

Tuition: How Far Does Your Wallet Get You?

**Anthony Scalise
Sam Selarnick
Daniel Ioffreda
Caroline Cotton
Shannon Walker**

**Ananda Rankin
Taylor Yount
Riley Compton
Joey Shibata
Matthew Dawson**

Introduction

The key to socioeconomic mobility for many families rests in access to a quality education. Today, the level of education that acts as the biggest meal-ticket is that of postsecondary -- primarily given by two-year institutions and four-year colleges and universities. Over the last few decades, the cost of a postsecondary education has skyrocketed, rising a staggering 1,120% since 1978 (Mosbergen). This presents challenges to families from humble means and hamstringing former students with tens of thousands of dollars in debt at tremendous interest rates. Recent studies have placed student loan debt in the United States at over 1.2 trillion dollars, eclipsing 7% of the total Gross Domestic Product (Berman; Bubble). Soon-to-be high school graduates must now consider the question: Is amassing tens of thousands in debt economically feasible for me and my family? States have experimented with budgetary restrictions on nonessential expenditures for public universities in order to curb spending and lower the funds necessary to run such an institution.

Our first approach delves further into this course of action, examining which expenditures may be nonessential and the impact on budgeting as a whole. Other western nations have sought to deal with the issue of the rising price of college in varying ways. Looking abroad, many nations such as Germany, Sweden, and Denmark have dabbled with the idea of tuition-free education in order to reduce the toll on hopeful students. This mirrors our second approach, which involves increasing the size and scope of government involvement in the market for education services. Doing so would favor aiding students who wish to receive loans as opposed to abolishing public university tuition altogether.

Rather than focusing on lowering the cost of tuition, our third approach scrutinizes the need for all young adults to continue on the path of attending a college or university. The increasing demand for colleges and universities may be because of ill-informed decisions on the part of recent high school graduates influenced by social stigmas and other societal forces. Our third approach contends that more students desiring vocational, trade, or professional education will decrease the demand for traditional four-year degrees and allow students to follow a track catered more to their skills. Regardless of the solution, it is grossly evident that there is a need for reform in the postsecondary education system. Adopting one or more of our approaches could be the course of action necessary to ensure that this problem does not continue to stymie economic growth and social mobility for future generations.



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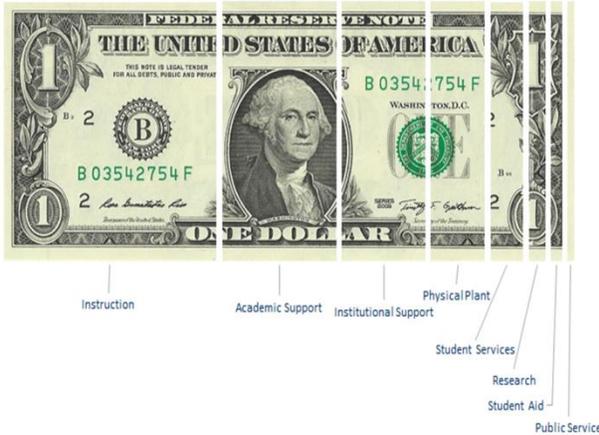
Approach One: Restructure University Tuition to Lower Tuition

Why Do Universities Need Your Tuition?

The scope of this approach to the issue of rising tuition cost is from a University's Standpoint. Public universities generate around 20% of their income from tuition, compared to

40% by private universities. The reason for the stark difference is that private universities do not receive state subsidies and instead rely on tuition and donations to offset their expenditures. On the other hand, public universities spend only 27% on instruction compared to 40% by private universities (Jasty). More specifically, Pennsylvania State is a public nonprofit university that spends around 31% of their budget on "Education & General". In simpler terms that means the university is publicly funded through the government and any profit is funneled back into the university to cover other expenses. To

Where Does My Tuition Go?



combat the price of rising tuition and fees, it is proposed that universities cut other expenses or impose alternatives in order to lower the cost for a student. Cutting the cost for students has many obvious benefits for a student, but some less obvious drawbacks.

Student Enrichment Funds

Aside from the money spent on instruction, many other university funds are spent on student enrichment services. These services help students prepare for their career, learn effective studying and writing skills, and benefit their physical, mental, and emotional health. The first resource is academic support. Penn State offers Penn State Learning which provides the students with tutoring, study groups, and other academic resources at no additional cost. Another resource for student enrichment would be career services. Penn State has the Bank of America Career Service Center that is designed to help students and even alumni achieve career goals. Students can use career services to learn networking skills, find internships, and prepare resumes. Next would be computer technical support. Penn State employs the Media Commons to help students best utilize the tech resources for class projects and other activities. Finally, public universities dish out on average 11% of their budget on health and counseling services. Here at Penn State many services are in place to keep the students physically and mentally healthy, such as Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) and the University Health Service (UHS). CAPS works with thousands of Penn State students per year in group therapy, individual counseling, crisis intervention, and psychiatric services ("Counseling and Psychological Services"). The UHS, on the other hand, is a nationally accredited health care service that has all the perks of a hospital.

The Value of Research

Aside from education, universities are known for their research. Research is an integral part of society but also student enrichment. Research provides students with hands on experience

with experts in the field. Aside from the hands-on experience, many of the top researchers at universities are some of the top teachers that incorporate the latest research – that would be too new even for a textbook – into their lectures. Also, most university-based research is funded through grants that must be specifically used toward carrying out approved projects or activities (aau.edu). However, it is important to note that some students never take part in the research that a university has to offer, especially if it is not required of their major.

| University Park | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Rates Effective 2016 Fall Semester | | | |
| | Per Academic Year | Full-Time* Per Semester | Part-Time Per Credit |
| Pennsylvania Residents: | | | |
| Undergraduate: | | | |
| Lower Division including Associate: | | | |
| Freshmen & Sophomore | 16,952 | 8,476 | 706 |
| Upper Division: (a) | | | |
| Junior & Senior: | | | |
| Business, EMS, Science, IST, Engineering: (b) | 20,226 | 10,113 | 843 |
| Nursing | 21,864 | 10,942 | 912 |
| All Other Programs | 18,326 | 9,163 | 764 |
| Graduate: | | | |
| MSA | 24,458 | 12,244 | 1,020 |
| Business, EMS, Science, IST, Engineering (b) | 21,254 | 10,647 | 887 |
| All Other Programs | 19,964 | 9,982 | 832 |
| Graduate Assistantships, Fellowships | 17,000 | 8,500 | - |

* Full-Time status is based on 12 or more credits.

This tuition breakdown is specific to Pennsylvania residents, but the website shows even higher prices for out-of-state students.

Big vs Small: Does It Make a Difference?

Penn State currently features a student-faculty ratio of 16:1 and has 39% of its classes with fewer than 20 students (USNews). If the cost of tuition was lowered, some faculty would likely be laid off, and the size of classes would increase. Small classes and a low student to faculty ratio are directly correlated to high retention and performance among students. The more faculty – professors, teaching assistants (TAs), and learning assistants (LAs) – the more personal instruction a student can receive. Likewise, studies have shown that students perform better and retain more information in smaller classes. Studies have not specified to what extent class size affects performance. Sure, smaller classes are desirable, but is having a lecture with 500 people instead of 400 going to make a noticeable impact? There really is no way to quantify the effect on students.

Construction: Hazard or Luxury?

Another cut to a university's budget could be through limiting construction. Walking around Penn State's campus is like walking through a construction zone. Day in and day out, there is a construction project whether it be repairing a sidewalk, renovating a dorm, or fixing a roof. While these projects improve campus quality, they are not always directly beneficial for students. Often, colleges will make improvements so that they can attract more students (and more revenue). Construction is necessary for safety reasons, but students can still gain the same educational experience without improvements made for luxury.

Do Gen Eds Help?

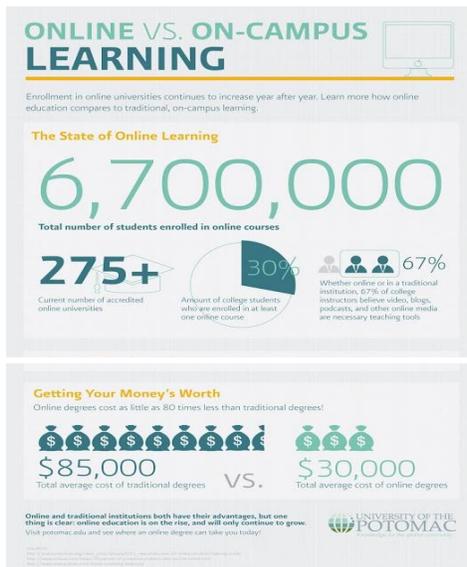
An alternative tactic for a university to lower tuition could be through a large cut in general electives. As shown by the image from Penn State's Tuition Website, students spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars per credit. To graduate with a Bachelor's degree, students are required to take 45 credits (15 classes) of general education courses (Baccalaureate Degree General Education). A lot of the time, students will take courses that qualify in the GE category for the sake of an easy course grade or completion check rather than for the sake of helping them advance in their specific major. If the amount of these general education courses was decreased, thousands of dollars could be saved for students. Or rather, students could be directing a large part of their tuition towards classes which would better suit their career of choice. Even some policy holders hold wary opinions as to whether or not a liberal education (one highly dependent on general education) is fundamentally useful to the workplace. This perspective can inhibit

public funding, lowering the aid that students can get towards the cost of their education (Shinn). Cutting general education courses poses realistic benefits for students financially.

However, a major drawback for students in cutting a university's general education courses is the loss of a "well-rounded" education and subsequent individual. Some of the skills that are believed to be gained through the implementation of a general education include: "To practice analytical thinking and communicate well in written and oral modes; To frame issues in historical and multicultural contexts; To work independently and in team settings; To apply their knowledge and skills in complex problem-solving in an evermore complex and rapidly changing world" (Shinn). These qualities can be attractive and highly sought after by professional employers.

Online Classes

In an attempt to save the value of general education while still lowering tuition costs for students, an option universities can pursue is the implementation of online courses. Students can gain a broader education without having to pay the expensive price per credit for an in-class lecture (one which often allows for little student-teacher interaction due to large class size). The price per credit for Penn State Online (Penn State World Campus) is about \$542. Or, for students taking 12 credits or more, there is a flat rate of \$6,587 (Tuition and Financial Aid). Additionally, research has shown that converting at least 20% of online classes saves more than \$90 billion annually. Online classes can significantly lower tuition costs not only for the decrease in cost per credit, but also for the predicted increase in student population (Moon). Student enrollment will not have to be limited due to available class-size; any amount of students can take online classes.



Despite the financial benefits, online classes do provide drawbacks in a student's educational success. A study conducted at UC Davis revealed that 85% of students completed their in-class courses as opposed to the 79% of students that finished online courses. Additionally, 56% of students pass their online class, while 63% of students passed their face-to-face course. Online classes are highly dependent on student motivation and discipline, something which can be difficult for college students. However, the study did produce success results in favor of online classes during a student's first semester; face-to-face learners found difficulty in adjusting to their new learning environment (Smith). Perhaps a better alternative to the case is creating a system which meets in the middle: an online course with a few required face-to-face interactions.

Two-Year Split Program

A way to avoid cutting any of the university expenses that have been posed is requiring students to spend two years off campus. The fundamentals of this option suggest a year studying abroad and a year working in a professional internship (Moon). Students can gain vital advantages with a global perspective and pre-professional experience; something that can be very attractive to employers. While it can be expensive for students to study abroad, there are

various opportunities for aid offered by specific colleges, special donors, global programs and federal scholarships. If colleges implement a two-year program as such, they can double enrollment which can result in a decrease in tuition by 40 or even 50% (Moon). In this case, students can reap the typical benefits of a university at a lower price while also gaining once-in-a-lifetime opportunities abroad.

Lowering tuition costs has become a newly adopted practice by many universities. Many are realizing that their prices have become so high (and not always necessary) that many students cannot afford to attend their schools at all. If some of the 'luxury service' cuts are made, and the value of education is put at the forefront, higher education can become both more affordable and attractive. However, many universities advertise a "sticker price" tuition which is eventually cut down by scholarships and student loans. If tuition is lowered, perhaps the amount of university sponsored subsidies will also be lowered. This aspect is important to consider when deciding which budget cuts or alternatives can be implemented to reduce tuition cost.

Approach Two: Increase Government Involvement in Post-Secondary Education

How Can the Government Help?

According to Chris Denhart of Forbes magazine, the current student loan debt has reached a staggering amount of 1.2 trillion dollars (Denhart). 1 trillion of this debt is due to federal student loan debt. Now that the issue has been put into perspective, what should be done by the United States government to alleviate the financial stress American students are currently experiencing?

The amount of aid that the government provides to students is an ongoing issue that has been discussed frequently in past years due to rising tuition costs and student debt. In this approach, we will discuss the benefits and drawbacks related to more government involvement financially within the postsecondary education system. Most recently, it has been a prevalent subject in the political sphere. Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders proposed a plan to completely eliminate the issue for students by providing free tuition. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Republicans, such as our current President Donald Trump, argue that the amount of aid the government provides is already too high and is harming the economy.



There are multiple ways that the government could go about changing their approach to student financial aid. The current approach to the rising tuition is to provide student financial aid in the form of grants and subsidized as well as unsubsidized loans. The government could potentially respond to the rising tuition in America by increasing, decreasing, or completely eliminating these forms of aid.

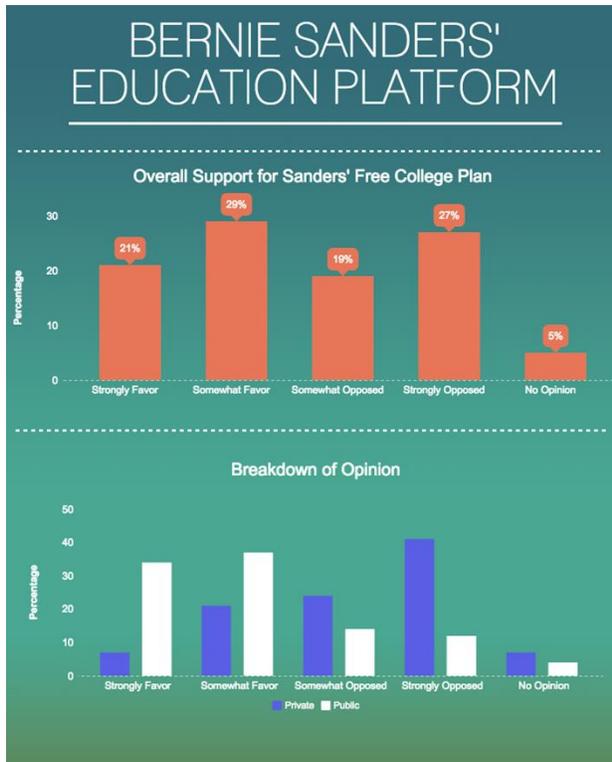
However, changing the amount of federal money that is dished out is not the sole way of helping students pay for their postsecondary education. An alternative option would be to change how this aid is awarded to students. Should it be more merit-based or financial-need based? Who should be qualifying for aid? Is aid distributed fairly? This brings up issues of equality and fairness that are difficult to navigate for people discussing this topic.

While discussing what should be done about the rising costs of tuition in America, it is nearly impossible to ignore the federal standpoint on student aid. Students in the United States are currently swimming in debt, and it's our job to discuss how the government should go about fixing it.

Free Tuition for All

One significant action the government could initiate would be instituting free tuition for postsecondary education. United States President Rutherford B. Hayes first proposed the idea of free education for America's youth claiming that it was the basis for a productive economy and

democracy. Today, countries such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Mexico have policies put in place that offer free tuition to their students. Should the government follow in their example and do the same for our own?



The plan that has been most recently proposed to accomplish this feat was created by United States Senator Bernie Sanders during his 2016 presidential campaign. He claims that this is a necessary step to creating a competitive educated workforce in our current global economy. Sanders believes that any child who works hard in school should have the opportunity to attend college without putting significant stress on their parent's or individual wallets. This aligns with the values of freedom and equality for all that many American citizens hold dear. He speculated that it would cost the government a mere 75 billion dollars to provide free tuition for all (Sanders). Just to put this dollar amount into perspective, the federal government currently spends about 31 billion dollars on financial aid for students. The extra money needed to make tuition completely free would come from an increase in taxes on the wealthy citizens in America.

With this in mind, it is obvious that one of the clearest tradeoffs for this approach is the increase in taxes. Many would protest this change because they would be paying for others tuition, when they may not even have a child who is attending college. Raising taxes is always a controversial and highly debated issue in America, and this situation would be no different. Also, it has been claimed that providing free tuition would decrease the value of a college degree. Some students would begin to not take it seriously and use the tax payer's money to attend college and party, without focusing on classwork. Today, countless students are graduating college to find that they are unable to find a job. This would only increase as more and more students attend college. Providing free tuition would also limit the amount of money universities have to spend on research and other student programs.

Reforming Student Loans

Another direction the government could take would be to reform the student loan system. In the next decade, it is estimated that the federal government will earn a profit of 110 billion dollars from student loans. To most, this hardly seems fair as America's students are drowning in debt from high interest rates.

One of the major issues with the current federal student loan programs is the high interest rates. Most students are paying around 5-7% interest on their loans. This is a steep amount when most Americans can get a car loan with an interest rate of only 2.5% (Dynarski). Lowering this interest rate would greatly decrease the amount of student debt in the United States.

Student Loans Outpace Other Forms of Debt



Another aspect of student loans that is harsh on America's youth is that payments begin immediately after graduation, and they maintain a static amount throughout. To further explain this, Australia will be used as an example of an alternative way to go about paying back loans. In Australia, students do not pay anything until their income reaches \$40,000 a year (Dynarski). This makes sense because most students are not making stable enough money to be making payments right away, especially if they cannot

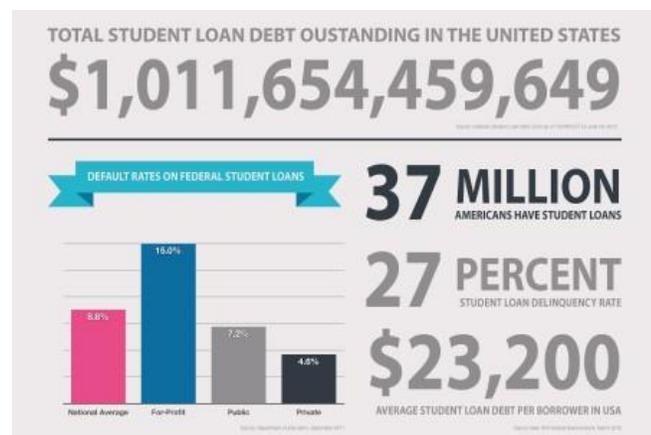
find a job immediately after graduation. Above a \$40,000 salary, loan payers pay 4% of their income until their loan is paid off. This is also a logical approach because payments should increase as income increases. How can we expect a 22-year-old to make payments in the same amount as a 40-year-old?

It has been argued that the availability of student loans should be increased as well. Many middle class students are finding it hard to fund their college education without significant help from their parents or taking out private loans, which can have even higher interest rates. An approach to fix this issue could be lowering the qualifications required to receive a federal loan, and increasing the dollar amount of the loans given.

However, one of the main concerns when it comes to student loans is that universities tend to increase their tuition as loans increase. It has been shown that for every dollar in student loans, tuition increases by 70 cents. This means that 70% of the loans students pay back are made up of money they wouldn't owe the university if they had just not taken the loan at all. Universities are benefiting more from student loans than students are. Student loans could be one of the major factors causing the increasing tuition crisis in America today.

Restructure Financial Aid

Finally, a major concern in governmental student aid is the structure of the financial aid system and how it should potentially be revised. The questions of who should qualify for financial aid, how much money should some students receive, and what the basis should be of student financial aid have been continually debated over the past few decades. With the rise in tuition, the gap between the upper, middle, and lower class only continues to grow, forcing the need for aid to grow as well. But, although it may seem as easy as simply giving more aid out to more students, there is much more depth to the issue at hand. Even with the financial aid system today, there is clearly still the issue of students not attending a



postsecondary school purely based on their financial standings. So the challenge lies in changing the structure of financial aid to make college accessible to students of any social standing; thus, giving better access to postsecondary education to the population as a whole while creating a bridge between the lower and upper socioeconomic classes.

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that the vast majority of colleges (99% to be exact) cannot promise to provide the financial aid that every student needs (Clark). The universities themselves cannot pour unlimited money into aiding the students. For this reason, the government steps in to divide up the aid among the students and in effect, students do not always receive the financial aid they need. The system has made strict standards in attempt to “equally” divide financial aid and of these standards, certain categories such as family incomes and taxes are evaluated. These categories are used to see who best qualifies for aid and how much the family can provide.

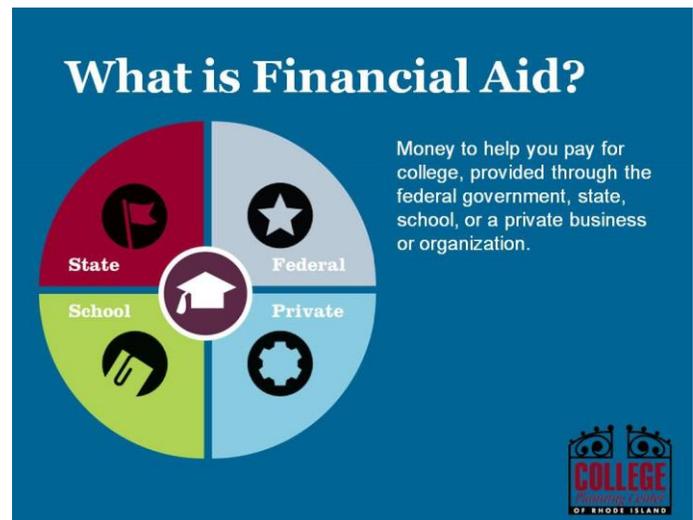
But, this brings in another issue. The formulas used for calculating the amount parents can provide for the children often produce numbers that are too bold and so the universities ask too much of the families, giving them meager financial aid packages. This creates a gap in what the parents can afford to pay and what they are expecting to pay, leading to debt. So, even if a student of a lower income family does qualify for some financial aid, they might not actually receive the amount they need to be debt free, or let alone be able to graduate college (Clark).

Furthermore, using these formulas, the amount of dependency between the student and the family is based purely on these numbers, not what the parents are actually planning on paying for the student. Maybe a student will receive no help from his or her parents when paying for college, even if their total family wage is \$100,000. Shouldn't this student who receives no help from their parents qualify for more financial aid? But this isn't necessarily measured from these numbers, creating yet another gap for students and the tuition they must pay.

Finding a balance of who qualifies and what money should go where is obviously challenging as the schools issue more than just financial grants to students, but merit based scholarships as well.

Rewarding students for their academic achievements goes a long way and these

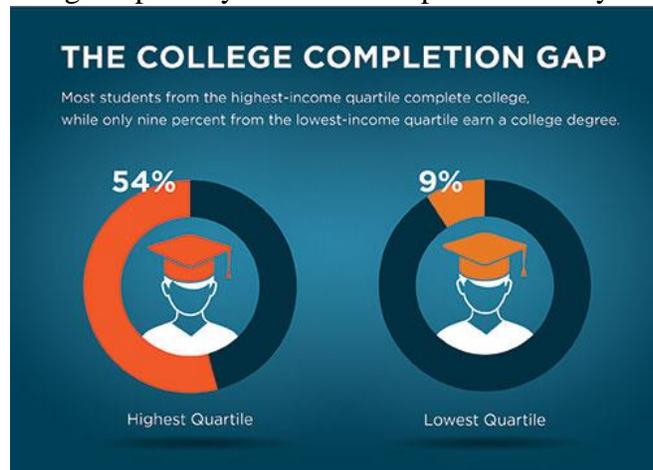
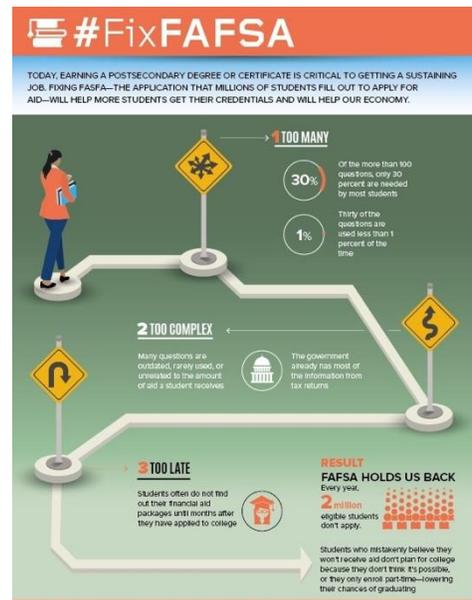
rewards are applicable to any student, no matter what the economic standpoint. Although these merit-based awards may seem to be a successful alternative to need-based aid in order to equally support lower and higher income students, they are in reality still not equal across the board. This is because many times, students of higher income families can afford to live in better communities, receive a better education, and qualify for more awards. This trend continues while those of lower income families may not have the same opportunities. This adds yet another layer to student aid as universities can't solely focus on merit based aid or solely focus on need based aid as both categories leave out mass groups of students. The issue once again with the limit in what the universities can spend on the students makes this balance difficult and often leaves



many lower income families to suffer as more money may go to scholarships of more and more upper class students.

Today, this lack of aid is unfortunately often times still the ultimate determining factor of students dropping out or even not attending college in the first place. The numerous combined underlying problems that student aid does not account for is the reason that the standards haven't been adequate in providing what students need.

This is where the government can step in to help. Changing parts of the structure of student aid could go a long way in help the entire student population. First by creating more subsidies for higher education, the government can make more financial aid available from the start to those of the lower class. With more resources, there would be no need to neglect one class over the other or need based aid over merit based aid. This would ensure that the lower income students could obtain the full financial aid they actually need from the government before that money is divided elsewhere and effectively remove many limitations for the lower class. The overall equality issue of providing aid could be greatly improved and suffice for a greater portion of the student population. And for the financial process itself, simplifying and updating parts of the application to focus on the most relevant and essential information needed could make the process more accurate and efficient. Even adding categories how much the family will actually be providing can reveal what students need aid apart from solely the family income would provide important information for consideration. This could contribute in minimizing the overall debt that students face even if they do qualify for aid by setting standards that correctly match the needs of the students. By combining these small yet important changes to the standards of the financial aid system, steps towards diminishing the effects of tuition costs being the primary limitation for post secondary attendance could successfully be taken.

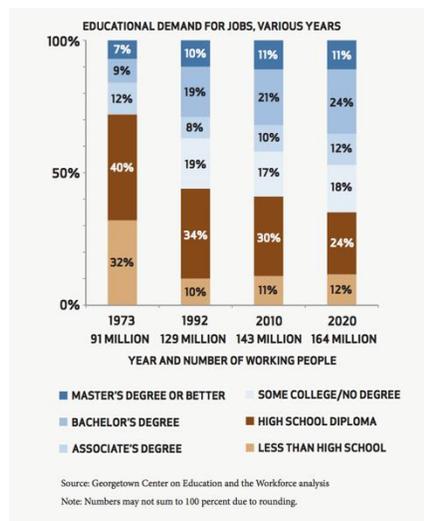


Although these adjustments would provide the changes needed for many students, they would not come without a cost. Specifically, a cost to the working society as a whole. This additional money has to come from somewhere and that somewhere is the people themselves. Taxes would most like increase in some way or form, as mentioned previously, affecting many parts of society including both low and high income. Cuts may also be made in other governmental areas in order to afford more money being spent towards education.

There is even the possibility that increasing aid available could drive up the tuition of colleges even more as colleges spend more money on the students. These are extremely important tradeoffs to consider and comparing them with the benefits to make some compromises would be the first step in the right direction to make an implemental change to successfully aid students.

Approach 3: Encourage Students to Make Educated Post-Secondary Decisions

Many people go to college for the wrong reasons. Some go because their parents said so, while others go just because their teachers recommended them to or because their friends are going. In modern day society, graduates constantly face pressure from people around them regarding their postsecondary decisions. When asked about their plans after high school, many graduates automatically say that they will attend a four-year university. However, there are still a large number of people who choose different paths. Unfortunately, most people hesitate to



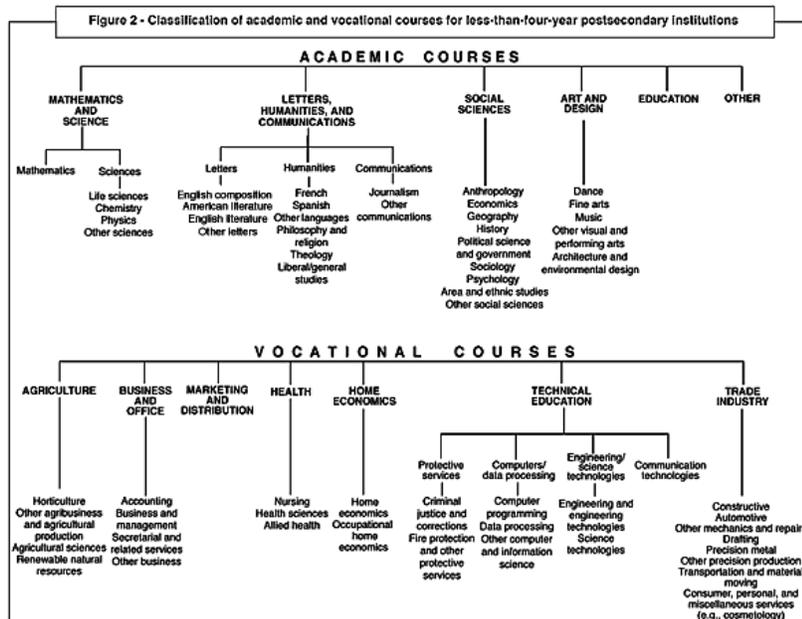
make that decision because they are afraid to differ from the social norms. There is an undeniable negative connotation attached to the words “vocation school”, “community college”, and “gap year.” However, these are great options for many individuals.

For many graduating high school scholars, their post-graduation plans are based solely on what they think they are expected to do. Many people attend expensive universities without analyzing other options. It is important to inform graduates of all of their options so that they can make practical decisions and get the most value for their money. Doing so would minimize wasted time or money amongst high school graduates. However, many universities would be negatively affected by this approach because they would lose many prospective students to vocational schools, community

colleges, or the work force. In fact, schools may even have an incentive to lower tuition costs to attract prospective students back to them. Regardless of colleges’ decisions, encouraging high school graduates to do their research and make practical decisions about their postsecondary plans could ensure that they get the most intangible value for their money. There are many excellent options for high school graduates to pursue after graduation other than attending a four-year anniversary.

Vocational Schools

Vocational schools are an excellent choice for many high school graduates who are ready to pursue specific jobs. However, vocational or technical schools undoubtedly have an inexplicably negative stigma surrounding them, even though they are a great option for many high school graduates planning to focus on specific trades or professions. Vocational schools are postsecondary education institutions that are geared towards preparing their students for particular jobs. They are usually far cheaper than public or private universities, but they are obviously a more expensive option than taking a gap year or entering the workforce. Vocational schools usually allow students to obtain degrees in two years instead of the four years that traditional colleges take. Students are often hesitant to pursue vocational degrees because they are not as ‘prestigious’ as a degree from an accredited university, but they are a great option for graduates looking to pursue a particular type of job. While this option certainly does narrow a graduate’s career options after obtaining a vocational degree, this does not matter much for individuals who already know what career they want to pursue after graduating high school. Additionally, individuals who choose to pursue vocational degrees have a much higher chance of



SOURCE: Susan P. Choy and Liara J. Horn, A Guide to Using Postsecondary Transcript Data and an Overview of Course Taking in Less-than-Four-Year Postsecondary Institutions, (Berkeley: National Center for Research and Vocational Education, March 1992).

obtaining their degree than someone who goes to a public or private university. According to “The Simple Dollar”, 40% of people pursuing four year degrees drop out of school before finishing their education, and 64% of college graduates take longer than four years to obtain their four-year degree (Hamm). Students at vocational schools have a much higher chance of graduating on time, which minimizes wasted time and money. Even though vocational schools may narrow a student’s options post-

graduation, they are far cheaper and career-oriented than most universities.

However, there are some undeniable trade-offs associated with attended vocational schools. For starters, public and private universities would suffer if a significant number of high school graduates decided to pursue vocational degrees. However, this may act as an incentive for colleges to lower the costs of tuition. Another trade-off of attending vocational schools is how narrow the focus of the education is. If a student spends two years studying engineering at a vocational school and then decides that they want to pursue a managerial career, they would be completely unqualified. Therefore, it is important for vocational students to carefully consider all of their career preferences before beginning their studies. If they can do that, they will get a lot of intangible value for their money, all the while minimizing the time they spend in college.

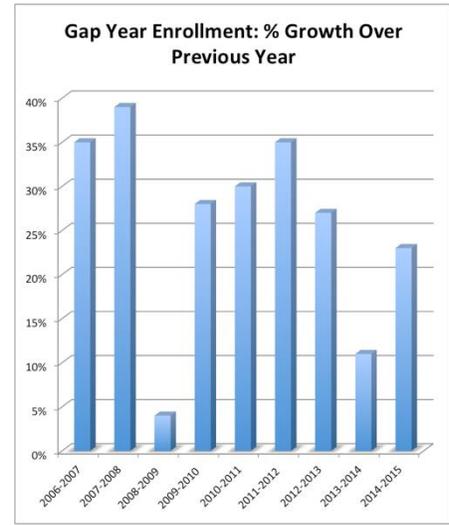
Gap Years

While vocational schools might be suitable for people who already have specific career plans in various specialized professions, they might not be the best choice for people who are still undecided about their futures. Since many people want to keep their options available, there are growing number of students taking a gap year before starting their postsecondary educations. Graduates can stay productive by traveling, volunteering, or working during their gap year. Sometimes, taking a gap year after graduation can be a very scary decision. The decision is filled with uncertainty and unpredictability. Also, the costs that may be required for a gap year are substantial and sometimes challenging to provide. However, as long as they remain productive during the gap year, they can learn from their experiences and take this knowledge with them into college or their other endeavors. Many colleges, including Harvard, have been encouraging student applicants to delay enrollment for a year of meaningful experiences to explore oneself (Dell'Antonia). Many students taking a gap year volunteer with international organizations such as the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps. Although criteria may vary, most programs provide a certain number of stipends while allowing them to partake in various tasks ranging from construction to teaching. Some programs even provide great

opportunities for students to travel internationally for various projects (Anderberg). Besides volunteering, many people use their gap year to travel around the world.

These experiences can be eye-opening to many, but they can be costly as well. One of the setbacks of this decision is financing students' own plans. Most programs provide little to no assistance for students, and some even require them to pay tuitions. If people choose to travel, they have to pay even more in order to cover the road fees and living expenses. Students may have to work to save money for their travels and spend minimal amounts of money every day to save money for their entire trip (Purvis). However, these challenges can help them become more socially independent later in life. Another trade-off for this choice is the risk of individuals never pursuing education afterwards. This is easily the biggest concern of the parents of these children as well. However, taking a gap year may help some graduates realize that they do not need to go to college to be

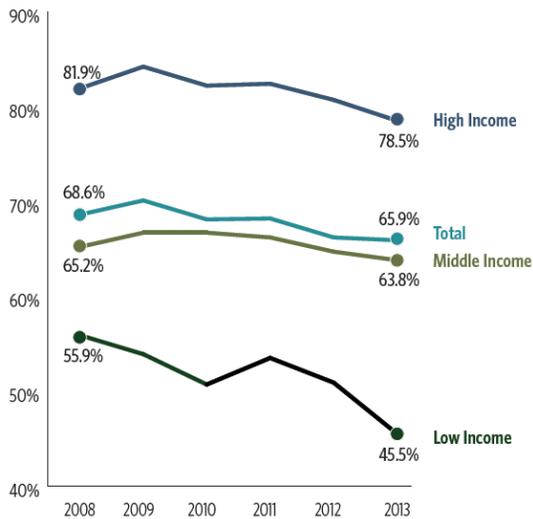
successful. If they still choose not to go back to school, they can still use the experiences and knowledge they gained to help them succeed later in life. Regardless of whether or not the graduates decide to go back to school, they still have the chance to gain once-in-a-lifetime experiences during their gap years. In fact, a report by Harvard College stated that "Its students speak of their year away as a 'life-altering' experience or a 'turning point,' and most feel that its full value can never be measured and will pay dividends the rest of their lives" (Fitzsimmons).



Entering the Workforce

While many individuals want to pursue higher education or travel the world after high school graduation, some people might just want to transition into the workforce right after high school. Doing so will allow them to become independent and begin providing for themselves. There is an undeniably negative stigma associated with entering the workforce immediately after high school graduation. Many people think that a high school diploma will not qualify them for high income jobs. While this is true in some cases, many high school graduates can earn comfortable livings immediately after graduation. Even if they start off with entry level jobs, commitment and hard work will undoubtedly lead to higher wages and better positions within their field. Another benefit of entering the workforce early is the early exposure to responsibility. These individuals will have a much clearer grasp of what it is like to work full time and take care of themselves. There are some undeniable tradeoffs for this option; many high school graduates have a hard time finding a job because of their lack of experience. Even when they do find jobs, many graduates do not earn livable wages immediately after high school. However, entrepreneurship is a great way to get around these obstacles. If other companies do not employ the individual, they can create a company and employ themselves. Many famous and wealthy entrepreneurs, such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg, did not graduate from a four-year university. Although it is not easy to maintain or expand a business, self-employment is one of the quickest ways to earn large sums of money without postsecondary education. Additionally, it is an ideal way to develop strong responsibility and managerial skills. While these skills are extremely valuable, they are not taught in most schools. Therefore, individuals who enter the workforce early will acquire this knowledge faster

1) College enrollment in two- and four-year institutions among all recent high school graduates has declined since 2008. But that drop has been most significant among the lowest-income students.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2008 through 2013.
 NOTES: Recent high school completers refers to individuals ages 16 to 24 who graduated from high school or completed a GED® test during the calendar year. Low income refers to the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes, high income refers to the top 20 percent of all family incomes, and middle income refers to the 60 percent in between.

than many college graduates. While it certainly is not easy, anyone with a computer, internet connection, and less than a hundred dollars can start a business. In fact, there are roughly twenty-two million people who are self-employed in the United States, and about eleven million of those people work from home (Anderberg).

However, the biggest drawback to this approach is the risk of failure. Unfortunately, the vast majority of new businesses fail. However, large risks reap large rewards, which is why some

of the wealthiest people on Earth were entrepreneurs. Every business, including global powerhouses like Apple and H&M, started at a small scale. Without taking risks, entrepreneurs cannot grow or develop their businesses. Statistics from the American Council on Education show that enrollment at four-year colleges has been consistently declining in recent years. (ACE). Obviously, more and more high school graduates are realizing that college is not the only option. Whether those individuals are attending vocational schools, taking gap years, or immediately entering the workforce, they are undoubtedly helping to eliminate the negative connotations that surround those choices. If high school graduates find that college is not for them, one of these options can ultimately help them get the most intangible value for their money.

Conclusion

As a society and economy that puts so much emphasis on a post-secondary education, it seems like it becomes harder and harder to attain this goal. This deliberation addresses three different approaches to this issue: restructuring the university's budget to lower tuition, increasing government involvement in post-secondary education, and encouraging students to make better decisions about post-secondary education.

If universities restructured their budgets the greatest benefit would be increased college affordability. Some lesser benefits would be that students would not have to take as many general education requirements, and they would have a better and more specialized educational experience. Unfortunately, restructuring the budget is almost synonymous with making cuts. With this approach, there would be less student services, grants, and faculty. The class sizes would also increase and there would be less money for maintenance and infrastructure. Restructuring the budget may be hard on the university, but the government may be able to provide more help.

Some ways that the government could be more involved in post-secondary education is implementing free tuition or reforming the structure of financial aid and the student loan system. If the government created policies addressing post-secondary education it would make college more attainable. In turn this would lead to more college graduates, less loan rates, and more qualified job applicants. If this were to be done, some drawbacks would include higher taxes, cuts in other areas of the national budget, and more students choosing majors in which job growth is either stagnant or decreasing. With more students with the ability to go to college, there be an increase in the amount of college dropouts.

Shifting away from the idea that college is the only route to success, it is important to mention that gap years, vocational, technical, and trade schools are all viable post-secondary options. There are many positive aspects to not attending a four-year institution. Students waste less time because they are doing something very specialized, it is less expensive, and there is a lower chance of the student dropping out. Plus, if more students attend alternative schools and are successful, it can help to eliminate the stigmas around vocational and trade schools. Some of the tradeoffs to encouraging the attendance of vocational schools are that university enrollment will drop, students who take a gap year may not return to school, lower incomes for students without a college degree, and their education is less wholesome.

There are many possible ways to find a better way to pay for a post-secondary education. These approaches are all vastly different and if there is any solution, it will be a combination of many ideas to the resolve this issue. The hard part is finding a balance between them all.

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