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## Editor's Column

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### Volume 46, Issue 2

In this issue, our authors address important questions related to consumer information about college costs, the effects of merit aid on college completion, loan use among community college students, and how goal complexity impacts student outcomes. Although distinct in many ways, each of these studies tackles persistent issues in higher education—issues that are fundamental to the mission of the *Journal* and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators—such as affordability, access, success, and opportunity.

With efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965 underway and in the midst the 2016 presidential campaign, the need for evidence-based policymaking related to affordability, access, success, and opportunity in higher education is as great as ever counter-balance political rhetoric, myth, and opportunism. For example, the Bennett hypothesis (a theory proposed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett positing that colleges will raise tuition in response to increased public funding) has been used to explain rising college costs and also to argue against increased public spending on higher education. Scholars (e.g., Gillen, 2012) have found mixed empirical evidence for the hypothesis, and debate continues about its validity, but this debate exemplifies the important ways that empirical research informs political debates about higher education. Lee's article in this issue weighs in on the Bennett hypothesis debate through analysis of state-based merit aid programs, another important policy area.

Similarly, each of the three other articles in the current issue contributes empirical evidence to current debates. In the context of increasing calls for institutional accountability and movement toward tying funding to performance, Rutherford looks at how goal complexity for institutions affects student outcomes. Anthony, Page, and Seldin's work adds to what we know about consumer information policies—specifically net price calculators—designed to help students better estimate costs of attending college. And finally, Menges and Leonhard explore what factors impact community college students' willingness to borrow money to pay for school.

Jacob Gross  
Editor

### ***Reference***

Gillen, A. (2012). Introducing Bennett Hypothesis 2.0. [http://centerforcollegeaffordability.org/uploads/Introducing\\_Bennett\\_Hypothesis\\_2.pdf](http://centerforcollegeaffordability.org/uploads/Introducing_Bennett_Hypothesis_2.pdf). Center for College Affordability and Productivity. Washington, DC.