When the first edition of *The Shaping of American Higher Education* was published it was lauded for its historical perspective and in-depth coverage of current events that provided an authoritative, comprehensive account of the history of higher education in the United States. As in the first edition, this book tracks trends and important issues in eight key areas: student access, faculty professionalization, curricular expansion, institutional growth, governance, finance, research, and outcomes. Thoroughly revised and updated, the volume is filled with critical new data, recent information from specialized sources on faculty, student admissions, and management practices, and an entirely new section that explores privatization, corporatization, and accountability from the mid-1990s to the present. This second edition also includes end-of-chapter questions for guidance, reflection, and study.

"Cohen and Kisker do the nation’s colleges and universities a much needed service by authoring this volume. The highly regarded histories of American higher education have become badly dated. They ignore the last quarter century when American higher education was transformed. This volume provides comprehensive information on that era."

— Art Levine, president, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, and author, *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today’s College Student*

"The second edition of *The Shaping of American Higher Education* is a treasure trove of information and insight. Cohen and Kisker provide us with astute and straightforward analysis and commentary on our past, present, and likely future. This book is invaluable to those seeking to go to the heart of the issues and challenges confronting higher education."

— Judith S. Eaton, president, Council for Higher Education Accreditation

"Arthur Cohen and his collaborator have now updated his up-to-date history of American higher education. It remains masterful, authoritative, comprehensive, and incisive, and guarantees that this work will stand as the classic required resource for all who want to understand where higher education came from and where it is going. The new material gives a wise and nuanced perspective on the current crisis-driven transformations of the higher education industry."

— John Lombardi, president, Louisiana State University System

"The *Shaping of American Higher Education* is distinguished by its systematic approach, comprehensive coverage, and extensive treatment of the modern era, including the first years of the twenty-first century. In this second edition, Arthur Cohen and Carrie Kisker are especially adept at bringing historical perspective and a balanced viewpoint to controversial issues of the current era."

— Roger L. Geiger, distinguished professor, The Pennsylvania State University, and author, *Knowledge and Money*

The Authors


Carrie B. Kisker is an editor, researcher, and educational consultant in Los Angeles. She has taught courses on the history of higher education and on citizenship, leadership, and service, and is the former managing editor of *New Directions for Community Colleges*. 
The Shaping of American Higher Education
The Shaping of American Higher Education

Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System

Second Edition

Arthur M. Cohen
with
Carrie B. Kisker

Jossey-Bass
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The Authors

Arthur M. Cohen has been professor of higher education at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) since 1964; he became emeritus in 2004. He received his B.A. (1949) and M.A. (1955) degrees in history from the University of Miami and his Ph.D. degree (1964) in higher education from Florida State University. He was director of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges from 1966 to 2003 and president of the Center for the Study of Community Colleges from 1974 to 2007. Cohen has served on the editorial boards of numerous journals. His most recent book is The American Community College (5th ed., 2008), coauthored with Florence B. Brawer.

Carrie B. Kisker is an editor, researcher, and educational consultant in Los Angeles. She received her B.A. (1999) in psychology from Dartmouth College and her M.A. (2003) and Ph.D. (2006) in higher education from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her dissertation examined the idea of integrating high school and community college from historical and policy perspectives. She has taught courses on the history of higher education and on citizenship, leadership, and service, and is the former managing editor of New Directions for Community Colleges.
Preface to the Second Edition

Several shifts in higher education’s support and functioning warrant a new edition of this book. In particular, the trends toward privatization, corporatization, and accountability all gained momentum in the last decade, and their effects within the academy have been far reaching. American higher education has also been affected by the housing and stock market collapses of 2008–2009, which left such losses in the economy that they triggered a major recession and forced institutions already operating on reduced levels of state funding to slash their budgets by double-digit percentages, search for more corporate and philanthropic support, and shift more of the cost of instruction to students and their families.

This edition of The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System exhibits a few modifications in the system’s history based on recent scholarship. But most of the changes from the first edition concern the era from 1994 to 2009, which is treated in a new chapter. Sources for this volume remain the same: contemporary periodicals, National Center for Education Statistics databases, and several recent books on students, faculty, institutions, finances, and other aspects of the enterprise.

Among the people who assisted in preparing this volume: UCLA Professor Richard L. Wagoner helped plan the work, contributing especially to the chapter on contemporary faculty; Zack Ritter, a UCLA graduate student, managed the bibliography and assisted in tracking down sources; Florence Brawer, coauthor of The American Community College, provided editorial comments; Martin Cohen contributed data on college libraries; Harry Kisker provided useful
feedback on much of the new chapter; and Bill Bleich suggested the Electronically Modulated Interactive Learning Environment (EMILE) discussed in Chapter Six.

ARTHUR M. COHEN
CARRIE B. KISKER
LOS ANGELES
AUGUST 2009
Preface to the First Edition

This book had its origins in the History of Higher Education course that I have taught for many years in UCLA’s Department of Education. Few of the students who enroll each term have much prior knowledge of American history, and fewer still are aware of the roots of collegiate institutions. As the course evolved, it became apparent that it had to both encompass the entire scope of higher education since the Colonial Era and to set the developing colleges in the context of their times—all within the span of a ten-week quarter. Furthermore, the review of 350 years of continuous expansion in enrollments, staff, curriculum, finance, and all other aspects of the system had to be organized so that it would not overwhelm the students. The matrix described in the introduction to this volume has helped serve that purpose.

The volume’s chief contribution is its synthesis of the Mass Higher Education Era (1945–1975) and the Contemporary Era (1976–1998); most of the trends that had developed earlier matured during these periods. Contemporary periodicals, data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, and a few essential books provided most of the information undergirding the work. Many examples from California are included because I have spent my entire academic career as a University of California professor and am therefore most familiar with that state. Also, several of the directions that American higher education has taken in the past fifty years first appeared there.

Many people helped prepare the manuscript. Several students in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies assisted. Erika Yamasaki took charge of the tables. Dan Zeidman reviewed legislation and court decisions affecting higher education.
in the past fifty years. Carol Kozeracki and Gwyer Schuyler, two of my doctoral advisees, contributed at every stage. They scanned books and articles, prepared the bibliography, gave careful readings to each draft, and provided their own perspectives. With people like these two coming into higher education, the system is in good hands.

Others also participated. Amy Pape transcribed the manuscript from audiotape. John Terrey, Burton R. Clark, and John Thelin reviewed an early draft and made helpful suggestions. I am grateful to them for sharing their expertise. The staff of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, headed by Tronie Rifkin, put the final draft together. UCLA provided a sabbatical leave so that I could give the project my full attention.

I owe a special debt to Florence B. Brawer, my wife, coauthor, and long-term collaborator in every area of my personal and professional life. She helped plan the book; she discussed ideas, reviewed drafts, criticized, and commended. I could not have undertaken the project without her encouragement, devotion, and support. This work is dedicated to her in total appreciation for the many years we have shared.

ARTHUR M. COHEN
LOS ANGELES
AUGUST 1998
The Shaping of American Higher Education
Introduction

A Framework for Studying the History of Higher Education

Reading the history of higher education teaches appreciation for the power of tradition. Practically every aspect of contemporary higher education can be traced to the formation of universities in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and many to the colleges in the Colonial Era. Some aspects were present in the universities of medieval Europe. This stability of form effects a counterpoise quite familiar to anyone who has attempted to modify any aspect of an institution.

Understanding history is thus essential for those who would reform higher education. Publications and presentations calling for completely revising governance, teaching, and funding appear frequently. An industry of innovation is apparent. But it must be satisfied with small victories: an occasional new course requirement, modified student admissions practices, changed patterns of faculty recruitment. Throughout its history the system has successfully resisted, co-opted, or absorbed—eventually changing but with the glacial majesty befitting a venerable structure. However, the repercussions stemming from the fiscal shock of 2008–2009 may accelerate the trends toward privatization, corporatization, and accountability that are discussed in Chapter Six, fundamentally altering historical structures and truisms. As an example, the forces leading toward individuals paying a greater share of the costs of their education may soon pass a tipping point at which many prospective students give up or at least delay entry. As well, the
structure of public higher education may change in many states as they become less able to support a variety of institutions that maintain distinctive missions. In short, the system has become more vulnerable to external forces.

The basic questions in higher education have been debated since colleges began. What shall be taught? Who shall learn it? Who shall pay? Each question impinges on the others. Each is grounded in the history of the institution. Curriculum, faculty selection and review, student entry and progress, and institutional funding are perennial issues. Today's problems are related to yesterday's practices. The system has its own momentum, its own well-trodden paths. How has it evolved? And to what degree?

The history of higher education is taught in most graduate programs that prepare practitioners for positions in postsecondary institutions. Sometimes it is presented as a self-standing course; often it is submerged in courses on higher education administration, systems, or issues. Several reviews have presented course syllabi and specialized reading lists (Miller and Nelson, 1993; Goodchild and Stanton, 1987; Thelin, 1986) that reveal a chronological approach.

Students are taught about colleges in the Colonial Era and then led through the founding of the American nation on into the present. The basic textbooks also are so arrayed. Rudolph's *The American College and University* (1962), Brubacher and Rudy's *Higher Education in Transition* (1976), Thelin's *A History of American Higher Education* (2004), and Lucas's *American Higher Education: A History* (2006) begin by showing how European forms undergirded the establishment of colleges in Colonial America. They then carry the story forward. The document compilations by Hofstadter and Smith (1961) and Smith and Bender (2008), as well as those in the *ASHE Reader on the History of Higher Education* (Goodchild and Wechsler, 1997; Wechsler, Goodchild, and Eisenmann, 2008), also follow a chronological pattern. Geiger's 1998 outline divides the chronology into ten eras.
Most syllabi and textbooks also take a topical approach, pointing out changes in students attending colleges, working conditions for the faculty, curriculum, number of institutions, patterns of governance, and public and private financing. These topics are often supplemented by subtopics of interest: the rise of women's colleges, education for African Americans, intercollegiate sports, training for the professions.

Various events are noted throughout the texts. The founding of certain types of institutions—state colleges, graduate and professional schools, and junior colleges for example—may be accorded separate sections. Legislation, including the Morrill Acts and the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, is given space along with important court decisions such as the Dartmouth College case, which protected institutional independence. The courses and texts also show how certain trends have been pervasive: access for more students, vocationally oriented curricula, secular governance, and state-level coordination of higher education.

Organization of the material is critical in an area as broad as the history of higher education. The theme should be wide enough to display the sweep of topics, trends, and events from the beginnings of colleges in the American colonies. But the presentation must ensure that the topics are not confounded; at the same time, it is important to avoid a restrictive approach that emphasizes a few topics to the exclusion of others.

This book's approach is to define trends and events chronologically under topical headings, showing interrelationships among them. A trend is a long-term movement that points in a consistent direction. An event is a specific occurrence that marks the progression of a trend. A topic is a cluster of trends and events. An era is a chronological distinction marked by a number of events.

Thus a matrix is suggested, with topics and trends on one axis and eras on the other. The events are noted within the categorical divisions that are formed. Exhibit I.1 displays such a layout—the one that forms the plan for this text.
### Exhibit I.1. Trends and Events in American Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ERAS</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Nation</td>
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<td>University</td>
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<td>Transformation</td>
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<td>Mass Higher</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Consolidation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
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#### Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Context</th>
<th>Overall Trends</th>
<th>Recent Adjustments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Expanding nation and economy; increased demands and expectations</td>
<td>Diverse; multipurpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Part-time, fungible labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time, fungible labor</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Vocational and varied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Decentralization; corporatization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Fiscal cutbacks; privatization; entrepreneurialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Outcomes</td>
<td>Individual mobility; societal and economic development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>Public funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Administration</td>
<td>Public funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Public funding</td>
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<td>Research and Outcomes</td>
<td>Public funding</td>
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<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
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Each of the topics illustrated has at least one major trend associated with it. Many of the tendencies have lengthy histories. The institutions have grown steadily larger and adopted more varied purposes and specialties. The trend for higher education’s enrollments has been in the direction of greater access for the American population; ever-increasing numbers of eighteen-year-olds and older adults have matriculated. In general, the faculty moved steadily toward professionalization, although this trend slowed and began showing distinct signs of reversal in the early twenty-first century. Curriculum has become more directly related to workforce entry as one occupational group after another has begun demanding additional years of schooling for its initiates. Throughout the first 350 years of American higher education, governance tended toward broader systems and a diminution of church-related control, but in the past two decades it has become increasingly decentralized and bureaucratized. Similarly, institutions became ever more dependent on public funds until the late twentieth century, when the forces of privatization took hold and colleges and universities were forced to broaden their search for support. Higher education’s outcomes have been directed increasingly toward producing trained manpower, enabling people to move out of the social class into which they were born, and conducting scientific research that yields useful products and processes.

Not all topics show such distinct trends. The context varies as public perceptions reflect contemporary societal concerns. In general, the expectation that higher education will contribute to economic growth has found its way into the mainstream of public thought. But the belief that it can or should ameliorate social problems or that access for everyone should be pursued at any cost is affected by the short-term mood of the nation, its media, and its national administration.

The six eras reflect the evolution of the trends. In the Colonial Era, 1636–1789, the college form was established on Old World models. The Emergent Nation Era, 1790–1869, saw hundreds
of small colleges established and the beginnings of access for different types of students. In the University Transformation Era, 1870–1944, the research university made its appearance, faculty professionalization took a leap forward, and the role of the state expanded. The Mass Higher Education Era, 1945–1975, was marked by greater size and number of institutions, augmented student access, and an increased reliance on federal funding. The Consolidation Era, 1976–1993, saw a flattening of growth in faculty professionalization, fewer institutional openings, and lower public per capita funding, matched by a greater reliance on state-level governance and increases in tuition and fees. The era since 1994 is especially significant from an historical perspective, as it can be characterized by course changes in several of the trends evident throughout the first five eras. Namely, institutions became increasingly entrepreneurial in their search for funds as the historical reliance on public coffers shifted to corporations, individual donors, and students themselves; faculty professionalization essentially came to a halt as colleges and universities employed ever greater numbers of part-time and non-tenure-track instructors; large, centralized public systems gave way to autonomous institutions, some granted charter or enterprise status, which provided greater freedom from governmental restrictions in exchange for increased accountability; and the for-profit sector grew larger.

For several of the topics, major events cluster around the cleavage lines separating the eras. The year 1790 marked the beginning of a rapid expansion in number and type of institutions. The first state colleges and the first technical institutes were formed shortly thereafter, and the curriculum was opened well beyond the liberal arts to include a broader array of emphases. Within a few years on either side of 1869, the Morrill Land Grant Act was passed, graduate study was introduced along with colleges for African Americans, and the first sizable philanthropic donations were given to establish universities. The year 1945 marked the opening of the Mass Higher Education Era because the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act,
the President’s Commission on Higher Education report, and the formation of the National Science Foundation all occurred around then. In the years surrounding 1976, America finally disentangled itself from the conflict in Vietnam, the gap between rich and poor began widening for the first time since the 1950s, and the rate of college-going turned up once more. However, the Consolidation Era was notable less for major events than for planting the seeds of change that would alter or even reverse historical trends in the years that followed. The beginning of the Contemporary Era in 1994 coincided with intensified public preferences—both at home and abroad—for smaller government and greater reliance on individual responsibility and free markets. Even though these preferences have weakened recently as people sought government aid in stimulating the economy, together with increased access, escalating costs, and greater emphasis on efficiency, they have led to adjustments in several of the trends that had undergirded the previous 350 years of higher education in America.

This book accords approximately equal emphasis to each of the eight topics. But the eras are treated differentially. Because other works have covered the years prior to World War II rather completely, this book devotes only 30 percent of its total to those eras: 15 percent to the Colonial and Emergent Nation Eras and 15 percent to the University Transformation Era. More than two-thirds of the work discusses trends and events of the past sixty-five years, from the beginning of the Mass Higher Education Era to 2009.

The book is less a history than a synthesis. Several general history books from McMaster (1909) to Jordan and Litwack (1994) were consulted relative to the societal context for the period prior to 1945, but no attempt was made to uncover new information regarding debatable issues. A rich literature traces social reform, the background and effect of immigration policies, sources of the expansionist mentality in the nineteenth century, the oppression of Native Americans, economic, social, and political issues related to slavery, and so on. As Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn (1997) have
Introduction
documented, all have been reinterpreted repeatedly, with no lasting consensus reached or expected. Controversies also persist over most major events within higher education: whether the Dartmouth College case of 1819 truly altered relations between states and private institutions; who was most influential in Congress’s passing the Morrill Act of 1862; the extent to which the Civil War retarded the expansion of higher education in the South; the importance of various collegiate forms that were tried early in the twentieth century; which institutions deserve the lion’s share of credit for preserving general education—to name only a few. Thorough treatments of each of these issues are available elsewhere.

This work traces higher education’s first three centuries by synthesizing prevailing views without iterating the debates over motives, causes, or prime movers. It recounts the story of the early eras only to establish a background to the past sixty-five years for readers unfamiliar with the ways higher education developed. It centers on what was and what is, with a minimum of what ought to be. However, biases do appear throughout; absolute objectivity is an impossible conceit.

Not all of postsecondary education is treated here. People always have learned outside the formal system; apprenticeships, ateliers, and academies have been prevalent throughout history. Today corporate classrooms, distance learning, and virtual universities surround the core enterprise and involve millions of learners. But this work considers primarily the sector that the National Center for Education Statistics calls higher education and that most people mean when they say they went to college.

This book is useful as an overview for practitioners in all areas of higher education who can benefit from knowledge of the broad currents affecting their work. It can also be used as a text in a one-term or two-term course presented to students in any social science department at any level from freshman to graduate. A complete course could be based on this book, or it could be coupled with one emphasizing the earlier eras and supplemented with additional readings on special topics and documentary sources. All six
chapters conclude with several questions embedded in the text; these questions may serve as discussion topics in class, or as starting points for student essays or debates.

A few books are indispensable for a rounded view of the history of higher education. Rudolph (1962) reviewed numerous single-college histories, anecdotal accounts of college life, and reviews of collegiate functioning to produce *The American College and University*—a detailed account of colleges in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The transformation of the university has been documented in several basic texts. Bledstein's *The Culture of Professionalism* (1976) traces one of the pillars on which the university system was built. Veysey's *Emergence of the American University* (1965) carries through the conversion of colleges and the development of new universities. Geiger's two-volume account of the research function, *To Advance Knowledge* (1986) and *Research and Relevant Knowledge* (1993), analyzes how the growth of research stimulated and was itself furthered by universities from the nineteenth century through the Contemporary Era.


Since the 1960s the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has conducted numerous surveys of higher education students, faculty, curriculum, and finance, primarily through the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) and
its successor, the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS). Many of the NCES compendia appear annually: *Digest of Education Statistics*, *Condition of Education*, and *Projections of Education Statistics* are essential for contemporary reviews. The center's occasional reports on faculty, distance education, international comparisons, and subtopics detailing special curricula and student types are also useful. All its databases are searchable online at http://nces.ed.gov.

The complexities of higher education early in the twenty-first century defy depth of understanding in every area. However, the era-topic-trend organization of this book affords a useful mnemonic. It also enables the reader to learn about each topic throughout history by scanning the corresponding section in each era. In other words, the trends in student access can be followed by reading the third section in each of the six chapters, trends in faculty professionalization by reading the fourth, and so on. This cross-sectional approach can be especially useful for people who want to follow a preferred topic. Those who learn better by comprehending the system in its entirety for each chronological era can follow the sequence chapter by chapter in the context of its time. Either way, the importance and beauty of a system that every young adult must either take advantage of or consciously reject should be apparent.
The Shaping of American Higher Education