to pay particular attention to the authors’ findings about the predisposition phase. Apparently it is at this stage that the determination to go to college is most often formed or strengthened. A prime audience for the findings regarding the search and choice phases is researchers who are developing materials for college admission officers, high school counselors, and other persons who focus on how to improve the information they give parents and students. Other research efforts might involve studying all A and B students regardless of where they live, or examining the considerations of students when choosing between public and private colleges or between two-and-four-year colleges. The results of this study should have multiple uses and be helpful to ongoing research in this area.

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American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges

The authors present a great deal of useful information on the current condition of higher education. The book is divided into four parts. The first, “The Setting,” includes an informative chapter on the development of the traditions of academic freedom in our colleges and universities by Robert M. O’Neil; a thoughtful essay, “Who Controls Academe?” by Berdahl and T.R. McConnell on the institutional autonomy of our universities; and a sober discussion by Ami Zusman on the financial constraints that help to determine university policy today. These chapters describe long-term trends, as well as more recent developments. Indeed, one chapter, “The Ten Generations of American Higher Education” by Roger Geiger, provides a useful summary history of the past 300 years in our colleges and universities. Interesting data are presented throughout this section on enrollment trends (past, present, and future) and on the changing financial problems of our colleges and universities.

The second part discusses external forces that constrain the university, especially the federal government, state governments, the courts, foundations and accreditation agencies. The third part discusses how the academic community faces the new century, with separate chapters on professors, students, and presidents. The final section, “Central Issues for the Twenty-first Century,” offers chapters on technological change; graduate education and research; the “multicultural revolution” and its critics; and the role of race in education.

This section also contains an article written by a professional economist, D. Bruce Johnstone’s “Financing Higher Education.” Johnstone sets forth an economic approach to a number of issues raised in this volume, including the appropriate level of financial support for
higher education, the extent to which this support should come from public or private sources, and the optimal level of efficiency and productivity in higher education. Johnstone even mentions—unfortunately all too briefly—an issue that this reviewer would put at the center of a contemporary discussion of the American education system:

“[T]he major remaining problem in higher education may not lie in excessive costs but in insufficient learning—a function of such features as redundant learning; aimless academic exploration; the unavailability of courses at the right time; excessive nonlearning time in the academic day, week, and year; insufficient use of self-paced learning; and insufficient realization of the potential of collegiate-level learning during the high school years.”

The remainder of the book is intended for the general public, yet there is much here to interest the economist. In addition to the wealth of information on past and current conditions on our campuses, American Higher Education tells us something about the attitudes of at least a segment of those intimately involved in collegiate decision-making. The fact that several of the authors in this volume have been university administrators, while others are members of university departments of higher education, provides a perspective that may be unfamiliar to the economist reader. An economist well trained in public choice theory will probably not be surprised, though, to find that a case for increased funding for higher education is a common thread running through many of these essays. The need for more funds is frequently defended as required to maintain or increase enrollments—to keep us on what Altbach calls “the path to universal higher education.” As an example, Zusman, discussing expected demographic changes in our population, is not deterred by a possible lack of English proficiency among an increasing proportion of young people, but instead argues that when “more non-native-English speakers enter college” this may mean “more support for English as a second language” at the college level.

The last two chapters are clearly defensive. John K. Wilson’s chapter on the “multicultural revolution” that has so roiled the academy is largely given over to a blistering rebuttal of critical studies of recent trends in higher education by the National Association of Scholars. (For an alternative viewpoint, the interested reader might want to consult the NAS’s quarterly, Academic Questions.)

The final chapter, “Race in Higher Education: The Continuing Crisis,” by Altbach, Kofi Lomotey and Shariba Rivers Kyle, is not well balanced. The authors criticize what they perceive as weak affirmative action policies in the Reagan, Bush, and even the Clinton administrations, and argue that “mean spirited” policies and statements emanating from Washington have contributed to a rash of racial incidents on campuses. On the other hand, the arguments of those who see negative effects of racial preferences on both black and white students are not considered.

Finally, my overall impression of the book is that is mistitled, since there is relatively little short-term forecasting and hardly any long-term predictions. (The very good chapter on technology and higher education by Gumport and Marc Chun is an exception here.) This lack may not diminish the intrinsic value of the book. The inaccuracy of most long-term predictions is notorious; moreover, these authors may have concluded that they lacked the forecasting background needed for such an ambitious endeavor. A different title would have been more informative, though, something like: “American Higher Education Facing the Twenty-first Century”.

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Teaching economics to undergraduates: Alternatives to chalk and talk

Although Economics of Education Review does not cover economic education (teaching economics), an exception may be made for this book, because someday a controlled study of the effectiveness of alternative teaching methods that are suggested in this volume may appear in the economics of education literature.

Several of the book’s chapters discuss alternatives to lectures (“chalk and talk”) such as group discussions or other cooperative learning, classroom experiments or simulations, writing assignments, etc. Other chapters suggest novel content, such as sports or literary examples, which could be used with any method of teaching, including lectures.

Experience with similar techniques prompts several observations. First, to work well, alternative methods take much preparation by both teacher and students, and students are not always ready to make the effort. In fact, when students see lectures as the norm, any deviation from that norm may not be taken seriously. On the other