Abstract: Examining science production in the United States throughout an era of massified higher education and the “super research university,” David Baker argues that world-leading U.S. scientific production resulted from an unexpected synergy between the rise of research universities, particularly public ones, and the comparatively rapid development of mass schooling, leading to mass access to higher education. From humble beginnings, U.S. universities organized faculty into modern academic fields that established national scientific societies. Universities not only offered access to broad segments of the population, they also added to the U.S.—and global—stock of scientific researchers by training ever-larger numbers of new PhD’s in STEM+ fields. Toward the end of the twentieth century, some observers sought to characterize universities as weak organizations; they speculated that universities’ share of scientific publications would decline and that universities would be outpaced by private industry. Yet university-based academic researchers continue to not only produce a majority of U.S. scientific publications, but they also collaborate with non-university partners to author more than three-quarters of all STEM+ peer-reviewed research articles. The research university and the inclusive educational practices originating out of public institutions over the last century served as the backbone of American scientific production that continues to lead the world.

David P. Baker is Professor of Sociology, Education, and Demography as well as a research scientist at the Center for the Study of Higher Education and at the Population Research Institute at Pennsylvania State University. He is co-author of National Differences, Global Similarities: World Culture and the Future of Schooling (Stanford University Press, 2005) and the author of The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture (Stanford University Press, 2014), which won the 2015 Outstanding Book Award of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). He is a frequent contributor to scholarly journals on education and is the Past President of the Comparative International Education Society (CIES).

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For further information, please contact Professor Justin Powell: justin.powell@uni.lu