

Demand Planning under Fire (January 13, 1987)

Abstract

Under increasing financial pressure, the minister-presidents of the federal states agreed in November 1977 to offset the anticipated increase in student numbers by adding new enrollment spots to universities. But personnel and facilities were not expanded accordingly, and the problems of mass universities only became all the more evident.

Source

The Decision for Open Admissions Is Ten Years Old

To prevent the expansion of the *numerus clausus*^[1] in the Federal Republic, government leaders made a “decision for open admissions” exactly ten years ago. It said that in times of “excess demand” for university spots, institutions of higher education should “overload” their teaching capacities, that is, they should accept considerably more students than planned. This prevented a breakdown in the admissions process—admittedly, often with adverse effects on the quality of education and research.

In order to counter these negative effects, most federal states—exceptions: the city-states of Hamburg and Bremen, which made selective improvements—have decided to institute “overload programs,” in some cases with massive increases in recent years. According to the West German Rectors’ Conference (WRK), since 1982 these temporary special funds have increased by 500 percent in Schleswig-Holstein, for example, by 200 percent in Bavaria, and by 150 percent each in Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia.

On closer inspection, however, there wasn’t all that much generosity. What was given by one hand was often taken away by the other.

According to surveys by the Science Council, the universities not only lost funding for 2.4 percent of their permanent positions since 1980, in a national comparison, but also, based on 1980 prices, experienced a 4.4 percent drop in the availability of operating funds. Of course, the situation varies widely from state to state. Whereas some state governments have actually increased funding to universities, others have cut back even more drastically. Bremen made the biggest cut, with a reduction of 38.8 percent.

The WRK concluded: “The development of the overload programs is positive, but they are almost entirely financed from the pockets of the higher education institutions. Rather than being cost-neutral, the overload must be borne with reduced funding. Moreover, by providing the required funds, the state has significantly increased its influence over higher education institutions.”

NOTES

[1] Restricted admission to higher education institutions in specific fields of study. Expansion refers to either raising the GPA for admission and/or applying the *numerus clausus* to more fields of study—trans.

Source: Paul Frangols, “Vor zehn Jahren kam es zum Öffnungsbeschluß,” *Die Welt*, January 13, 1987. Republished with permission.

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