

12

POLICY FRAMES

The first learning objective was to encourage: *Critical thinking about claims regarding progress and equity in progressive and global periods (identify embedded claims)*. Whether substantiated, based on misinterpretation of research, or entirely unfounded, making claims that link policies to educational outcomes in the bedrock of policy rationale-building in education. This decade, for example, the dominate rationale for K-16 education shifted from preparing all students for college to educating to STEM workforce. Discerning claims embedded in policy documents starts with paying attention to shifting ideological constructions of the linkages between education policy, practice (including policy implementation), and educational outcomes.

Federal and state policy adaptations to develop the economy and workforce have ushered higher education policy into a third era of government involvement. In the colonial and early American period, colleges appealed to government for funding, but there was no coherent policy framework (Hearn, 1993; St. John & Parsons, 2004; Thelin, 2004a, 2004b). From the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, states developed public K-12 and higher education systems, with the intent of promoting the social good and economic development. After World War II, the federal government began to take a substantial role in science, and student and policy sciences emerged as tools to inform state and federal policy decisions. The century of progress in expanding educational opportunity through public funding ended as the Cold War ended. The link between educational investment and older notions of the public good broke down as the federal government pushed STEM education and created new markets with lower federal costs as an artifact of increased reliance on student loans.

To encourage critical thinking about policy development and research, we introduce four frames that have been used to make claims about the educational right of citizens historically and along more recent trajectories. We also consider how states adapted to the new trajectory by reframing policy (i.e., program features and funding), building on the frameworks established by the end of the 20th century. We conclude by encouraging readers to think critically about the claims made by policymakers and consider how they use evidence to build rationales for changing programs.

FRAMES USED TO RATIONALIZE POLICY CHANGES

Since *A Nation At Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), education policy reforms have been framed as means of achieving a more globally competitive position, a central element of neoliberalism. The most troubling aspect of the policy shifts that followed was separating education quality from funding, a neoconservative logic (St. John, 1994). Unfortunately, after 1980, the neoliberal reframing of the purpose of education combined with neoconservative funding schemes radically altered the logics used to craft policy rationales for education reform. There were fundamental differences in policy rationales about funding education before this big shift, but even extreme conservatives such as Milton Friedman (1962) did not argue that quality was unrelated to the level of funding, a core tenet of the Reagan administration's policy rationale in education (Ben-nett, 1986, 1987; Finn, 1988a). To illustrate the problem underlying this shift, we identify policy claims before and after.

Assumptions Embedded in Political Ideologies

When crafting policy in universities and government agencies, advocates muster evidence to appeal to perceptions of educational rights. Policy arguments about the importance of accountability and markets can be deceptive, as can arguments about the general public good made in older political frameworks. Four widely espoused arguments about education policy are evident along two dimensions: 1) Systemic control vs. individual empowerment/action, and 2) social contract (equal rights) vs. economic incentives for action, leading to the four basic frames identified as part of the policy shift (Figure 12.1).

Policy Frames: While there have been breakdowns in grand narratives supported by the social theories and unifying political ideologies of the old left and right in education policy, it is possible to classify the types of assumptions used to rationalize for specific policies and changes. Two continua provide the basis for a typology of new and old policy rationales:

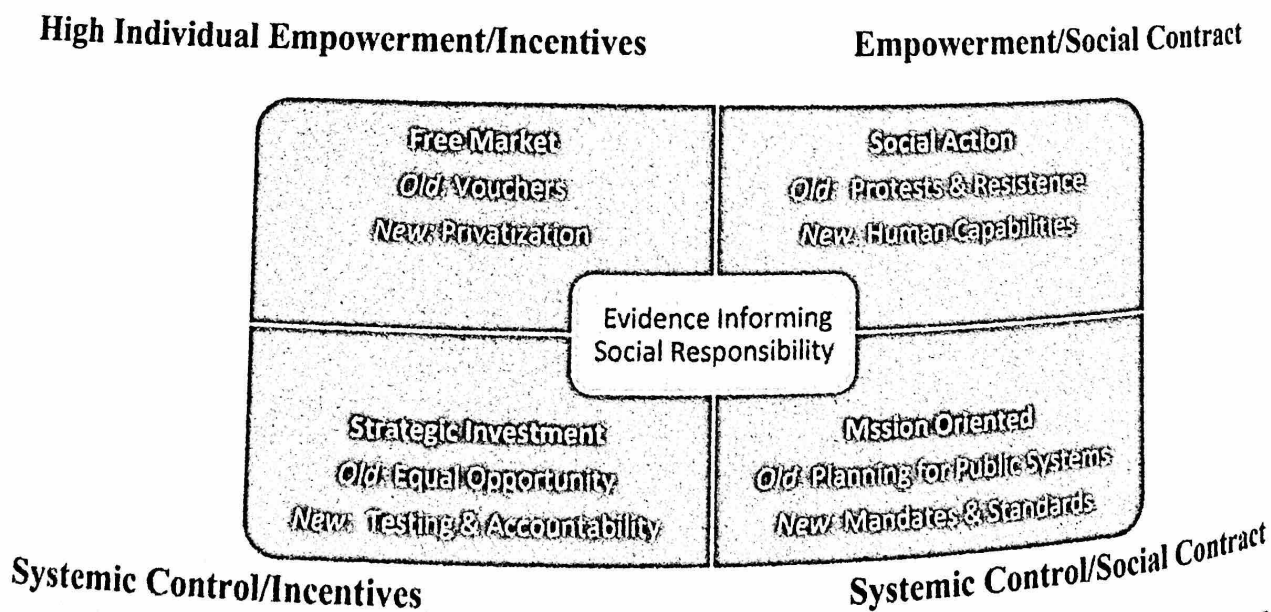


Figure 12.1 Assumptions Embedded in Political Ideologies and Old Strategies

- From high system control (public systems) to high empowerment (individual freedom to choose)
- From high social contracts (rights based) to high markets (competition & profit)

These distinctions provide four generic frames of viewing policy rationales:

- *Mission-oriented public investment* (quadrant 1, Figure 12.1) used mandates and funding related to the social contract for education, as part of provided public education, including mandated enrollment in K-12 and free or not tuition college access. The underlying argument changed from requiring education for children to a federal role in promoting equal opportunity.
- *Strategic investment* (quadrant 2) was a means of achieving efficiency and using systemic incentives, including targeted funding, to encourage desired systemic actions in polycentric systems. In the 1970s, the federal government provided financial incentives for states to develop coordinating agencies, develop state data systems, and coordinate state grant and loan programs with federal programs. The federal government has used similar policy mechanisms today to incentivize more-neoliberal policy preferences, such as increased school choice and greater accountability.
- *Free market* (quadrant 3) beliefs underlie rationales for policies promoting individual choice and corporate innovation based on market forces. In the earlier trajectory, private schools and colleges provided access for wealthy students but were generally not available to college-qualified, low-income students before the federal government invested in need-based grants. The concept of vouchers emerged in the 1960s as an alternative way of distributing public funding for primary and secondary education.
- *Social action* (quadrant 4) involves using social activism in schools and communities to empower students to overcome barriers to educational opportunity. Local action created early schools, and social action protests in the mid-20th century were used to reduce racial barriers. *Human capabilities* is a newer basis for social action promoting racial and economic equity that emerged through political and social action this century.

The Policy Shift: Once we adjust vantages to consider how appeals to educational rights are framed, it is possible to discern how federal policy shifted after 1980 (illustrated by the "new" strategies in Figure 12.1). The argument that all students should be college prepared transformed the older concept of mandatory education until age 16. Since the federal government did not control, or even directly fund, education for all students, the new logic provides a basis for shifting the focus away from government funding and toward incentives for states and schools.

The federal role developed after *Brown v. Board of Education*, when the federal government was charged with developing programs and strategies for reducing inequality through such mechanisms as providing school funding for supplemental and special education and making available need-based student grant aid. The early federal student aid programs were intended to reduce inequity, implicit in the targeting of aid to students below a specified income threshold. Prior to these programs, the higher education market was open mostly only to those who could pay for private schools or who attended colleges that had successfully secured need-based grant funds by writing proposals to

the federal government. While Friedman's (1962) voucher argument—that directing school funding to students would create competitive school markets—had never been adopted by states for K–12 education, this logic had influenced the Newman Commission's (1971) arguments for a major new grant program, which eventually became Pell grants, a portable need-based program (Mendez, 2006).

The privatization of public education and the use of loans instead of grants is often rationalized as free-market strategies that require individuals to pay a significantly larger proportion of the cost, assuming benefits of higher education disproportionately accrue to the individual. According to this logic, loans extend choice; however, low-income students are priced out of 4-year colleges if they resist accumulating excessive debt.

Frames Embedded in State Policy

Paying attention to the role of frames is a useful analytic tool for researchers, policymakers, and educators. We recognize that these frames are embedded within political ideologies that routinely inform the policy-formation process. The frames could help build an understanding of the ways in which state policies evolved in the 20th century, and how states adapted to the new policy trajectory, including emphasis on STEM preparation and free markets, in the early 21st century (see Table 12.1). In the next section, we consider basic frames, adaptive frames, and regional influences.

Basic Frames: Three of the states we examine as case studies had frames informed by public good rationales at the turn of the century: California, Indiana, and North Carolina. The California Master Plan model has since been emulated by other states as they develop three-level collegiate systems. Indiana developed a model with two university systems that also included 2-year campuses. North Carolina had a strong historical ethos of the public good, but evolved one large state system that also included community colleges. Within this “public good” tradition, there clearly were different methods of organizing state systems, a topic widely studied in the 1960s and 1970s as the field of higher education emerged (e.g. Lee & Bowen, 1971), and the “public good” argument had been central to the policy literature.

In the early 1970s, the market efficiency argument was developed and had a substantial influence on state policymakers, a theme evident in Part I and in the Minnesota case. Minnesota developed the model based on analyses focusing on rethinking the state's role in public accountability. Rather than subsidizing all students equally, the “public good” model provided higher subsidies to wealthier students enrolled in elite public universities, as was evident in economic research on higher education (e.g., Hansen & Weisbrod, 1967), the 1972 reauthorization of the HEA, and the development of state planning commissions (Chapter 4 & 5). Minnesota was the first state to fully embrace this model, which initially included emphasis on adequate funding levels for the three tiers of higher education (universities, state colleges, and community colleges), the higher funding needs of STEM courses, the need to share the burden of paying for college by raising prices (to one-third of cost) and subsidizing costs for low- and middle-income students, and coordinating state and federal need-based grants. Few states actually followed this model, although many tried (Hossler, Lund, et al., 1997).

Michigan's market model also emerged by the turn of the 21st century, but it differed radically from the Minnesota model. Michigan never had strong coordination, although it had an agency for the purpose when the federal government funded planning

Table 12.1 Frames Embedded in State/Basic Frame Late 20th Century

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Table 12.1 Frames Embedded in Case-Study States' K-16 Policies and Adaptations to the New Federal Policy Trajectory

State/Base Frame Late 20th Century	Frame Used in Adapting to New Trajectory
<p>California: Public Good California Master Plan pioneered university access in the 1960s with University of California for top 10%, state colleges for top 33%, and community colleges for all (academic and technical options). Strong state grant program.</p>	<p>Free Market (Revenue Constrained) Tax revenue constraints (1978 through 2012), lessening public access and eroding state's number-one position in college access. Constraints on uses of affirmative action increased inequalities. Recent corrections.</p>
<p>Minnesota: Accountability (Market Efficiency) After reviewing emerging challenges in the early 1980s, state originated the efficient market model, regulating educational costs by balancing institutional funding, tuition, and student grants.</p>	<p>Free Market (Constrained) State well-positioned for accountability in new standards; however, the new trajectory hastened movement to high loans in early 2000s, accompanied by declines in financial aid.</p>
<p>Indiana: Public Good (Conservative Progressive) Republican-Democrat consensus used to develop dual public systems (Purdue as engineering, University of Indiana as arts and sciences). More poorly funded than other states in region, Indiana lagged in rankings while expanding access. (Exemplary: 21st Century Scholars Program begins)</p>	<p>Human Capabilities (College Preparation & Access) Reforms in high school diploma types, development of strong college encouragement, funding for need-based grants, rationalized funding for K-12 and higher education. New model eroded after 2005 with breakdown of consensus and emergence of neoconservative state leadership.</p>
<p>North Carolina: Public Good An Adams state with a legacy of segregation, development of state-wide University of North Carolina system provided means of moving toward strengthening institutions and expanding access in quasi-rationalized system, narrowing inequality gap.</p>	<p>Human Capabilities Early adoption of progressive policies on high school reforms. UNC Chapel Hill developed the Carolina Covenant to expand opportunity for low-income state residents and coordinated statewide college-access programs (supported by Cooke Foundation model). Weathering neoconservative wrath.</p>
<p>Michigan: Market (Privatization) The first state to move rapidly toward "privatization" of public universities, Michigan had paltry state coordination. High inequalities in access in spite of defense of affirmative action in the Supreme Court.</p>	<p>Accountability (K-16 Initiatives) Raised math requirements for all, cut state funding for public schools, required college admissions tests for all high school juniors. State takers over of schools in major cities and districts did not lead to success with rising standards.</p>

commissions. States, including Michigan, adapted to capture federal funds during this period; the "privatization" of the University of Michigan led the way in this transformation (Duderstadt & Womack, 2003). Funding for institutions eroded in Michigan, influencing tuition increases. At the same time, paltry need-based grants compounded the impact of tuition increases on middle- and low-income families, accelerating inequalities in outcomes.

The contrast between Minnesota and Michigan illustrates differences in the concept of markets. Minnesota's efficiency model developed as a result of using rational discourse, informed by expensive data analyses and comparisons of funding at peer institutions

in other states. In contrast, Michigan did not seriously consider such analytic strategies to inform policy formulation; instead, the state moved toward privatization as a means of supporting two nationally competitive, highly-rated universities (i.e., University of Michigan and Michigan State).

Adapting to the New Trajectory: The basic frames used in these states in the early 21st century relate to but do not fully explain how they adapted to the dual challenges of raising high school graduation requirements (promoted but not funded by the federal government) and promoting high debt rather than high need-based grants. Multiple framing assumptions are involved in the ways that states respond to new challenges, but we have identified a general pattern from the cases, for illustrative purposes.

California and Minnesota did not respond to the challenges created by changes in federal student aid through adaptation of the core state frameworks. Instead, the new free-market model influenced student reliance on debt, altering the ways these states' models worked. Both states failed to substantially change their core state finance systems.

California had an early "universal access" notion that ushered in the transition to mass higher education (Trow, 1974a, 1974b). Faced with tax revenue constraints, California retained differential funding of colleges (i.e., high per-student subsidies at the elite state universities) and low-tuition as core aspects of their model, but did not adapt to tax revenue constraints in ways that ensured expanding access and equal opportunity, especially at the UC campuses. The result was that the state fell from its lofty perch as the top access state, even though it maintained high-quality public universities.

In contrast, Minnesota sought to adhere to the grant model in the face of shifting state funding, declining grants, and dismantling of the state coordinating agency. The result was high debt for students and an increasingly politicized policy environment for higher education. Of the states studied, Minnesota was exemplary in terms of its capacity to lead during the emergence of the K-16 pipeline. The accountability-based, market-efficiency model had great adaptability. Tuition rose, prices increased, debt increased, and the older model eroded, but the state kept pace on access.

Michigan responded to the new period by emphasizing accountability mechanisms as a complement to their base strategies. It went full-speed into higher standards and accountability schemes in K-12 education, but it lacked an underlying rationale for public finance of K-12 and higher education. The result was increased inequality in access, and urban schools failing financially.

A "human capabilities" logic was used as part of the adaptive change process in Indiana and North Carolina. The importance of the 21st Century Scholars Program in Indiana was not its modest improvement in state grants for students, but its provision of a logic for maintaining rational funding models for K-12 and higher education. This movement was led by a state legislator, Stan Jones, who eventually became Commissioner for Higher Education. In contrast, the emergence of more humanistic strategies in North Carolina was hastened by activism of administrators at UNC Chapel Hill (St. John, Ort, & Williford, 2012). The Carolina Covenant—a means-tested institutional grant program designed to eliminate the need for loans among low-income students—provided a logic for increasing funding for student grants, benefiting institutions across the state.

The illumination of the roles of policy rationales provides a basis for explaining adaptive changes in states' financing of higher education before and after changes in the national trajectory of higher education. The logic of human capabilities is new and largely untested, but it illuminates how embedded assumptions influence adaptive

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change in states and it may become a useful method of creating discursive space for discussing critical social issues—especially emerging inequalities—in addition to providing a means of shedding light on the past.

Regional Influences

The state cases illustrate some of the regional differences in higher education, a topic that merits further attention in policy research. For example, the fact that the states affected by the Supreme Court's *Adams* decision in the South had histories of legal segregation should not be overlooked as analysts examine rationales for new polices, such as merit aid. This legacy still plays a substantial role in the ways that adaptive changes in North Carolina are debated, and the impact they have. In another example, the fact the Midwest states of Minnesota and Indiana were exemplars is not an accident, but rather is an artifact of the progressive history of the states emerging from the Northwest Territory.

While Michigan is in the Midwest, it was not part Northwest Territory provisions that emphasized education as the American colonies expanded, a hallmark of the region. As a university founded before Michigan was part of the United States, the University of Michigan actually started under French influence (Li, 2011). In contrast, California was a western state caught in a period of growth in demand in the 1990s unlike most of the rest of the states; in fact, policymakers in California thought they were facing enrollment decline (Zumeta, 2004). We did not pay sufficient attention to the regional influences on states in the first edition, but address aspects of this issue in the final chapter.

USING FRAMES TO DECODE POLICY RATIONALES

As states adjust to the new trajectory toward accountability and expensive (*although coined free*) markets in education, they are undergoing a shift in the logic used to rationalize educational programs and investment in them. As states leave the era of public good into a period in which widely varying claims are made to restructure educational systems, it is important to filter through the rhetorical noise. After briefly reconsidering what we have lost analytically with the demise of a grand theory of education, we return to the importance of linking interventions to outcomes as a means of providing evidence in policy discussions, research, and analysis.

Identify Underlying Arguments

Political rationalizations about program and policy options contain embedded assumptions about how program features and funding link to quality and equity outcomes. In the shift from old logics, appeals to *quality education for all* took priority over equal educational opportunity, the public good rationale that had previously been the basic logic for K–12 and higher education programs.

The highly conflicted policy debates about education, health, and social services have given the authors reasons to reconsider one of the major assumptions we made when starting this venture in 2010. While many critical analysts lump the post-1980 policies together under the rubric of neoliberalism (e.g., Harvey, 2005), this approach oversimplifies the complexities, especially how neoconservative arguments about the economic efficiency of loans over grants were based on radically embedded misconceptions. Certainly, the neoliberal rhetoric about educational opportunity used to promote raising graduation standards disguised the savage inequality created by the market forces

unleashed by federal policy emphasizing loans over grants. These market developments did not align with the progressive rhetoric of many advocates of K-12 reforms, and failed to consider the regressive consequences of high tuition, high loans, and the inevitable breakdown of the older need-based programs promoting equal opportunity. Many states were ill prepared to cope with the new inequalities resulting from the changes in the nation's educational trajectory.

Rather than lapse into a critique of all post-1980 changes in K-12 and higher education policy as neoliberal, we conclude that it is crucial to further examine the claims about social equity being made as part of the contemporary policy. Researchers and analysts must decode the claims being made about basic liberties and rights regarding educational opportunities; for example, focusing on what was *new* in the shift, including but not limited to new conservative arguments about reducing government costs and new liberal arguments about education rights.

The Demise of a Grand Theory of the Public Good

In the earlier era of grand social good theory, the funding and regulation of colleges was left to the states. After WWII, a federal role developed in research and financial aid, altering incentives for students and colleges.

The Old Tensions Revisited: The early federal policies in education were shaped by arguments about the economic and social good. The prevailing notions were that the federal government could support educational improvement for disadvantaged groups and that public investment in need-based aid could expand the base of students who enrolled in college. These early frameworks had embedded logics that provided a basis for examining the return on public investment.

Federal interventions seeking to expand opportunity were the policy wedge used to create an initial federal role in the 1960s and 1970s. After cuts in federal tax rates in the early 1980s, there was a brief period when federal policymakers were interested in tax-revenue gains from student financial aid. The net present value of federal spending on need-based student aid in the 1970s and early 1980s was estimated to be a return of about \$4 for every \$1 spent (St. John & Masten, 1990). Unfortunately, the idea that Head Start, student aid, and other programs designed to uplift underrepresented groups were important gave way to new logics that emphasized public standards and accountability.

The economic benefits from investing in education—the gains in earnings for individuals and the resulting economic growth—had given states a basis for rationalizing general support of education. The more that states invested, the greater their gains in the economic wellbeing of citizens and growth in state economies (Paulsen, 1996a; 1996b). As states followed the federal formula for upgrading the high school curriculum and privatizing higher education, the basis for assessing returns on state investments ceased to be part of discourse on educational policy.

Neoconservative Reframing of Core Logics: There was tension between the federal role of promoting equity based on the logic of intervention supporting uplift of groups not fully served by states, and the idea that investment in state education programs advantaged all citizens. Federal education programs provided incentives for states to be more inclusive, but the idea that citizens were taxed to pay for special programs was easily attached to the neoconservative logic ushered in by the Reagan administration (Finn, 1990b). Market logics made it easier to decrease taxpayer support to tuition and need-based grants to loans, as part of the new rationales. William Bennett (1986, 1987), Bruce

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Carnes (1987), and many others were among the chorus of scholarly voices advocating the reemphasize on the traditional liberal art (e.g., Bloom, 1987; Finn, Manno, & Ravitch, 2001). These arguments are sophisticated in their use of research to alter public opinion, including among educators and educational researchers. They were rapidly adopted by anti-tax right-wing factions in state legislatures, which have since become a transformational force.

We need to recognize how assumptions used in education policy change. Shifting to monitoring outcomes for all was a wedge argument against targeting subsidies to people of great need. Ravitch's (2010) *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choices are Undermining Education* provides an excellent analysis of how researchers can be swept away by the potential to engage at the highest levels of policy.

Recognizing the Underlying Shift: Our purpose in revisiting these old debates is not to ignite new ones, but to encourage professors, graduate students, researchers seeking funding, and administrators in organizations that fund research to recognize that this debate is over. Policy shifted. In the new context, however, it is crucial that inequalities be considered as part of policy analysis. This requires specifying the features of programs, how they change over time, how they might change under new proposals, and outcomes. A single program does not operate in a vacuum, so it is important to think through the forces at work and the context; to do otherwise can create tautology. For example, it is not sufficient to compare the effects of providing information about grant programs to not having such information. Of course, having information helps students apply (it is a tautological truism), but it may not help them navigate toward college success if it does not help them consider actual costs and the role of debt. If governments and colleges do not routinely meet financial need with grants, students have to know about the consequences of loans, realistic information about earning associated with different majors, and likelihood of employment.

Rethinking the Roles of Policy Analysis and Research in Promoting Equal Opportunity: It is important to consider neoconservative arguments for reconstructing accountability and market strategies. The evidence-based logic for linking policies and outcomes offers a means of expanding the discourse on social justice, using evidence to address inequality. However, this goal requires that we weigh opposing arguments seriously. Specifically, we encourage policy researchers to:

- *Identify and Use Indicators of Policies and Outcomes:* Trends in the actual policies implemented, especially criteria (e.g., selection criteria such as merit and/or financial need for student aid programs), funding levels of programs, and outcomes related to attainment and achievement. The use of indicators based on frames provides visibility into inequalities that merit public attention and social action.
- *Specify the Features of Programs and Funding that Link to Outcomes:* The idea of accountability must consider inequalities as well as average outcomes, and it is crucial to provide evidence on outcomes. Vague ideological arguments about the value of accountability and choice must be questioned with regard to impacts on inequality.
- *Include Equity and Quality Outcomes:* Enrollment, equity, and quality indicators are typically used by governments in rationales for programs. The challenge is to document how those policies and practices link to outcomes. The policy changes in

- the 1980s moved the focus from equity to excellence for all (quality). Reintegrating and valuing equity outcome is essential.
- *Address the Social Contexts of Inequality:* The social aspects of inequality have been exceedingly difficult to address as part of educational and social policy. Programs such as 21st Century Scholars, Washington State Achievers, and College for Every Student have provided laboratories to explore strategies for overcoming barriers to equal opportunity. Studies of these programs can inform social action by educators and community organizations as well as policy.
 - *Recognize Erosion of Key Program Features That Promote Equity:* Different facets of programs to promote equity have eroded over time, including Pell grants and Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program. Generating evidence of these shifts in policy and their consequences is crucial.
 - *Appeal to the Better Nature of Divergent Groups:* It is vital to avoid pitting the interests of marginalized groups against the interests of dominant groups. The rationales being used by advocates of accountability and markets include appeals to human rights (a topic addressed at the outset of this chapter). Evidence from research (qualitative and quantitative), along with the testimony of people who have overcome barriers, can be motivational across groups.

ENCOURAGING CRITICAL REFLECTION

This chapter introduced two interrelated approaches to identify topics that merit further inquiry about the impact of policy changes—policy frames and rationales. We've used the concept of frameworks to depict how frames and ideologies converge with history within states. All of these things can change: the frames reframing used to build rationales to recraft rationales change the course of policy, but the frameworks in states and nations are historically situation and usually adapt to new political current rather than suddenly transform as an outcome of policy.

We encourage readers to review problems using the frames described in this chapter (Text Box 12.1). Addressing these sorts of questions about a program should take place before undertaking a policy study. We encourage readers to keep these questions in mind as they read the next chapter. In addition, group discussion of diverse policies, programs and changes in them, and related funding issues will help inform understanding of the potential contributions of well-thought-out policy studies.

Text Box 12.1 Questions about Policy Frames

1. Identify a state or federal program that has changed in the past few decades, or a new program that interests you.
2. If it is a program change, consider: How was the program changed? Were there changes in eligibility criteria, selection processes, funding, or other mechanisms?
3. If it is a new program, consider: What are the key programs features? How was it funded?

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PUBLIC POLICY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Reframing Strategies for Preparation, Access, and College Success



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ROUTLEDGE