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Contact for Rockefeller Institute:**

Robert Bullock
Deputy Director for Operations
(518) 443-5837

or by email at robert.bullock@rockinst.suny.edu

Wildavsky: Britain's Open University a Distance Learning Pioneer

The Rockefeller Institute's Ben Wildavsky discussed Britain's Open University and the impact it has had on distance learning worldwide in an essay featured in the Brookings Institution's *Brown Center Chalkboard*.

In his essay, Wildavsky indicated that while the concept was discounted initially, nearly 20 percent of all British university students enrolled, signaling its potential. From early lectures broadcast on the British Broadcasting Company, the Open University was soon using a range of distance-learning technologies to grant inexpensive degrees to older, part-time students who lacked traditional credentials for admission, Wildavsky writes.

He cites some of the advantages inherent in this pioneering model, including:

- Continual change;
- Recognition that part-time students' learning needs vary enormously even within the same institution;
- Providing multiple points of entry, at no risk, to attract nontraditional students; and
- Combining scale with personalization.

At a time when American universities are seeking to promote access and improve effectiveness, Wildavsky underscores the potential of models like the Open University to serve nontraditional student populations.

Ben Wildavsky is director of higher education studies at the Rockefeller Institute of Government of the State University of New York and policy professor at SUNY's University at Albany. His research focuses on the globalization of universities and the push for innovation in U.S. postsecondary education. A former senior scholar at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and guest scholar at the Brookings Institution, he is the author of the award-winning book *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World* (2010). He is also the co-editor of *Reinventing Higher Education: The Promise of Innovation* (2011). His articles have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Policy*, the *New Republic*, the *Atlantic*, and many other publications. As a consultant, he has provided strategic advice to education leaders and written influential policy reports. Wildavsky graduated from Yale University (Phi Beta Kappa, summa cum laude).

To read the essay, go to: www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2016/02/01-open-university-broadcast-lectures-wildavsky.

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