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文-----教育类 1. The Commission on the Future of Higher Education A while ago I was attending a lecture given by a preeminent scholar of higher education whose work on behalf of poor students has been very important and influential. But at one point, he commented that one of the biggest challenges facing higher education today was grade inflation. "Grade inflation?" I thought. "Grade inflation?" Like many people both within and outside of our business, this scholar equated American higher education with the 13 or 35 most selective institutions in the United States--that group of institutions that lead us to claim that our system is "the best in the world." But for the colleges and universities attended by the overwhelming majority of students, as well as for American higher education as a whole, grade inflation is pretty far down on the list of challenges that clamor for attention. And its also way down on the list of issues that policymakers need to be concerned about. Policy concerns itself with the place of a social service within the larger context of the society. Policy always focuses on the question, "This may be good, but what is it good for?" Higher education in the 21st century, in this as in every other nation, needs to be good in order to make a vital contribution to the social and economic health of the polity. It needs to be good so as to equip individuals with the capacity to find satisfaction in their lives while negotiating the

complexities of contemporary culture and politics. And it needs to be good so that it can help the nation develop the ability to stay at the head of the pack in the economic arms race, lest its citizens watch their standard of living slowly, or (more likely) swiftly, ebb. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education, whatever you think of its answers, indubitably asked the right questions. It asked whether our nation is educating enough citizens to a high enough standard to keep our historic civic and economic edge, as well as whether we were doing this in a way that is sustainable for students and for those who help subsidize their education--the states and the federal government. In order to answer those questions, it aimed its inquiry at what I think of as "the three big As": access, affordability, and accountability. In short, it concerned itself with what Paul Lingenfelter, in this issue, identifies as "the most urgent imperative of the 21st century" for higher education: "significant improvement in the education of the average American." 2、 Education dept. plans to boost HBCU loan participation If you direct facilities planning at a historically Black college or university, expect to hear from the U.S. Department of Education about financing your capital improvement needs. In response to a Government Accountability Office report slamming management of the largely unused Capital Financing Program for HBCUs, (see *Diverse*, Dec. 14) the Education Department plans to boost its efforts to get more schools involved. Next year, the department will provide HBCUs with pre-applications and brochures describing the program and explaining each stage of the

process. "Before we do that, I want to know the needs of all the HBCUs," says Don Watson, special assistant to the assistant secretary of education for HBCU financing. "We are going to send surveys to all the schools, not just to presidents but to facilities officers and [chief financial officers] so we can get feedback." The GAO found that half of the loan funds available to 104 HBCUs sits untapped because the Education Department has failed to market the funds and has failed to evaluate the effectiveness of the contractor running the program. Schools complained that the loan process was too long and cumbersome, with one school complaining that it took more than six months to get an answer on whether a project qualified. Watson says eligible institutions may not have chosen to participate because they'd be taking out repayable loans rather than receiving grants as they're accustomed. To get a loan, schools have to show that they are creditworthy and that their plans are realistic. For example, a loan to build housing that would hold many more students than the school can enroll would almost certainly be turned down.

Widening the door to higher education: the continuing growth in the number of part-time students challenges old notions about time to degree

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