



# Optimizing Talent - Closing Education and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide: Higher Education and Lifelong Learning



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Panelists Horeau, Carnevale and Salmi share their views on equity

## Equity in Education: Treating all differences equally Being different isn't wrong - different treatment is

By: Gerben van Lent

**The basic idea underpinning the concept of triangulation (in social studies) is that the phenomena under study can be understood best when approached with a variety or a combination of research methods.**

So in alignment with this principle the second day kicked off with three presentations intended to better understand the phenomena of equity and higher education.

The situation that underprivileged in a wide sense are faced with was characterized as "It is not wrong to be different. It is wrong to be treated differently if you are."

From a moral perspective it is relatively easy to support statements related to promoting social mobility and decreasing achievement gaps, but the environment in which this has to take effect is at best indifferent but more often not interested or even hostile.

Some macro societal aspects were presented that looked at the key issues from an external perspective. In this view education in general is seen as caught between capitalism and democracy. Whereas these huge concepts contradict one another in the sense that the first drives inequality

whereas the second fosters equality they had a common cause against the (past) powers of the Church and nobility. Education in this view is one tool with which governments can address inequalities by redistribution of funds i.e. capitalism is the banker for democracy. The pressure on post-secondary education starts when education becomes human capital because of the connection to higher income potential.

One of many observations to this analysis was that governments could choose to address inequalities through taxes and providing services like low tuition fees

Whether you subscribe to this analysis or not, it underlines the necessity that the real advocacy for optimizing talent is not only within the educational community but towards the external decision makers. Last year already the statement was made "If you believe education is too expensive, try ignorance," which was sharpened this year by highlighting an Occupy Movement slogan: "One day the poor will have nothing left than to eat the rich". An alternative to this horror 'scenario' came from research done by the Empower European University projects that demonstrated the link between Equity in higher education and economic growth. Some ideas were shared about funding and cost sharing

against the background that "each EU government could fully fund each student with less than 0.1% of the European budget used to rescue banks!"

The concept of triangulation is also used as survey technique for accurate large-scale land surveying. Working groups kicked off their activities 'to survey' the immense 'landscape' related to optimizing talent in a Global perspective. Returning elements in the debrief were the need for data, are we too different to identify commonalities, can we learn and or transfer solutions from one situation to another, what is the role of technology, we might need a 'marketing plan' for equity, can private education be a great solution for non-traditional learners or is asking money for tuition by default promoting inequality?

It is easy to say that solutions cannot work because we are different from one another or that situations are so different that you cannot treat them in the same way. However understanding one another's solutions first can already make a big difference and in the end the key question is who and how do we need to convince that we have to Close Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide.

*Gerben's full post can be seen on [www.salzburgglobal.org](http://www.salzburgglobal.org)*



## A FELLOW'S OPINION

# Who will educate low-income students?

By: Marybeth Gasman

**Those who work in higher education or study higher education know that President Obama, as well as several national foundations, have rigorous goals for our nation in terms of increasing degree attainment. The question is: where will these new students be educated?**

According to Anthony Carnevale, faculty member for Salzburg Global Seminar's "Optimizing Talent - Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide" Session and professor at Georgetown University, these students will not be educated at the majority of four-year, predominantly white institutions. In his words, most of these institutions are striving to be more elite and are chasing money and test scores. Carnevale thinks that most of the movement and contributions in terms of degree attainment will take place at community colleges and for-profit institutions. I would argue that Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are aiding,

and have significant potential to aid, more low-income students and to contribute greatly to degree attainment in the US. There are over 560 MSIs today, including Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges, Black Colleges, and Asian Pacific Islander Serving Institutions. I would also argue that many of these institutions educate with an ethic of care that is vital in the lives of the students they serve. I'm not sure if or how for profit institutions, as Carnevale suggested, can educate with an ethic of care as mixing profit and education just does not work in my mind.

All too often Minority Serving Institutions are criticized for having lower graduation rates. However, these lower rates are indicative of the role that MSIs play in American society. Unlike many colleges and universities that ignore low-income and underprepared students (as well as students of color), MSIs consider these students part of their historic and current mission.

According to Carnevale, "efficiency crowds out equity" in American higher

education. Many PWIs appear intensely efficient -- with well-prepared students and high graduation rates -- yet in order to maintain this efficiency they cannot truly meet the needs of low-income, underprepared students. In order to educate these students, an institution often has to be comfortable with inefficiency and a bit of messiness; they have to be open to criticism. I am not making excuses for low graduation rates, but one cannot expect institutions that take risks in terms of the education of students to have the same graduation rates as institutions that take no risks.

If our goal is to increase the number of students earning college degrees, we should be applauding MSIs for their willingness to do the heavy lifting. Moreover, the public and private sectors ought to be investing in these institutions at a higher level. We need to stop, as higher education scholar Gary Rhoades, spending the least amount of money on the students that need it the most. Much of the gains in terms of higher education and equity in American society are to be made in MSIs.

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