

# Let's Let Two Metaphors Help Us Understand a Reality of 21st Century Public Education



## **The 800# Gorilla of Skyrocketing College Costs Has Knocked a Sacred Cow Off Her Throne: Assured Success Via Pursuit of a 4-Year Degree**

Let's address immediately those who believe fervently in 4-year-degree pursuit, and view the above graphics as something like blasphemy. We should all believe fervently in the value of 4-year degrees. They are key to a vast number of job categories that were, are, and always will be critical to the success of our economy and our society. But in the golden era of 4-year-degree emphasis (circa 1945-1980), it was respected guidance counseling to encourage any graduate who could find a way to be accepted, to give college a try.

The sub-texts were (1) that any degree from any school was a legitimate avenue to greater career success, and (2) cost was low enough that a try and flame-out wouldn't break the family's bank.

Neither sub-text is valid today. Beginning around 1980, the U.S. job market began shifting from a manufacturing

focus to a knowledge focus, driven by the arrival of the digital age. The job market did care about relevant skill and the era of French Literature graduates earning burger-flipper wages was underway. Skyrocketing college costs have led to family disasters of crushing debt burden, sometimes without achieving the sought after degree because of cost-related dropout.

Inevitably American ingenuity recognized the opportunity for vocationally focused alternative paths, and those alternatives are proliferating.

Bottom line. four-year-degree pursuit should begin with clear-eyed assessment of goals, capabilities, motivation and life impact of the cost. If that analysis says GO, it should be pursued with vigor. But proven alternative paths should be respected, and should receive guidance counseling and a share of philanthropic support.

### **Let's Talk!**

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