

A Study on American Higher Education

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Abstract : Higher education is one of the essential channels for a country to stand out in the world. Higher education in the United States is one of the most competitive industries today, and its undergraduate and graduate schools have provided a steady stream of higher education talent and developed a large number of top technologies around the world. The paper considers the advantages of U.S. higher education and the areas for improvement from three dimensions: history, current situation, and future development. Nowadays, U.S. higher education is still exploring, so the lessons learned from its historical experience, are of great relevance to countries that are committed to enhancing the quality of higher education.

Keywords : American Education; Higher Education; Education Change

As a country with a relatively short history, the United States has successfully expanded its university functions, developed its characteristics, and evolved into a major higher education country from the early days of its founding to the present day. From the Second World War to the early 21st century, while maintaining its traditions and combining mass education and research innovation, U.S. higher education underwent a series of reforms and developed rapidly. Nowadays, in the environment of a global epidemic, American higher education, which is constantly reforming and innovating, pays more attention to the effectiveness of school operation and teaching quality, and many of its practices are worthy of reference undoubtedly.

1. History

1.1 The emergence of higher education in the United States

The American higher education system has been gradually formed in the course of historical development. It began in the colonial period, starting with the discovery of the New World by Columbus. Later, the Puritans in England took refuge here to escape the persecution of the king and spread their doctrines. At the same time, the American university emerged.

1.2 The development of American higher education

The development of American universities was not only based on European influence for a long time but also due to the constraints of the country's socio-economic values. Thus, American universities gradually produced characteristics different from those of other countries.

1.2.1 Loose government control and full autonomy

In the administrative system of basic public education in the United States, the federal government has a department of education, but it does not go to govern the following state and country departments of education. Due to the U.S. constitution delegates education administration to the states, local education is mostly developed by them.

1.2.2 Diversity of funding sources

The United States is a federal country, government funding for higher education includes the federal government, state governments, and local governments at three levels. Both public and private universities can receive government funding, but the opportunity of the proportion of funding varies. Public institutions in the U.S. receive direct government funding, with state and local government funding dominating. From an emphasis on the public service function of private universities, the government

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provides more public indirect funding to private colleges and universities.

1.3 The climax of higher education development in the United States

In 1862, Abraham Lincoln passed *Morrill Land-Grant Act*. The Act provided that the federal government would allocate 30,000 acres of land to each state legislator according to the number of them. The states used the land grants to finance schools, which also known as land-grant colleges, breaking the tradition of the U.S. federal government not asking for education.

The development of higher education in the United States was also driven by World War I and II. After these two world wars, the United States not only strengthened its industrial efficiency in advance but also perfected its concept of national development. Based on the fact that the United States was the winner and safe zone in World War I and II, these two factors were the fundamental reasons that led to stimulating the economic growth of the United States during them.

1.4 Development of higher education in the United States towards prosperity

Between World War II and the end of the 20th century, *G.I. Bill* was passed to help veterans better adjust to civilian life after World War II. The implementation of the Act benefited millions of American veterans and provided talent assurance for the rapid transformation of the United States from wartime to civilian economy. The enactment of the National Defense Education Act was to focus on education for the gifted. A large number of additional education funds was allocated for this purpose as financial aid for schools at all levels. It is also in the context of the era of promoting education that American society has continued to improve the educational system and make every effort to reshape the learning system to improve the quality of education in all aspects. This has resulted in a rich range of remarkable achievements.

2. Current situation

2.1 U. S. higher education system

2.1.1 Research universities

In the United States, there are about 200 research universities, which are relatively more demanding to enroll compared to other universities, and the number accounts for only 4% of the higher education colleges in the U.S. However, this type of college can award the vast majority of doctoral degrees, and the government allocates large amounts of money to these colleges for academic research every year.

2.1.2 Comprehensive universities

Most comprehensive universities are public, numbering around 700, with a focus on undergraduate studies. The application policy is more relaxed, so the academic performance of these students is much lower than that of students entering research universities. As a result, comprehensive universities are closely related to the region, providing services to a variety of local institutions.

2.1.3 Four-year colleges

The number of colleges in this category is around 1000, mainly non-profit private schools, smaller in scale, with relatively small enrollment. Some private colleges are even on the verge of bankruptcy and closing.

2.1.4 Community colleges

The number of community colleges exceeds 1000, of which 85% of the number are public colleges. The two purposes of choosing this type of college are to enter a four-year college after graduation through further education and to receive vocational education to prepare for entering the workforce.

2.1.5 For-profit educational institutions

In the United States, for-profit educational institutions have a large scale, with the number above 1,300, and the trend is increasing year by year. About half of the students can be awarded a bachelor's degree, and the rest are awarded specific vocational training certificates to students.

2.2 Characteristics of the current state of education

2.2.1 Disparity

Due to the high degree of decentralization, the regulator of public universities in the U.S. is the state government, which does not have much power to intervene in the administrative affairs of the schools, while private institutions have no agency at all to regulate the quality of education. In addition, compared to other countries, the U.S. does not have an official national educational evaluation agency to assess and control the quality of teaching and learning in colleges and universities. Thus, U.S. universities are powerful, and have the right to decide the majors and programs to be set up, as well as their admission procedures, and requirements.

2. 2. 2 Competitiveness

The source of motivation for the continuous progress of American universities is competition. Compared with Chinese candidates, American candidates can apply to an unlimited number of American colleges and universities, and a student can be admitted to several colleges and universities at the same time, then pick the most suitable one for admission from the institutions that admit him. Therefore, U.S. colleges and students are a two-way street, even the most prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale must often compete with other schools for the best students.

3. Comment

3. 1 Comparison

The path of higher education in the United States from the early days of the country to the present day has been shaped by the British education system, but over the years it has also developed its own set of teaching methods. Many of these methods have had a profound impact, directly attracting the best students from around the world to study in the United States and creating a very strong global reputation. Some of the unique education systems are described below.

3. 1. 1 Love my teachers, but I love the truth even more

In traditional education, the authority of teachers in students stems from their proficiency in a particular area of expertise. This professional authority has led to “listening” as the primary mode of instruction in the campus classroom, with students often in a passive position, listening to teachers teach them the knowledge, skills, norms, and values they will need to enter society. American college teachers are more like facilitators or coaches in the classroom. They do not simply and brutally instill knowledge and scientific conclusions into students, and do not answer academic questions for them. Let them find the answers to their questions on their own.

3. 1. 2 The “stressful” daily study

In the United States, before classes, teachers usually specify the reading content to be read in each class, and students are faced with a large number of reading tasks and usual assignments during them. Some domestic teachers also provide some relevant books in class, but due to the lack of specific quantitative requirements and related examination and supervision mechanisms such as class discussions, the reading or not of professional books is left to students’ consciousness. The assessment methods of domestic university courses are generally more result-oriented, especially in humanities and social science, and art courses, where most teachers usually only assign an essay topic or creative work in class and do not take exams or collect assignments until the end of the course, and the requirements during the course are very loose, which makes it difficult to effectively stimulate and supervise students’ actual reading behavior after class. Because the learning evaluation system relies too much on the score results of the final exam, there is a lack of “process management” during the classes, which leads to a shortage of effective pressure during the class. In contrast, American college students pay more attention to regular study, and by establishing an effective quantitative grading system and appointing a heavy class workload, students do not dare to be sloppy in their regular study, thus effectively ensuring the depth and quality of the study.

3. 1. 3 Strict elimination mechanism

New faculty members are immediately faced with the tremendous pressure of “promotion or dismissal” at U.S. colleges and universities. They are required to sign a contract with the university that includes details of their employment title, teaching requirements, tenure, salary, and so on. If a teacher’s teaching and research performance do not meet the requirements at the end of the term, he must leave the school to find another job. To effectively stabilize the backbone of the school’s faculty, the tenure system is also commonly implemented in American universities. Once a faculty member is recognized as an outstanding professor, he will receive a tenure-track appointment. The university provides tenured professors with long-term stable teaching and research opportunities, permanent employment security, and reliable financial income.

3. 2 Future development

As we enter the 21st century, the world has changed significantly, and American society has also been greatly affected by terrorism, a certain amount of variation has occurred in American higher education. The United States is determined to continue to increase the reform and development of education at all levels and in all categories, to improve the quality of education, and to strive to train a new generation of high-quality people who will be loyal to the United States of America.

3. 2. 1 COVID-19 and the impact on education

Over the past year, as the country struggles to contain the outbreak of COVID-19, online education technology in the U.S. has grown massively, not only at the higher education level but across the entire K-12 education spectrum. While most schools are now

open and have students enrolled, colleges and universities will continue to use online instruction as a way to maintain safety and keep students connected to faculty during the epidemic. Meanwhile, Biden made it clear that it would be impossible to open up the U.S. economy, schools, and communities without containing the virus. The U.S. is expected to be on a safer track to open up more quickly as the way it responds to the changes. This is good for universities and the education system as a whole, as full operations can help all learners, both in school and online. Of course, it also helps international students who rely on cross-country travel to get to campus to study, so the faster this happens, the more confident students will be that it is safe to study in the United States.

3. 2. 2 Changes to H1B&OPT

Biden said he would lift the cap on employment visas for individual countries, and recent graduates of Ph.D. and STEM programs would also be exempt from the cap on any visas in his program. In the future, OPT policy is likely to remain intact as well, which puts immigration policy on track to return to pre-Trump levels. Biden reminded the world that the United States welcomes foreign students, immigrants, and families. But affected by the epidemic and continued high unemployment, the administrator may require immigrants to guarantee they will not negatively impact U.S. job growth.

4. Recommendation

The main recommendation for general education in China's universities is to clarify the cultivation goals of higher education in China and adopt universal protection measures for the country's elite talents to ensure that their lives are not disturbed. At the same time, we should set up a reasonable curriculum configuration and assign coursework according to the employment and research intention of undergraduates. It is essential to pay attention to the balance of humanities and science, and now the country's demand for composite talents is getting higher and higher, so the cultivation of talents in universities needs to expand its dimension.

5. Conclusion

American higher education is known for its demanding nature and the high quality of its graduates, but it is by no means a guarantee that one will soar to greatness. It is a complete waste of time and money to study for a "gold plated" degree and not appreciate its essence. In today's society, a diploma by itself can have little impact. The most important thing is to develop the skills and eyesight you need and apply them during your school years. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that American higher education is not perfect, with challenges such as the much-criticized high tuition, the solidification of the elite class of children in prestigious schools, the underfunding of public universities, and the diminished authority of faculty. But it is undeniable that even though foreign competitors have taken the edge off other U.S. industries, colleges and universities have perpetuated their global educational juggernaut by relying on the ecological mechanisms of independence, inclusiveness, and free competition. As the famous quote says: "Erected for the Students that Religion and Learning may Go Hand in Hand and Character Grow with Knowledge."

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