

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

IN THE 1996 commencement address he delivered at Princeton University, President Bill Clinton declared, “It is clear that America has the best higher education system in the world and that it is the key to a successful future in the twenty-first century. It is also clear that because of costs and other factors not all Americans have access to higher education. I want to say today that I believe the clear facts of this time make it imperative that our goal must be nothing less than to make the thirteenth and fourteenth years of education as universal to all of Americans as the first twelve are today.”¹ He then proceeded to describe his “college opportunity strategy,” which included the biggest expansion of college aid since the GI Bill, which funded college attendance for thousands of veterans after World War II.

Later that same year, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (otherwise known as welfare reform), which was designed to “end welfare as we know it.” He declared, “This bill will help people to go to work so they can stop drawing a welfare check and start drawing a paycheck.” There was no mention of college, nor even education, in his speech. That is because, as he put it, “We are saying with this bill that we expect work.”²

The difference in President Clinton’s rhetoric in those two speeches demonstrates a new attitude toward poor Americans that became a widely accepted tenet of popular discourse by the mid-1990s: an idea that is often referred to as the “work-first” approach to social welfare policy. The title of his campaign book labeled Clinton the *Putting People First* president. But work-first does not put people first, and it differs significantly from the “college for all” ethic Clinton talked about at Princeton; in fact, it stands in stark contrast to it. According to the work-first perspective, college is for some, not for all. For those

at the bottom of the income distribution who have turned to the government for support, work—and work only—is deemed most appropriate.

“Work-first” is a simple idea. In fact, its strength lies in its simplicity: poverty can be alleviated by moving the poor off welfare and into work as quickly as possible. This notion powerfully capitalizes on the American ideals of individualism and hard work, focusing squarely and exclusively on employment as the route out of dependency. This shifting emphasis decouples education and work, despite increasing evidence that they must be linked. In so doing, it effectively ignores the critical role that high-quality education and training play in achieving self-sufficiency, especially for the most vulnerable populations. Consequently, work-first policies and practices have further weakened this country’s already-fraying social safety net, effectively ensuring that the poor will remain in poverty or be sorted into low-paying jobs with little chance for advancement.

This book examines the ascendance of the work-first idea—its emergence at the federal level, its dominance in policy and practice at the state level, its impact on access to education and training generally and, more specifically, on the institutions that serve as the entryway to postsecondary education for the disadvantaged—community colleges. We focus on exploring work-first as it is embodied in two policies: welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). By tracing the emergence and the implementation of work-first from the broadest federal level to the most localized communities and educational institutions, we demonstrate how it has usurped human-capital ideals, which link the economic well-being of the poor with education and training. We also show the very real impact this shift has had on the institutions and individuals most directly affected by it.

Our argument about the far-reaching effects of the work-first idea is three-pronged, and is based on an extensive array of both quantitative and qualitative data collected over the course of four years (2001 to 2005) and across six states (Illinois, Massachusetts, Florida, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island). First, we argue that the ascendance of the work-first ideology challenges a human-capital approach that links economic self-sufficiency with access to high-quality postsecondary education. Contemporary policy harbors a contradictory set of notions that discredit education as a viable route out of poverty for the poor, even as it promotes education for the non-poor. Second, as embodied in welfare reform and WIA, work-first reduced both the quantity and the quality of education and training available to low-income adults. It did so via a set of policy signals, incentives, and laws that result in policies that are squarely work-first in their implementation, despite variations in formal, official policies at the state level. And third, welfare reform and WIA discouraged community colleges from serving low-income populations, thereby contributing to their more general movement away from serving these populations. In short, our evidence clearly indicates that welfare reform and WIA cemented a

“sea change” in national thinking about the role of education in the lives of poor people. Whereas education is commonly acknowledged to be a sure and consistent route to self-sufficiency, recent federal policy has effectively removed this pathway for our poorest citizens.

It is hard to exaggerate how successfully the work-first approach acted as an organizing principle for the reform of these policies. The emphasis on putting poor people to work as quickly as possible leveled everything in its path. It overcame a generation of social-science research on poverty which produced clear evidence that such an approach provides no long-term benefits to the poor. It succeeded in states regardless of whether the governor was a Democrat or a Republican, whether there was an effective advocacy community or not, and whether there was support for this approach from state officials. Whereas most implementation studies seek to understand how and why policies have failed to reach their intended goals, in the case of this new generation of welfare-reform and job-training programs, the work-first philosophy was implemented more fully than anyone could have realistically expected. Thus, our challenge in this book is to understand how this idea came to dominate the policies and practices of poverty programs, despite the fact that the work-first approach contradicts a widely held acceptance of the importance of education and training for success in the contemporary labor market.

In the remainder of this chapter, we provide the scaffolding for examining the ways in which the work-first idea became embodied in welfare reform and WIA, and how it took tenacious hold of the implementation of these policies, despite significant variation across states in their formal policies. We begin by situating this idea within the broader context of American beliefs about the value of postsecondary education, followed by a discussion of the distinction between education and training, which points out how they differ in terms of content, delivery, and outcomes. Next we provide a brief overview of how work-first operates in each of the two policies, providing a foundation for our more in-depth examination of this topic later in the book. We then introduce our analytical framework, which utilizes recent social science theory regarding the power of ideas and their role in the formation and implementation of policy. Our particular focus on community colleges in our study of these policies is also discussed. Finally, we provide an overview of our research methodology.

THE PARADOX OF “WORK-FIRST”

A clear and consistent narrative permeates American discourse regarding education. A college education is increasingly viewed as the gateway to the American Dream—a necessary prerequisite of social mobility. Indeed, recent polls indicate that fully 98 percent of American citizens believe that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, social class, or gender, should have equal op-

portunity to attend college (National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good 2003). Most acknowledge that postsecondary education yields both private and public benefits, providing an opportunity to overcome poverty and increase one's social standing, greater access to well-paying jobs, a steady stream of well-trained workers, reductions in crime and incarceration, and increasing civic engagement in activities such as voting.

Thus, in the public imagination college attendance increases human capital—neutralizing all manner of initial social disadvantage and positioning its recipients as viable members of the economy and of society more generally. These beliefs are sensible ones, as confirmed by numerous recent studies on the economic benefit of higher education, which report a 5 to 12 percent annual increase in income for every full-time year of postsecondary education completed, and even more if a credential is earned (Grubb 2002b). They also provide the intellectual and moral underpinnings of numerous public-policy efforts toward improving the stock of human capital among all Americans, including an array of sources of assistance for those who wish to attend college, such as federal and state financial aid, state subsidies to public higher education, and state savings plans to assist parents in saving for their children's education.

Yet for the most disadvantaged the policy picture is quite different. The work-first ideology now driving federal and state policy directed at the poor ignores, and effectively contradicts, the human-capital approach characterizing most postsecondary educational policy. The two major pieces of federal legislation that have emerged in the past decade—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), known to all as welfare reform, and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—embody a work-first approach to the needs of low-income populations. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, at the “heart of the [welfare reform] statute is the expectation that, in exchange for flexibility in designing appropriate programs and services, each State be held accountable for moving families from welfare to self-sufficiency through work” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Likewise, WIA is a mechanism that, paradoxically, encourages an “employment-first approach to job training,” in the words of one U.S. Representative (U.S. House of Representatives 1998).

By de-emphasizing postsecondary education in favor of rapid labor-force attachment, these two policies establish a double standard for our poorest and our better-off adults. A variety of policies and practices encourage and even assist in providing access to postsecondary education for Americans generally; but at the same time, federal welfare and workforce policies erect barriers to access for the mostly low-income individuals who are the targets of the policies. Explaining this paradox and its effects on low-income adults and the community colleges that serve them is the central task of this book.

WHY ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING MATTERS

At the heart of the work-first idea is a debate over who deserves access to education and training. But the terms denote quite different things in the context of welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act. What, exactly, is characterized as “training,” and how does it differ from more traditional notions of “education”? What are the relative benefits of education versus training?

Generally speaking, “getting an education” means going to college and pursuing either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. In contrast, the term “training” is often used to characterize short-term occupational learning that typically does not lead to a certificate, degree, or credit toward a degree. Training is usually vocationally oriented, and can occur in a classroom or on the job; but even activities that do not include training, such as job-search assistance and resume writing workshops, are often identified as “job training.” W. Norton Grubb (1996) has argued that job-training programs are commonly “one-shot efforts to get individuals into employment rather than the beginning of a long period of education and job training” (73). As such, these programs often ignore the need for long-term resources that would increase cognitive and vocational competencies. In and of itself, training is not always a dead end; training can, and sometimes does, provide an entry to credit-bearing college-level course work, especially when it occurs at community colleges (Jenkins 2002). Yet the vast majority of training remains disconnected from a career or educational pathway.

Given these shortcomings, it is not surprising that evaluations of the job-training programs that preceded welfare reform and WIA—the Job Training Partnership Act and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program—revealed that their benefits were modest at best. In the only JTPA evaluation based on a randomized controlled experiment (now considered by the U.S. Department of Education to be the “gold standard” for evaluations of educational programs), researchers found relatively small gains for job-training participants when compared to a control group that qualified to receive these services but did not enroll (Orr et al. 1996). Earnings gains for all job-training participants were about \$2,000 or less annually, and the biggest earnings gains for both men and women were derived from on-the-job training and job-search assistance rather than classroom training (Orr 2004).

Other nonexperimental studies of job training (for example, Raphael, Stoll, and Melendez 2003; Hamilton 2002) suggest that integrated job-training strategies, those comprising a combination of job search, job training, and basic education and training, result in the highest employment and earnings gains. Yet the provision of integrated job training is an exception rather than the rule. For example, in one study, fewer than 20 percent of in-

dividuals participating in a job-training program in Massachusetts received integrated services (Raphael, Stoll, and Melendez 2003). As we later illustrate in our analysis of the implementation of educational and job training under welfare reform and WIA, this pattern has been reinforced and even exacerbated in recent years. As a result, the vast majority of job-training programs do not address the long-term educational or occupational needs of their participants, although they could serve as an important first step in achieving this goal. Indeed, recent evaluations of high quality training programs in Missouri and North Carolina suggest that although earnings losses may result immediately after completion of training, over the long run most welfare recipients experience significant earnings gains from such programs (Dyke et al. 2005).³

In contrast to training, the term “education” most often refers to programs based at postsecondary institutions that are delivered in traditional classrooms. While education at the postsecondary level may or may not lead to a certificate or a degree, it is generally distinguished from training by the fact that it carries college-level credit, and it can at least potentially be credited toward a recognizable certificate or degree. Compared to the negligible impact of training, the economic returns to postsecondary education are substantial. Returns to the equivalent of even one year of full-time enrollment at a community college (approximately thirty credits) increases earnings 5 to 11.3 percent for men and 11.8 percent for women (Grubb 2002a, 2002b). In fact, as former President Clinton himself noted, the thirteenth and fourteenth years of education are especially important. Individuals with an associate’s degree earn approximately \$7,000 more annually than do high school graduates, and those with bachelor’s degrees earn close to \$12,000 more annually (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2003). Credentials are particularly valuable for women. In a study of displaced workers attending community college in Washington State, Louis Jacobson, Robert J. LaLonde, and Daniel G. Sullivan (2001, 2005) found that women who completed an associate’s degree experienced a significant increase in earnings, which they did not experience if they took only a few courses. This finding echoed results of previous research (Kane and Rouse 1995, 1999). In short, a substantial body of empirical evidence indicates there is a clear, positive relationship between years of education (and credentials in particular) and annual earnings. Moreover, in real terms, the earnings for educated skilled workers have risen while those of less-educated workers have declined. In the last thirty years, workers without a high school degree experienced an 18.5 percent decline in real wages, while those with a college degree experienced an increase of 15.9 percent (Károly and Panis 2004). The implications are clear: those who do not acquire a degree or some postsecondary credential will remain at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Indeed, recent results from studies of those who have left the welfare rolls bear this out. Although many welfare recipients who left the rolls early dur-

ing implementation did find jobs, this is less common among more recent leavers. The number of families leaving welfare without a steady income and support system is rising, and their unemployment rate has increased. Moreover, most studies of leavers find that they enjoy little to no income growth in the years following departure from the rolls. In other words, welfare recipients pushed off the rolls and into work stay poor (Fremstad 2004).

ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING UNDER WELFARE REFORM AND WIA

As our subsequent analyses demonstrate, the ascendance of work-first resulted in a decrease in access to both the quantity and the quality of education for low-income adults. Not only are fewer individuals accessing postsecondary education or training via these policies, but when they do, they are increasingly directed toward the most ineffective forms of training rather than toward higher-quality college-level education.

Part of this story is about the importance of numbers. The overall number of welfare recipients receiving education or training declined dramatically following welfare reform in large part because far fewer people were on the rolls. Since 1996, caseloads have dropped by over 64 percent, and with them the absolute number of individuals for whom welfare has provided access to education and training. There were over 12.6 million people on welfare in 1996; as of 2005, that number was just over 4.5 million (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005). Caseload reduction is thus a significant aspect of how work-first manifests itself in welfare reform. The sooner individuals obtain jobs the more rapidly they can be removed from the welfare rolls. Poor women with young children make up the vast majority of welfare recipients, and the health-care and child-care benefits that can be accessed via welfare are critically important factors that can determine whether this population has in place the supports needed to pursue postsecondary education. Thus, the massive drop in caseload must be seen as an important mechanism in eliminating welfare as a pathway to postsecondary education.⁴ As Jason DeParle has written with regard to welfare reform, “Putting people to work [is] a discretionary activity. The core curriculum [is] getting them off the rolls” (2004, 129).

Yet federal welfare programs were never a significant route to postsecondary education for a large proportion of the poor. Prior to welfare reform, it was rare for more than 10 percent of recipients to enroll in college; following reform that proportion became even smaller, as we detail in later chapters. Clearly, the rate of participation in education and training in this population has never been high, and welfare reform has resulted in still lower rates of participation. But belief in the power of education remains alive and well in the minds of many poor women, who do, despite popular belief, often desire to

attend college (Sosulski 2004). In a recent study, a group of California welfare recipients reported, “Nothing can replace an education. . . . It’s the best thing anyone can do. . . . Education provides the greatest access to the pathway out of poverty. . . . I [don’t] just want a job, I want a future, a career, a life for my daughter—attending college will give me that” (Jones-DeWeever 2005, 26–27).

Work-first in welfare reform not only reduced access to postsecondary education but also diminished access to the most important type of postsecondary education—specifically, the credit-bearing higher-education courses that lead to long-term economic benefits. Under welfare reform, a significantly higher percentage of recipients participating in any type of education or training pursue only short-term, noncredit training. Thus, when we disaggregate the types of education that are available, we see that the quality of the education that is available to welfare recipients has been significantly reduced. More detailed analyses of federal and state level welfare data are provided in chapters 3 and 4.

Access to all forms of education and job training dropped even more precipitously in the wake of WIA. Federal workforce-development policies that antedated WIA, such as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), provided ample entrée to job training—over 90 percent of clients received some kind of training or education, albeit usually the kind of short-term, noncredit training activities that lead only to modest income or employment gains (Grubb and Lazerson 2004). WIA clients, however, are much less likely to obtain access to either job training or postsecondary education than those served by previous federal programs. Under WIA, both the quantity and the quality of education available were significantly reduced. Moreover, because this policy contains a multitude of onerous reporting requirements, it also effectively reduces the participation of the institutions that have consistently delivered the highest-quality training to the poor—community colleges.

THE POWER OF IDEAS: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF WORK-FIRST

Welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act do not reduce access to postsecondary education simply by forbidding it through federal law. Rather, this effect is achieved via a complex set of formal and informal rules, incentives, and signals that work to restrict the range of responses of state and local implementers to the needs of clients by making education and training a less attractive and feasible option. In short, the work-first idea is expressed most powerfully and visibly via the policy-implementation process.

In recent years, a diverse and rich body of literature has emerged across the social sciences on the role of ideas in public policymaking (Campbell 2002; Goldstein 1993; Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Hall 1993, 1997; Kingdon

1984; Somers and Block 2005; Weir 1992, 1993). Research on ideas provides an alternative to interest-based explanations of political and social phenomena that is more nuanced than the latter. Yet heretofore, researchers in this area have been primarily interested in the causal impact of ideas on policy adoption—that is, the process by which ideas become embodied in law and formal policy—while relatively little work has explored the ways ideas can subsequently influence policy implementation processes. Yet, as recent scholarship has shown (see Goldstein 1993; Hasenfeld 2002; Lin 2000; Maynard-Moody 2003; Roe 1994; Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer 2002; Stein 2001, 2004; Weir 1992), policy ideas, once institutionalized, can strongly influence “implementing agents to think differently about their behavior . . . and encourag(e) them to construct alternative ways of doing business” (Spillane 2004, 12).

Ideas assert their power over policy implementation via two major institutionalization mechanisms. The first mechanism is through law and incentives (Goldstein 1993; Pierson 1993; Weir 1992; Weir and Skocpol 1985; Weiss 1990). Policy ideas are generally enacted through legislative processes and formalized through statute and legal interpretation. Statutory law creates rights and obligations and builds in a set of formal rules that govern the behavior of state and local implementing agencies. Implementers will not always comply with rules, of course, but laws create powerful incentives to do so, even for those who do not believe in the ideas (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). In short, when policy ideas become laws they change the interest calculations of those who must implement them. In the case of welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act, work-requirement thresholds for states, along with new and complicated sets of accountability measures and outcomes tracking, were developed to keep caseworkers clearly and consistently focused on concrete measures of success that operationalize the work-first idea.

Policy ideas can also become institutionalized through their role as focal points or signals (Garrett and Weingast 1993; Mazzeo, Rab, and Eachus 2003; Moore 1988). Ideas are powerful political forces because they can cause people to think and act differently (Roe 1994; Spillane 2004; Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer 2002). Political actors and policy entrepreneurs are aware of this and seek to frame policy ideas in ways that are marketable and resonant with other politicians and the general public. Policy ideas that are adopted widely are thus likely to be those that are easily understandable, simple to describe, and commanding of broad support. As John L. Campbell (2002) put it, “The most successful [policy ideas] are those that provide the clearest road maps out of troublesome or uncertain policy situations” (29).

Policy models built around a central slogan or animating principle, such as “work-first,” are particularly powerful. The work-first slogan provides a simple, straightforward precept that is appealing to politicians and the public. Work is a central value in American political culture, and appeals to that value

have historically influenced social policy in this country (Skocpol 1992). Furthermore, once an idea such as work-first becomes law it is also deceptively easy to implement—work before welfare, work instead of education. As embodied in federal statute, it sends a simple but potent signal to states and implementing agencies about the preferred approach to welfare and workforce policy. An alternative slogan (such as self-sufficiency or poverty reduction) is both harder to sell and harder to implement.⁵ Putting people to work is seen as a mere problem of will; pulling people out of poverty requires resources and training and implementers with strong skills and a high level of professional authority.

In sum, recent scholarship in the public-policy literature provides a framework for understanding how federal welfare and workforce policy might powerfully influence the multiple and disparate actions of thousands of state and local political officials and implementing agencies. Through the mechanisms of law and incentives, and via its power as a focal point for policy implementation, the work-first idea provides a powerful cognitive template for state and local policymaking. Put differently, the state welfare and workforce-policy processes we describe in this book involve the “making, interpreting and enforcing of meaning” (Maynard-Moody 2003, 9). While, as argued above, we can predict with some confidence the outcomes of these processes, we can also surely expect the surprises and variability characteristic of federal policy implementation in the United States.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: WHERE WORK-FIRST IDEAS BECOME PRACTICE

Policy implementation is a lengthy and complex process that can result in impacts—even unintended consequences—on seemingly uninvolved parties. In the case of welfare reform and WIA, community colleges, while not directly involved in the formation of these policies, have nevertheless been sharply affected by the work-first agenda. Indeed, we argue that the signals sent by the work-first message have reduced incentives for community colleges to provide education to the poor, and have raised barriers to their efforts to do so.

The community college sector is unique in American higher education because it holds at its core an equity agenda focused on providing access to postsecondary education for those who have traditionally been denied entry. As growing numbers of Americans seek a postsecondary education and college tuition simultaneously skyrockets, the community college remains the single most affordable and accessible option for disadvantaged individuals. Today there are 1,085 community colleges in the United States serving 5.7 million students, including 45 percent of all first-time freshmen. The community college population is disproportionately female (58 percent), and serves more

minority students than any other postsecondary institution, including 46 percent of black undergraduates and 55 percent of Hispanic undergraduates (Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach 2005a, 2005b).

For the poor and working class, the community college is the most accessible point of entry to the postsecondary system. Sixty percent of low-income first-year students begin their undergraduate careers at community colleges (G. Winter, "Junior Colleges Try Niche as Cheap Path to Top Universities, *New York Times*, December 15, 2002, p. 1); see also David T. Ellwood and Thomas J. Kane 2000). Over one-third (37.8 percent) of community college students qualify for and receive some form of financial aid, even though the average annual tuition is a low \$2,076—because for the lowest-income families that tuition represents approximately 12 percent of their annual income (American Association of Community Colleges 2005; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2002). Yet community college tuition remains the least expensive postsecondary option. On average, it is less than half the tuition at public four-year colleges and one-tenth that at independent four-year institutions (Philippe 2000).

Community colleges, acting as comprehensive "second chance institutions" (Grubb 2001, 284), provide much of the education and skills training taking place in the United States today. Each year they award more than 579,000 associate's degrees and nearly 200,000 two-year certificates (National Center for Education Statistics 2003; Philippe 2000). In one industry, health care, 65 percent of new workers get their training at community colleges (Philippe 2000). Because community colleges offer a wide variety of courses and programs, ranging from remedial to academic, flexibility in response to employer needs; and credentials with economic values, they are particularly well positioned to serve the low-income population, which possesses less information about college programs and fewer financial resources and thus faces much more uncertainty than middle-class students. But perhaps even more important, because they have traditionally functioned as educational rather than training institutions—connected to learning and concerned with quality instruction—community colleges serve the poor not only educationally but also by offering a real route to social mobility (Grubb 2001). Therefore, if access to education via the community college is reduced, the most feasible route to higher education for the vast majority of low-income adults is obstructed.

The work-first ideology emerged at a time of rapid change for community colleges, and as a result its effects are particularly potent. In recent years, the mission of the community college has grown increasingly complex. As Kevin Dougherty notes, "The community college is a hybrid institution, combining many different and often contradictory purposes" (1994, 8). Historically community colleges held their academic mission as primary, but now there is mounting pressure on them to adopt a workforce-preparation mission, which

includes varied curriculums blending vocational and academic programs, short-term, certificate-oriented training programs, and an increasingly entrepreneurial approach toward education and training (Bailey and Averianova 1999; Dougherty 2003; Dougherty and Bakia 2000a, 2000b; Grubb, Badway, and Bell 2003; Grubb et al. 1997; Gumpert 2003).

This trend flows from a shift in the economic, educational, and policy environment in which community colleges operate. First, competition is emerging in the form of a growing number of private, two-year or less “occupational colleges” focused on narrow training in vocational areas and offering quick, attractive training options for low-income students (Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum 2003). In addition, community colleges are increasingly dependent upon public funding (federal, state, and local) compared to other sectors of higher education, which can generate more funds from higher tuition, endowments, and alumni support. More than half of community college revenue comes from public funding (Hebel 2003). Moreover, this funding is increasingly being linked to strict performance-based outcome measures such as transfer rates, degree-completion rates, and other outcomes that are difficult to attain when serving highly disadvantaged student populations.

In the face of increased competition for low-income students and funding formulas that are a disincentive to serving this population, community colleges are having a difficult time maintaining their commitment to serving poor and disadvantaged adults. As Alicia Dowd notes, “Against the din of calls for efficiency, productivity, and accountability, concern for the vitality of the community college’s democratizing role is barely evident in the policy agenda” (2003, 93). It is therefore unsurprising that some community colleges show signs of turning their attention away from serving this community and toward more lucrative niches, such as business and community education programs and honors programs targeted to middle-class students (Bailey and Averianova 1999; Bastedo and Gumpert 2003; Shaw and Rab 2003).

This trend is exacerbated by the emergence of work-first. Through the power of law and the informal influence of ideas, community colleges face even greater pressure to shift from their historic mission of serving low-income individuals. Under the influence of work-first, community colleges are both less willing and less able to address the needs of either welfare reform or WIA clients.

FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS MULTIPLE STATES

Although welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act are federal policies, both emerged in a context of “devolution,” in which states received a relatively high degree of autonomy in responding to federal legislation in ex-

change for meeting relatively strict performance measures. As a result of this policy context, states have the potential to vary considerably in terms of their response to both policies. Because of these factors, we felt that it was important to closely compare the implementation of both welfare reform and WIA across several states.

Our goal was to investigate states whose responses to these policies varied significantly, and we collected an array of data to assist us in our selection. During the state selection process, we conducted telephone interviews with state officials, examined state Internet sites, reviewed published reports by research and policy houses, and consulted with the Washington D.C.-based Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); we were able to make critical use of CLASP's typologies of states and their responses to welfare reform in our decisionmaking process. Our assessment of welfare reform policy determined our choice of states to study for several reasons. First, this project was originally focused solely on welfare reform but expanded within the first year to include an analysis of the Workforce Investment Act. Second, high-quality work by CLASP and others had been done to typologize states in terms of their response to welfare reform at the time that we were choosing our sites. And finally, when we examined state-level WIA policies specifically in terms of formal policy regarding access to education and training, we found very little variation. Thus, although states had enacted WIA policies that were quite similar, our group of states purposefully includes variation along a number of factors related to welfare reform.

In making the final selection of our six states, we sought to assemble a sample that varied in terms of general approaches to welfare reform and of the level and quality of access to postsecondary education afforded welfare recipients. We also wanted to achieve some level of geographical diversity as well. Although each state's approach to welfare reform and WIA is quite complex, it was possible to place them initially into broad categories according to the amount of access to postsecondary education that is allowed in the states' formal welfare policies. As table 1.1 shows, two states—Massachusetts and Washington—could be categorized as low-access states when our sample was selected in 2001. At that time, Massachusetts required students to do twenty hours of work while attending college, although this requirement has subsequently been relaxed so that recipients can attend college without work for twelve months or less—a change that we examine in more detail in chapter 4. Washington did not allow recipients to attend college unless a mandated job search did not result in employment; and they were restricted to vocational education.

In contrast, both Florida and Pennsylvania were categorized as moderate-access states. Though quite different in their approach to postsecondary education, both allowed college attendance for some period of time without a work requirement, and they did not restrict the type of education available to

Table 1.1 Welfare Reform: Six States' Policies Regarding Access to Postsecondary Education and Training under TANF

State	Access to Postsecondary Education
Massachusetts	Low. College attendance without working is not allowed. Recipients must work twenty hours a week while attending college.
Washington	Low. Recipients may attend college for twelve months without working, but only vocational education is allowed. They may attend college only if mandated job search fails.
Florida	Moderate. State has forty-eight-month lifetime limit of college study. Recipients may attend college for twelve months without working, and in some instances may continue past this point.
Pennsylvania	Moderate. Recipients must conduct job search. If search unsuccessful, they may attend college for twenty-four months without working.
Rhode Island	High. State employs a human-capital approach to welfare reform. Recipients may attend college for twenty-four months without a work requirement and may continue full-time postsecondary education if necessary after this point.
Illinois	High. Recipients may attend college full-time for thirty-six months without working. To continue after that time, they must work twenty-nine hours per week. State uses Maintenance of Effort funds to “stop the clock” for recipients pursuing postsecondary education.

Source: Compiled by authors, drawing on Greenberg, Strawn and Plimpton (1999).

recipients. Rhode Island and Illinois were chosen because they allowed a relatively high level of access to postsecondary education. Welfare recipients in these states could attend postsecondary education for more than twenty-four months without a work requirement. In sum, the six states appeared to represent a broad range of responses to welfare reform—multiple contexts within which to examine WIA—and provided a rich and fertile field from which to conduct our analyses.

Within each state we collected data that allowed us to examine how each policy was implemented at various levels of analysis—at the state and local levels, and also within individual community colleges. We utilized a nested comparative case-study design, which is based on the methodological thinking of Charles Ragin, Howard Becker, and others (Ragin 1987; Ragin and Becker 1992) that explores ways in which comparative case-study methods can be used to examine complex social phenomena. We strove to develop a pool of data that would allow us to do meaningful comparisons of the effects

of these policies across different state and institutional contexts. This approach is in keeping with the recommendations of Stephen H. Bell's *New Federalism and Research: Rearranging Old Methods to Study New Social Policies in the States* (1999), which suggests that variation within and across states resulting from devolution requires intensive, detailed case-study analysis.

Data were collected at several different levels. First, we interviewed a total of one-hundred-ten state-level officials in relevant departments (for example, education, human services, employment and training), and analyzed formal policy development and implementation utilizing existing policy documents and policy analyses provided by a number of policy-research houses as well as the agencies themselves. Next, we identified one to three community colleges in each of the six states. These community colleges varied in terms of size and urbanicity, but we chose institutions that had historically served a significant number of low-income students, including welfare recipients. In this way, we hoped to be able to gauge the effects of WIA and welfare reform among community colleges that were most likely to be impacted by shifts in these policies. We interviewed a total of ninety-six faculty members and administrators at thirteen different colleges. We also conducted eleven individual interviews and interviewed four focus groups with low-income workers such as welfare recipients and WIA clients. Finally, we interviewed thirteen welfare and WIA caseworkers. Our interviews were "in-depth," meaning that we followed a topical script rather than a survey instrument, and these conversations often lasted an hour or more. We also visited each state multiple times over the course of a two-year data collection period (2001 to 2003), and conducted numerous follow-up interviews as our analysis proceeded through 2005. This extended period of time in the field allowed us to analyze the implementation of both policies over time.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. We utilized Hyperresearch, a qualitative data-analysis package, to code and analyze the interviews. As is true in most qualitative research, our analytic framework became increasingly specific as analysis unfolded, leading us to focus more carefully on how conceptions of the work-first idea influenced the implementation of welfare reform and WIA as it became clear that there was far less variation in the implementation of these policies than written, state-level policy would suggest. We were also particularly interested in discerning both the intended and the unintended effects of these policies as they were implemented at the local and institutional levels.

In addition, we collected an extensive amount of secondary data regarding the implementation and outcomes of both policies, including reports generated by states, research institutions, advocacy organizations, and community colleges. These data sources were used to verify and expand upon information culled from the interviews, and to develop interview protocols as the study unfolded.

We complemented our detailed case studies with original analyses of micro-level data on postsecondary education enrollment. Specifically, we examined the degree and type of change in postsecondary education participation that occurred in the wake of welfare reform and WIA. National analyses of welfare reform and postsecondary activities were conducted utilizing the Current Population Surveys (CPS), the National Household Education Surveys (NHES), the Surveys of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and the National Postsecondary Student Aid Surveys (NPSAS). State-level analyses of changes in education and training activity pre- and post-WIA were drawn from state reports that used standardized program data. In addition, descriptive state-level analyses of enrollment in postsecondary education pre- and post-welfare reform were conducted using data provided by state officials at the relevant departments in each state.

In all, our data allow us to paint a detailed and comprehensive picture of how the implementation of welfare reform and WIA is affecting access to postsecondary education and training for low-income populations. A framework that includes multiple levels of analysis, as well as cross-state and cross-policy comparisons, provides us with a rare opportunity to examine the implementation of two major federal policies simultaneously.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

We begin our close examination of welfare reform and WIA in chapter 2, where we lay the foundation for our argument by providing an analysis of the emergence of the work-first idea, as we trace shifts in federal social policy from a historical perspective and identify a critical set of factors that provided a fertile environment for the work-first idea to take hold. Specifically, the chapter examines the role that training and education have historically played in federal and state welfare and workforce development initiatives and describes how work-first emerged as a potent policy idea in the late 1980s.

The next four empirical chapters trace the ways in which these policies filtered down from state-level policy to practices that occurred within individual community colleges and local one-stop career centers. In chapter 3 we analyze the development of welfare reform, focusing specifically on the policy elements that restrict access to postsecondary education. We provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which work-first is embedded in the details of federal welfare reform, pointing to aspects of the policies that create barriers to postsecondary education participation. And we present statistical analyses to provide the most comprehensive assessment that exists today on the effects of welfare policy on college access.

Chapter 4 provides a more fine-grained analysis of the implementation of welfare reform by exploring the mechanisms through which the policy is enacted at the state and local level. We begin with an analysis of state data that

demonstrates the extent to which implementation of welfare reform resulted in variation in access to education, across all six states. Then, by utilizing an array of data from our case studies we examine how various actors, agencies, and institutions reacted to and shaped welfare reform in their states. Our case studies include states that have implemented a work-first policy despite variations in formal legislated policy, as well as examples of states that have not allowed work-first to completely dominate welfare reform. Our analysis looks closely at the roles of state officials, welfare advocates, and community colleges themselves in explaining how access of welfare recipients varies across these states.

In chapter 5 we turn our attention to the Workforce Investment Act. This chapter pays particular attention to devolution and its effects on local WIA policy, and examines the myriad of accountability measures that are an integral part of WIA federal policy. Quantitative data provide evidence of the overall effect of WIA on access to education and training. Utilizing data from several states, in chapter 6 we further illustrate how access to education and training was reduced by WIA, through its effects on one-stop career centers and education and training providers. Several aspects of WIA contribute to this trend: burdensome reporting requirements; a relative drop in funding for training; and a work-first orientation among one-stop career center caseworkers who failed to send their clients to college. These details about the processes of WIA implementation provide a greater understanding of the ways in which a work-first training policy actually affects access in practice.

The book concludes with a chapter that synthesizes our findings regarding the power and influence of the work-first idea, examining how welfare reform and WIA work in combination to erect sizable barriers to postsecondary access in a number of arenas. We also explore the implications of welfare reform and WIA within several broader contexts. What lessons can we learn from considering these two policies together? What is the cumulative effect of these policies on the ability and willingness of community colleges to continue to serve low-income populations? How can the grip of the work-first idea be loosened from federal policy directed at the poor?

Although the genius of work-first lies in its simplicity, this book does not tell a simple story. Welfare reform and the Workforce Investment Act are complicated pieces of federal legislation, and their emergence and implementation at the federal, state, and local levels has been a complex and sometimes maddeningly contradictory process. But whereas the details of their implementation varied in some important ways, the overarching theme that emerges from our analyses is this: the work-first ideology that drove first welfare reform and then the Workforce Investment Act has had a remarkably pervasive and consistent effect—a marked decrease in access to quality higher education for low-income populations. Clearly, college is only for some, not all, in the United States.