

Understanding differences in the choice of college attended: The role of state public policies.

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Laura W. Perna, Marvin A. Titus

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Abstract

This study uses multilevel modeling to examine, after taking student-level predictors of enrollment into account, the effects of state public policies on the type of institution high school graduates attend. Four types of state policies (direct appropriations, tuition, financial aid, and K-12 academic preparation) influence the type of college high school graduates select. Observed socioeconomic status differences in college enrollment patterns are not explained by the student- and state-level variables in the model.

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SPECIAL FOCUS ON STUDENTS: RACE, CLASS, AND CHOICE

Understanding Differences in the Choice of College Attended: The Role of State Public Policies

Laura W. Perna and Marvin A. Titus

Two recent reports by the Institute for Higher Education Policy describe the increasing “economic stratification” of the nation’s higher education system. In *The Tuition Puzzle: Putting the Pieces Together*, the Institute (1999) concluded, based on its review of prior research, that decreasing shares of students from middle- and upper-income families are enrolling in public two-year institutions, while increasing shares of students from upper-in-

LAURA W. PERNA is an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research explores the individual and structural factors that limit the ability of women, racial/ethnic minorities, and individuals of lower socioeconomic status to realize the economic, political, and social opportunities that are associated with two aspects of higher education: access as a student and employment as a faculty member. MARVIN A. TITUS is an assistant professor of higher education at North Carolina State University, Raleigh. His research interests include college student access, persistence, labor market outcomes, and higher education finance. They presented an earlier version of this paper at the Public Policy Forum at the ASHE conference in November 2002 at Sacramento, California. This research was supported by a grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education. The opinions are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the granting agency. The authors thank Scott Thomas and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript. Address queries to Laura Perna, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, University of Maryland, 2200 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742; telephone: (301) 405-2220; fax: (301) 854-1632; e-mail: lperna@wam.umd.edu.



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