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“Viewing Accessibility to Higher Education: A comparative study across the US, UK and Cuba”

Higher education seems to be the key to economic stability and social mobility in many different nations. Various factors are attributed to the hindrance of higher education, such as familial background, childhood upbringing, age, financial reasons, and access to the necessary resources. In addition, specific obstacles of postsecondary attainment need to be identified in order to implement a working solution that eliminates barriers and proactively assists in making higher education accessible to a wider range of students. Higher education can provide life-changing opportunities after secondary education and holds a special significance to each person pursuing it. After an analysis of the education systems in the United Kingdom, Cuba, and the United States, this presentation will explore how accessible and attainable higher education truly is, as well as the pathways available to higher education.

In the United Kingdom, the education system is set up in such a way that allows students to decide which path of education they prefer to take after completing Year 11. If students choose to continue their education, they can either choose a Further Education college or a Higher Education university. Further Education colleges include academic courses to prepare for Higher Education universities or vocational training. While the intention of this particular system is to provide a route for people to obtain a postsecondary education, recent trends show that students of color make up a smaller percentage of both undergraduate and postgraduate students. There is also a gap in degree attainment after undergraduate study for students of color.

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The education system in Cuba mandates education up to the basic secondary level. At this point, the secondary level extends to pre-university education or technical and professional education. Pre-university education in Cuba allows students to further their academics in preparation for tertiary education, which consists of both undergraduate and graduate programs. This is the typical path taken in order for students to be on track to obtain a degree of higher education. Due to the complete subsidization of all levels of education, higher education is accessible for Cubans of all classes in theory. However, there is a slight overrepresentation of white Cubans in higher academic settings compared to black and mestizo Cubans. There is also an underrepresentation of women in men-dominated subjects of study, such as technology, math, and engineering.

In the United States, higher education typically comes after completion of high school or with a General Education Diploma (GED). However, many people from historically underrepresented groups or working class striving for a college degree have the experience of not knowing where to find information on college. One method used to alleviate this issue is the implementation of college readiness programs. These programs are established with the goal of making the necessary resources available to people in order to assist in the college search and application process. This presentation will consist of a specific analysis of an established college readiness program, the College Discovery Program, as one attempt in making college resources more accessible to those who need it.