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The economics and politics of cost sharing in higher education: comparative perspectives

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Abstract

Cost-sharing, or the shift in at least part of the higher educational cost burden from governments (or taxpayers) to parents and students, is a worldwide trend manifested in the introduction of (or in sharp increases in) tuition fees, user charges for lodging and food, and in the diminution of student grants. The phenomenon is seen even in Europe, which still remains the last bastion of generally "free" higher education, as well as in countries that were once Marxist and that are finding loopholes to retain the legal semblance of free higher education while becoming increasingly dependent on tuition revenue for the financial survival of their institutions. This paper examines the rationales for cost-sharing as well as the continuing ideological, political, and technical opposition to it, even in the face of extreme austerity and the virtual inevitability of higher educational revenue diversification, including some forms of cost-sharing, in most countries.



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Keywords

Costs; Educational economics; Educational finance; Grants; Student financial aid

JEL classification

I. Health; Education; Welfare

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† An earlier version of this paper was presented to the International Conference on the Economics of Education held at Peking University, Beijing China in May 2001. Additional papers on cost-sharing may be found [2003–2004] on the project website at <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance/>.

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