



**Higher Education in the UK and the USA since Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan:
Converging Models?**

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Friday 23 March 2012

Maison de la recherche de la Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, 4, rue des Irlandais, 75005 Paris, France

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The Issues of Access and Inequalities to Higher Education in the UK and the US

Abstract:

How are the discourses of student selection different or alike among at highly selective universities in the UK and the USA? And what does this tell us about the differences and similarities regarding the underlying ideas of merit and who is worthy to study at a highly selective university in the two countries? This paper is based on interviews with admissions officers at Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia in the US and tutors from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK. The analysis also draws on published materials (websites, prospectuses) from the different selective universities and compares the kind of key-words used in describing the values of the admissions process. The paper discusses the constructions of the idea of merit in university enrolment in the two contexts. Current developments in British higher education – in particular, the introduction of higher tuition fees from 2012 – are also discussed. In conclusion, similarities and differences between the two systems with regards to admission to highly selective universities are summarised and analysed to see whether the two countries are converging in their admissions discourses.