

# The State of Higher Education

## INTRODUCTION

---

I have been personally concerned for a number of years with the increasingly high cost of college and university education and with the drift of academic content and bias being taught to our young people. I discovered I was not the only one with these concerns. Andrew Hacker, a professor at Queens College and Claudia Dreifus, who writes for the "Science Times" section of the New York Times and teaches at Columbia University, collaborated on a book titled, "Higher Education". It was published by Henry Holt and Company, LLC in 2010.

These two are obviously insiders in the higher education industry. They seem to be very objective in their assessment and are highly critical of many aspects of the industry. I was, however, surprised to learn that their reference to higher education only refers to liberal arts. Degrees in engineering, nursing, accounting, etc. are considered vocational training.

In any event, many of my observations and opinions are based on this book, except as otherwise noted. My considerations include what they refer to as vocational training leading to a bachelor's degree or better in addition to liberal arts schools.

In the following pages, I will make some recommendations aimed at improving the industry, but I by no means have all the answers. It is up to those in the industry to find the means to solve their problems and then act on them. If only they can become so motivated. Hacker and Dreifus apparently set out to do just that, but leaders throughout the industry have to pick up the baton.

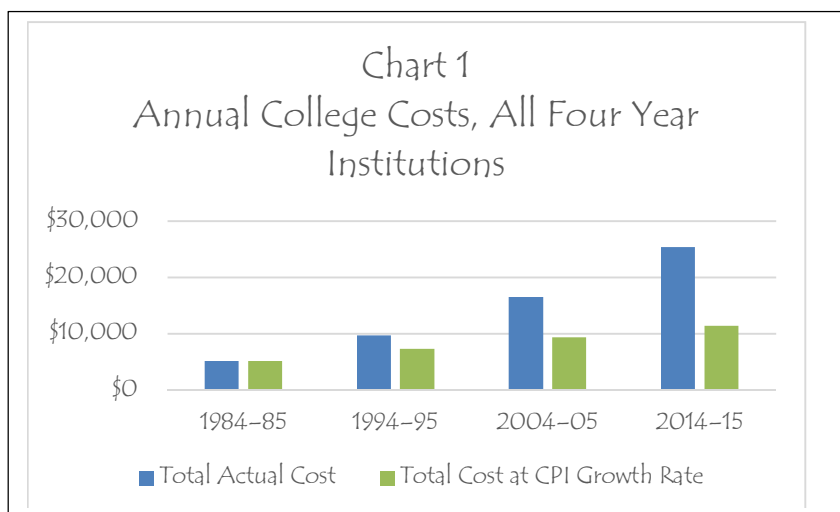
## PROBLEMS

---

### SOARING COSTS

The first big problem with higher education is the soaring costs. Witness the following tables and Charts.

| <b>Table 1</b>   |   |                               |                         |
|--|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Annual Total Cost incl. tuition, fees, room and board</b> |   |                               |                         |
| <b>All Institutions</b>                                      |   |                               |                         |
|  | Total Actual Cost   | Total Cost at CPI Growth Rate | Excessive Actual Growth |
| <b>1984–85</b>   | \$5,160   | \$5,160                       | \$0                     |
| <b>1994–95</b>   | \$9,728   | \$7,308                       | \$2,420                 |
| <b>2004–05</b>   | \$16,510  | \$9,366                       | \$7,144                 |
| <b>2014–15</b>   | \$25,409  | \$11,366                      | \$14,043                |
|  | SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Digest of Education Statistics, 2015 (NCES 2016-014), Table 330.10 |                               |                         |

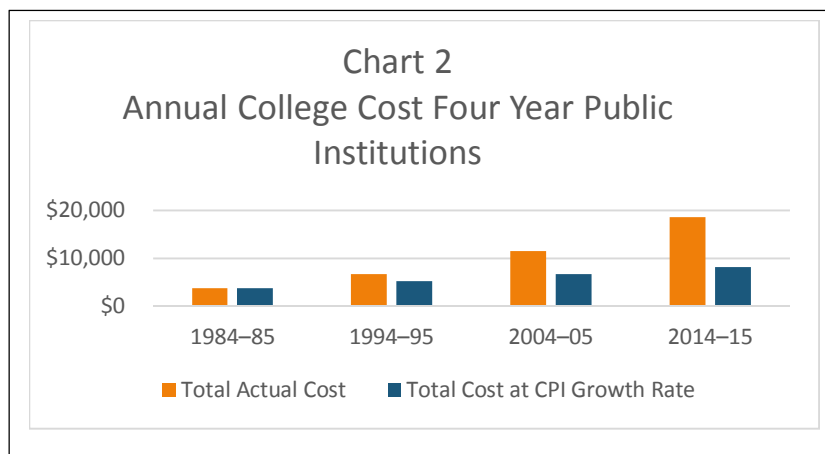


In Table and Chart 1 you will note that the actual costs of going to college has grown steadily over the last four decades and it has grown at a faster pace than the rate of inflation. Had the costs grown at the same pace as inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, they would have

totaled less than half the actual amount in 2014. This strikes me as an alarming statistic. We will look at the causes and possible remedies later. In the next two tables and charts we will see the same comparison for private schools and public schools.

| <b>Table 2</b><br><b>Average Total Cost incl. tuition, fees,</b><br><b>room and board</b><br><b>Public institutions</b> |                   |                               |                         |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
|   | Total Actual Cost | Total Cost at CPI Growth Rate | Excessive Actual Growth |
| 1984-85   | \$3,682           | \$3,682                       | \$0                     |
| 1994-95   | \$6,670           | \$5,215                       | \$1,455                 |
| 2004-05   | \$11,426          | \$6,683                       | \$4,743                 |
| 2014-15   | \$18,632          | \$8,111                       | \$10,521                |

[SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics \(2016\). Digest of Education Statistics, 2015 \(NCES 2016-014\), Table 330.10](#)

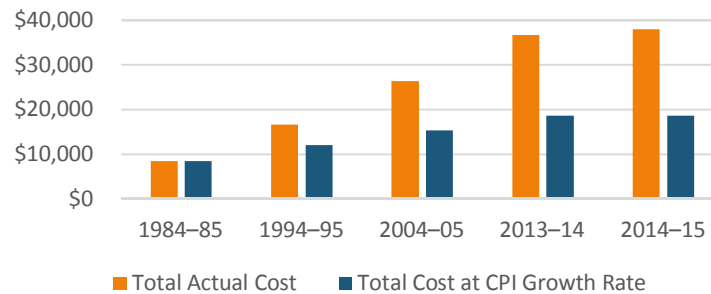


**Table 3**  
**Average Total Cost incl. tuition, fees,**  
**room and board**  
**Private Institutions**

|         | Total Actual Cost | Total Cost at CPI Growth Rate | Excessive Actual Growth |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1984–85 | \$8,451           | \$8,451                       | \$0                     |
| 1994–95 | 16,602            | \$11,969                      | \$4,632                 |
| 2004–05 | 26,260            | \$15,339                      | \$10,921                |
| 2013–14 | 36,587            | \$18,593                      | \$17,994                |
| 2014–15 | 37,990            | \$18,615                      | \$19,374                |

[SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics \(2016\). Digest of Education Statistics, 2015 \(NCES 2016-014\), Table 330.10](#)

**Chart 3**  
**Annual Total Cost of College Private**  
**Four Year Institutions**



Both private and public schools have experienced similar cost growth rates. Public schools enjoy taxpayer subsidies and therefore their costs are about half of those of the private schools. I must give the public schools some credit as they have held the cost increase rates similar to those of private schools even as they were losing taxpayer support. In the 1970s the public universities received 75% of their budgets from the state, now it's down to 25%. Perhaps this suggests that financial pressure stimulates cost control efforts. In either case, actual costs of going away to

school have grossly outpaced the rate of inflation. Public schools do have an excuse, but what about private institutions? What is their excuse?

IS A COLLEGE EDUCATION AFFORDABLE?

Let's look at college costs compared to family income. The following chart shows how total annual college costs have grown more rapidly than median family income as reported by the census bureau.

**Table 4**

| <b>College Costs Related to Household Income</b> |               |                      |                          |
|--|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Year   | Median income | Annual College Costs | Percent of Median Income |
|  |               |                      |                          |
| 2015   | \$70,697      | \$25,409             | 36%                      |
| 2014   | \$66,632      | \$24,699             | 37%                      |
| 2013   | \$63,815      | \$23,871             | 37%                      |
| 2012   | \$62,241      | \$23,011             | 37%                      |
| 2011   | \$60,974      | \$22,074             | 36%                      |
| 2010   | \$60,236      | \$21,126             | 35%                      |
| 2009   | \$60,088      | \$20,409             | 34%                      |
| 2008   | \$61,521      | \$19,363             | 31%                      |
| 2007   | \$61,355      | \$18,471             | 30%                      |
| 2006   | \$58,407      | \$17,451             | 30%                      |
| 2005   | \$56,194      | \$16,510             | 29%                      |
| 2004   | \$54,061      | \$15,505             | 29%                      |
| 2003   | \$52,680      | \$14,439             | 27%                      |
| 2002   | \$51,680      | \$13,639             | 26%                      |
| 2001   | \$51,407      | \$12,922             | 25%                      |
| 1995   | \$40,611      | \$9,728              | 24%                      |
| 1985   | \$27,735      | \$5,160              | 19%                      |

Source of Median Income: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-families.html>

Over this span of time college costs as a percentage of median family income has gone from nearly 20% to 36%. Clearly most families, without receiving scholarships, cannot pay to send their kid

to college out of current earnings. So they must have saved money beforehand. But suppose a family has two kids to educate, they would have had to save something in the order of \$25,000 times 8, or \$200,000. Most families with incomes at the median level of about \$71,000 could not or would not have saved that much. Bear in mind that half of the families will earn less than the median. And many of those above the median level income couldn't save that kind of money. So there seems to be no doubt that most families could not afford to send their children on to higher education, unless they are willing to incur debt.

#### STUDENT DEBT

And willing they are. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the following statistics paint a picture of what many consider to be a crisis. Current student debt is in excess of \$1.4 trillion in the United States. To put it into perspective this exceeds total credit card debt in the nation. Roughly 70% of college students incur debt. Forty-four million people are carrying student debt. Average debt at time of graduation was around \$30,000. Bear in mind that this is an average, so some students have lower debt but some have much greater amounts owing. The Bank further reports that about 10% student debt holders decide that either they can't or won't repay their loans.

As I see it, there is a double connection between high college costs and high student debt. It's obvious that the high cost causes many students to have to borrow. But more significantly, the ability to easily borrow money has allowed the colleges and universities to demand more and more for producing an education. It's called charging what the market will bear. I'm sure many in the academic world would scream bloody murder if they heard this. To them it's unthinkable that they would engage in such a base capitalistic practice.

Forbes tells us, that the majority of student loans are backed by the U.S. government through banks like Sallie Mae, or since 2010, by the Department of Education. Translation: the creditor in this scenario is the U.S. tax payer, who if students default on these loans will be subject to carry the burden of these loans. So, the unintended consequence of this generous, and I'm sure popular, easy credit action has put our federal government in the position of enabling the ever increasing college costs.

The higher education industry has developed an insatiable appetite for money. And we have become enablers by providing the resources which make it possible for colleges and universities to continue their rampant growth in costs.

I believe the higher education industry must re-invent itself to find less expensive ways of delivering education. If I were working in that field I would be embarrassed.

#### IS IT WORTH THE COST?

The following Table 5 displays the median income for people with varying levels of education.

Table 5

**Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers 25 years and over by educational attainment, 2005–09 annual averages**

| Year | Less than a high school diploma | High school graduates, no college | Some college or associate degree | Bachelor's degree and higher |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2005 | \$409                           | \$583                             | \$670                            | \$1,013                      |
| 2006 | \$419                           | \$595                             | \$692                            | \$1,039                      |
| 2007 | \$428                           | \$604                             | \$704                            | \$1,072                      |
| 2008 | \$453                           | \$618                             | \$722                            | \$1,115                      |
| 2009 | \$454                           | \$626                             | \$726                            | \$1,137                      |

Source: [Current Population Survey](#) | [Chart](#)

Per Forbes <https://www.forbes.com/sites/steveodland/2012/03/24/college-costs-are-soaring/#1017d2241f86> Dated March 2012

The data is not very current, but the differential patterns remain fairly constant from year to year, so it is probably representative of the current condition. Clearly higher education increases one's income level, as shown in Table 5. In 2009 the median weekly income for those who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher were 81% higher than for those with only a high school diploma. In monthly income, \$4889 with a bachelor's degree is a lot better than \$2692, with a high school diploma. But is the extra education worthwhile, in monetary terms, if significant debt is required?

It is useful to look at the influence of "what you study" has on earnings levels. Table 5-1, below, provides some useful insights.

We find a remarkable difference between the various major choices. Clearly, those courses of study that Drefus and Hacker refer to as vocational studies pay the most. The liberal arts majors are at the bottom. Education majors rank so low because most of them are, as teachers, working fewer weeks per year than the rest of us. The prudent student will take care in selecting his/her major course of study.

**Table 5-1**

| <b>First Year Salary by Type of Degree</b> |                            |                 |                          |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>BACHELOR'S DEGREE MAJOR</b>             | <b>2016 AVERAGE SALARY</b> |                 | <b>Percent Advantage</b> |
|  | <b>Per Year</b>            | <b>Per Week</b> |                          |
| Engineering                                | \$64,891                   | \$1,248         | 86%                      |
| Computer Science                           | \$61,321                   | \$1,179         | 76%                      |
| Math and Sciences                          | \$55,087                   | \$1,059         | 58%                      |
| Business                                   | \$52,236                   | \$1,005         | 50%                      |
| Agriculture/Natural Resources              | \$48,729                   | \$937           | 40%                      |
| Healthcare                                 | \$48,712                   | \$937           | 40%                      |
| Communications                             | \$47,047                   | \$905           | 35%                      |
| Social Sciences                            | \$46,585                   | \$896           | 34%                      |
| Humanities                                 | \$46,065                   | \$886           | 32%                      |
| Education                                  | \$34,891                   | \$671           | 0%                       |

Source:

<http://time.com/money/collection-post/3829776/heres-what-the-average-grad-makes-right-out-of-college/>

Next, we will take a look at various levels of debt and the impact it can have on the graduate's future life.

**Table 6**

| <b>Years Required to Repay Various levels of Debt</b> |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Debt</b>   | <b>\$20,000</b> | <b>\$30,000</b> | <b>\$40,000</b> | <b>\$50,000</b> | <b>\$60,000</b> |
| Monthly Repayment                                     | \$500           | \$500           | \$500           | \$500           | \$500           |
| Interest Rate   | 4%              | 4%              | 4%              | 4%              | 4%              |
| Years to Repay  | 3.7             | 5.7             | 7.8             | 10.2            | 12.8            |

|                   |     |     |      |      |      |
|-------------------|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| Monthly Repayment | 350 | 350 | 350  | 350  | 350  |
| Years to Repay    | 5.3 | 8.4 | 12.0 | 16.2 | 21.2 |

This table suggests that a reasonable amount of debt could be paid off in a relatively few years, if the borrower is willing to suck it up and commit something in the neighborhood of \$500 per month



toward debt repayment. If, on the other hand, they can only commit \$350 per month the repayment periods become much longer. With private college costs being nearly \$20,000 per year greater than public institutions it's clear that with many individuals, debt coming out of a private institution could be as much as \$40,000 greater, adding 10 to 15 years of debt repayment. So, it raises a genuine question whether attending a private school is worth the extra cost. I contend that in monetary terms, it is not.

I recognize that there are non-monetary values that a private institution might offer, e.g. religious teachings and moral atmosphere, ideological values such as those conservative teachings that draw students to Hillsdale College, for instance, etc. But, by and large, young people with limited means should be heading toward public institutions.

Despite all the woe cited above I conclude that higher education should be here to stay. In addition to the monetary benefits, a bachelor's degree or above generally provide opportunities for more interesting work atmosphere and more satisfying lives for many.

## CAUSES OF HIGHER COSTS

### Facilities

Colleges and universities compete for students. They want high achievers and they want students who can pay. One means of competing is to offer "first class" facilities. Hacker and Dreifus point out that Kenyon, a well-regarded private college in Ohio added a \$70 million "palace of a gym" which included a twenty lane pool, indoor tennis and squash, an all-weather running track, Wi-Fi internet, and two hundred pieces of exercise equipment. Who could resist such an attraction?

My alma mater, St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, a few years ago received a gift of a few million to build an up to date exercise facility. It was a gift, so what harm? The harm is the addition of operating costs which the college must bear. But perhaps the greatest harm is reflected in a comment I received from an alumnus of Gustavus Adolphus College, a direct competitor in St. Peter, MN. He said, "St. Olaf got a spiffy new exercise facility so now we need one too". So, St. Olaf's actions end up costing their peer institutions money also.

Brick and mortar have been an important element of the institutions for a very long time. Good looking facilities are part of the draw. Private schools place more emphasis on attractive architecture than public institutions. But they all consider up-to-date facilities to be a must in demonstrating the worth of their education. Heaven forbid that a school might lease classroom space in a strip mall or an empty apartment building. That would be deemed to suggest an inferior quality education was being offered.

### Faculty Salaries

Faculty salaries, not surprisingly, are the major cost item. So, we should take a look what's been happening on that front. As Hacker and Dreifus put it, "Say good-bye to Mr. Chips with his tattered tweed jacket; today's senior professors can afford Marc Jacobs." They point out that since the mid-1980s full professor's pay at Stanford has increased by 58% in constant dollars, North Carolina 56% and Duke 65%. Further, it's not unusual for a professor to receive in excess of

\$100,000 for a teaching schedule of 300 hours per year. And thanks to tenure, they can continue to receive these high salaries as long as they choose, with little or no review of performance. So, we might conclude that one of the major causes of the cost increase is faculty salaries.

It's interesting to note that Dreifus and Hacker conclude that the reason salaries have risen so dramatically is because, "the money has been there. Parents willingly paid the rising fees, alumni sent in donation, and colleges borrowed freely with distant payback dates. The idea also arose that the quality of a faculty could be gauged by how much its professors were paid." My guess is that competition for top name professors also played a role.

But during the same period, we have seen total college costs increase by 266% when measured in constant dollars. So, quite clearly professorial salaries are not the major culprit.

#### Administration

At many institutions, non-teaching positions account for as much as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total college staff. Dreifus and Hacker report that since 1976 the ratio of bureaucrats to students has literally doubled. I suppose there are many reasons "justifying" these overhead positions. Some, such as librarians and laboratory techs do support the teaching functions. But I suspect a number come from "strings" attached to government support and charitable foundation grants. For instance, a donor or the government may offer money provided the institution complies with certain stipulated standards, and a quarterly progress report must be submitted.

And some come from, what I call "drifting goals". For instance, the University of Arizona right here in Tucson recently added a new Vice Provost for Inclusive Excellence and Senior Diversity with a salary of over \$200,000. Essentially the job is to protect students' rights, i.e. protect them from being offended and, he claims, to foster exchange of ideas. One of his first acts was in response to the substantial "upset" over the results of the 2016 presidential election. He sent a memo to all faculty suggesting that when one student makes a comment that offends another, the offended party should say "ouch", and the offender should say "oops". Not fooling folks, that actually happened, not in the third grade but at the university.

Even more shockingly, during the recruiting process they found two, in their view, excellent candidates; so excellent that they hired them both. Thus, the VP has an assistant also pulling down a six-figure salary. Most higher education institutions have broadened their primary goals from that of providing a quality education and physical safety to now including protection of emotional sensitivities. (More on that subject later.) All of this type activity adds to the costs. Who knows how many other "fringe" functions have been added.

#### Other Niceties

As Dreifus and Hacker note, physical facilities have become more expensive. Dormitories once provided double deck beds, a military mattress and a battered old desk. At some schools students now get suites and private bathrooms. Cafeterias used to offer a set meal "eat it or leave it. Now there are food courts with specialized stations. Washington State University provides a jumbo Jacuzzi with room for fifty-three bodies. The University of Houston has a five-story climbing wall. The list of amenities goes on and on as the schools are caught up in the competitive amenities race.

Students are treated to a luxurious life, whether they can afford it or not. We make it all possible by assuring that there is an ample supply of money available to be borrowed.

#### Athletics

Sports teams, especially at division 1 schools, are expensive, especially basketball and football. The most successful teams are sometimes self-supporting. But most lose money. In most states, the highest paid public servant is either the head football or basketball coach. They typically make more than the president of the university and the governor of the state. Just plain shameful. I recently had the pleasure of playing a round of golf with a division 1 university football defensive coordinator. He opined that college coaches are overpaid.

Again, referring to Dreifus and Hacker, they report that about ten years ago a man named Eric Dexheimer of the *Austin American-Statesman* calculated that varsity sports at all colleges together run a deficit of \$3.6 billion.

Quite a few years ago my brother, Stanford, was chairman of the board of regents at Texas Lutheran College. Stan had been a good college football player and he loved the game. However, TLC was under some financial stress. Stan concluded that the football program was consuming a lot of money. So, he successfully shut down the program. I know it was a very painful decision for him. But he did the right thing and returned the college to a sound financial footing.

The excessive costs of varsity sports stem from, expensive facilities, high coaching staff compensation and the many athletic scholarships. Full-ride scholarships include tuition, books, fees, room and board. And these costs get shoved onto the students. Our local University of Arizona has a decent but aging football stadium. It wants a major facelift. Last year a \$200 annual student fee was proposed. There was such a hew-and-cry that the plan was abandoned. But this year they are back asking for \$100.

I have some radical ideas of how we might fix this problem, which you will see when we get to the solutions sections of this paper.

#### Research

Much research is conducted by university professors, to the general benefit of society. In theory, the cost of research is borne by grants and contracts paid by outside institutions such as foundations, commercial enterprises, and the government. But there is considerable evidence that it does not work out that way.

John V. Lombardi, a university professor and administrator, including a stint as president of Florida University, reports in his "A business model view of changing times in higher education"

"...when running several business models simultaneously, there is great opportunity for cost shifting from one component to another when the organization wants to discreetly cross subsidize activities. It thus becomes very difficult, if not impossible, for customers to understand exactly what they are paying for."

In other words, if a university is in the business of educating students and in the business of conducting research and in the business of operating competitive athletic teams, etc. there is ample

opportunity to shift costs from one enterprise to another. Often research costs are understated and teaching costs are overstated.

He goes on to recommend the use of cost accounting in which the costs of each product or program are accurately reported. In a system in which costs are transparent and cost shifting does not occur, the priorities and the balances will be determined by the collective priorities of the payers - students and parents, government, foundations, etc. Outcomes could be quite different from those currently defined by the providers! (Music to an old cost accountant's ears.)

Table 7, below, gives us a picture of where the funding for university based research comes from. We see that a substantial portion comes from the university resources, most probably comes from tuition. In 2014 almost 25% of the cost was borne by the universities, a percentage which was increasing each year. Effectively this money comes from tuitions, adding a greater load on the students. And the institution's share is growing.

**Table 7**

| Funding for research in higher education<br>Millions of Dollars |         |       |          |           |           |                   |               |                   |
|---|---------|-------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
|   | Federal | State | Business | Nonprofit | All other | TOTAL<br>EXTERNAL | Institutional | TOTAL<br>RESEARCH |
| 2010  | 37,475  | 3,852 | 3,198    | 3,740     | 1,048     | 49,313            | 11,940        | 61,253            |
| 2011  | 40,767  | 3,829 | 3,179    | 3,854     | 1,037     | 52,666            | 12,610        | 65,276            |
| 2012  | 40,140  | 3,695 | 3,271    | 4,023     | 968       | 52,097            | 13,633        | 65,730            |
| 2013  | 39,445  | 3,653 | 3,506    | 3,889     | 1,537     | 52,030            | 14,985        | 67,015            |
| 2014  | 37,923  | 3,869 | 3,725    | 3,980     | 1,905     | 51,402            | 15,754        | 67,156            |
| 4 year %<br>change  | 1.20%   | 0.44% | 16.48%   | 6.42%     | 81.77%    | 4.24%             | 31.94%        | 9.64%             |

Source: Changing Higher Education - A 2015 survey by NSF (National Science Foundation)  
<http://www.changinghighereducation.com/2016/08/the-high-cost-of-funded-research.html>

#### Law Suits

In our increasingly litigious society lawsuits lay a burden on the university and college finances. Dreifus and Hacker cite these examples:

- The University of Iowa paid \$226,000 to a professor who said he had been falsely accused of altering student evaluations.
- A University of Florida dean, who had been charged with sending libelous e-mails, was given \$517,000 to settle his claim.
- Two students who charged that they were sexually abused by Colorado football recruits received a joint award of \$2.8 million.

- LaSalle University settled a suit brought by a family for \$7.5 million, on behalf of their son, who sustained debilitating brain injuries while playing football for the school.
- A Charleston Southern professor, in a moonlighting stint, swindled local investors out of tens of millions; the university, which had been made a co-defendant, contributed \$3.9 million toward restitution.

I am not passing judgement on the appropriateness of these awards and settlements. Just pointing out that this is a cost that universities must bear.

The authors think that universities often settle too easily to avoid embarrassing trials.

## TENURE

Most of the comments in this section are attributable to Dreifus and Hacker.

While one definition of the word tenure represents the duration of one's engagement in an assignment. For professors, it has an entirely different connotation; guaranteed employment for life. This means no enforced retirement and no discharge except for the most egregious causes. They continue to work for as long as they choose, regardless of their capability levels. Their performance is never evaluated. The only other group that enjoys "lifetime employment" is federal judges.

The only caveat is that their institution must remain solvent. But colleges and universities are resilient. Even during the extended depression of the 1930s very few closed their doors. They can trim budgets when they must. In the 2009-2010 slump when budgets had to be trimmed it started at the bottom. The California system, for instance, cut hundreds of contingent instructors. The classes they had taught were cancelled and applying students were turned away. Some seniors couldn't find the courses they needed for graduation. But not one of the tenured professors was removed from the rolls. At worst, they suffered some unpaid furlough days.

The most common justification for tenure is "academic freedom". It is said that the public good is served when professors pursue the "truth" in their research and teaching. And certainly, that is a worthy goal for the academic community.

Dreifus and Hacker point out that tenure is not entirely fireproof. They cite five examples, the most notorious being the case of Ward Churchill. He upset a lot of people for having, outside of the classroom, called the people who were killed in the World Trade center "little Eichmanns". This quickly became a national news story and the general populous wanted his head. There was considerable political pressure on the University of Colorado. He was ultimately fired for academic misconduct on an unrelated matter. The point is, if a university really wants to get rid of a tenured professor, they can usually find a way. Tenure doesn't protect out of classroom behavior, but it does seem to protect in classroom behavior and performance. To my mind that's just backwards. In classroom performance is what is important and should be subject to evaluation.

Typically, the tenured staff equals 70+% of the teaching people. And they all tend to be highly paid. As a result, a relatively small portion of the payroll budget is left for lecturers and assistant professors. At Stanford, for instance, only 16% of the faculty budget goes to these folks, who do

the bulk of the teaching, with senior professors focusing on research. Many of them live from pay check to pay check hoping to get tenured status.

The quest for tenure proves to be a diversion from the teaching process. Dreifus and Hacker say, "To get past a tenure committee, assistant professors are increasingly expected to produce at least one book, several scholarly articles, present papers at conferences, teach large introductory courses, and perform service to the institution, the last mainly by sitting on committees. During what is commonly a six- or seven-year probation, few junior faculty are willing to try unconventional research or break with the orthodoxies of their discipline, espouse dissenting ideas, indeed do anything that might otherwise displease their seniors."

#### NON-TEACHING WORK

Besides teaching and conducting research faculties become very engaged in "helping run" the institution. Virtually all instructors are assigned to committees. I suspect this is largely the result of faculties believing that administrations cannot be trusted to make wise decisions regarding the operation of the school. Whatever the reason committee assignments add significantly to faculty workload and, I submit, distract from their real mission, teaching. Dreifus and Hacker found at one highly respected small college in Minnesota a total of 68 committees, not counting department committees. A sampling revealed the following:

- Accessibility Awareness Committee
- Faculty Compensation Committee
- Language Requirement Exemption Committee
- Animal Care and Use Committee
- Recreation Center Advisory Committee
- Junior Faculty Affairs Committee
- Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault Committee
- Committee on Convocation & Common Conversation

They state further that "There is a general consensus within the professoriate that administrators are a kind of class enemy and danger rather than facilitators of a joint enterprise." I conclude that faculties have entirely too much influence on the governance and operation of the institution.

#### IDLE TIME

Traditionally professors have received a sabbatical leave every seven years, that is they can go off and do whatever they please, completely unrelated to the university, and still receive full pay and benefits. But there is a trend, especially in the upper range schools to shorten the interval. For instance, in the year 2010 when Dreifus and Hacker were writing their book, Yale granted the sabbatical every 3<sup>rd</sup> year. At Harvard, untenured assistant professors got a fully paid year to complete a "promotion worthy book".

Given the fact that faculty payrolls are the largest cost component, its little wonder that tuition costs are so high.

Finally, I ask what other professions get such generous time off; medical doctors, engineers, corporate CEOs, lawyers, accountants, etc.? I think none of them. I would reason that if my enterprise can get along without me for a year, they might just figure out that they could get along without me period.

#### RESTRICTED SPEECH

There has been a growing trend to limit free speech on campuses around the country. It is not the norm, but certainly not uncommon for conservative speakers to be shutdown. In the less egregious cases their speeches are systematically boycotted. But more and more these speakers, who have been invited to a university sanctioned speaking date, are physically prevented from speaking their piece; persistent heckling, throwing of fruit and vegetables at the speaker, and rioting.

Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. *His website is [www.tsowell.com](http://www.tsowell.com).* In a posting in March 2017 he had this to say:

õ Many people seem shocked at the recent savagery of a mob of students at Middlebury College, who rioted to prevent Charles Murray from addressing a student group who had invited him to speak. They also inflicted injuries requiring hospitalization on a woman from the faculty who was with him.

õWhere have all these shocked people been all these years? What happened at Middlebury College has been happening for decades, all across the country, from Berkeley to Harvard. Moreover, even critics of the Middlebury College rioters betray some of the same irresponsible mindset as that of the young rioters.

õThe moral dry rot in academia ô and beyond goes far deeper than student storm troopers at one college.

õFrank Bruni of the New York Times, for example, while criticizing the rioters, lent credence to the claim that Charles Murray was "a white nationalist." Similar ô and worse ô things have been said, in supposedly reputable publications, by people who could not cite one statement from any of Dr. Murray's books that bears any resemblance to their smears.

õAcademia, however, is ground zero in the war against people whose ideas go against the current political correctness. The virtual monopoly of the political left, on campuses across the country, allows all sorts of things to be attributed to people the left disagrees with, irrespective of whether those people have ever said anything resembling what they are alleged to have said.

õThe professors don't usually riot against people whose ideas they disagree with, because they can just dismiss those ideas, with some characterization that there is no one on hand to challenge.

øProfessor William Julius Wilson of Harvard, for example, said of Justice Clarence Thomas, "He'll say he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps. I say I was in the right place at the right time.ø

øJust where did Justice Thomas say that he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps? The central theme of his autobiography, titled "My Grandfather's Son," credits the wisdom of the grandfather who raised him as what saved him.

øNuns who taught him in school were brought to Washington, at his expense, to be present to see him sworn in as a Justice of the Supreme Court, to see that their dedicated efforts on his behalf had not been in vain.

øBut has anyone ever asked Professor Wilson on just what he based his claim about Justice Thomas? The central tragedy of academia today is that you don't have to have anything on which to base dismissals of people and ideas you disagree with.

øThis attitude is not unique to William Julius Wilson or to Harvard. On the west coast, Professor Lanny Ebenstein of the University of California at Santa Barbara has included economists Stephen Moore and Walter Williams, as well as television host John Stossel, among those "committed to the welfare of the top few.ø

øProfessor Ebenstein has every right to disagree with these individuals on economic or other issues. But that is very different from attributing to them a commitment to "the welfare of the top few."

øIt so happens that I have read books by all three, without finding any preoccupation with the welfare of the affluent or the rich. I have known Walter Williams for more than 40 years. When we both lived on the east coast, we and our wives often met socially.

øIn all that time, neither in public nor in private did I ever hear Walter Williams express the slightest concern for the welfare of the affluent or the rich. Innumerable times I heard him focus his concern on the well-being of people like himself, from a poverty background. That concern was also expressed in deeds as well as words.

øBut who is going to ask Professor Ebenstein to cite the basis for his claim?

øWhy should we expect students to welcome debate about differences of opinion, when so many of their professors seem to think cheap shot dismissals are all you need? Lacking their professors' verbal dexterity or aura of authority, students use cruder methods of dismissing things they disagree with.

øSo long as academia talks demographic "diversity" and practices groupthink when it comes to ideas, we have little reason to expect better of student mobs that riot with impunity.ø

I expect that all of us have heard of our universities' establishment of free speech zones. Time.com had this to say about it in October 2016:



“University campuses are now home to a plethora of speech restrictions. From sidewalk-sized ‘free-speech zones’ to the criminalization of microaggressions, America’s college campuses look and feel a lot more like an authoritarian dictatorship than they do the academic hubs of the modern free world. When rolling an inflated free-speech ball around campus, students at the University of Delaware were halted by campus police for their activities. A Young Americans for Liberty leader at Fairmont State University in West Virginia was confronted by security when he was attempting to speak with other students about the ideas he believes in. A man at Clemson University was barred from praying on campus because he was outside of the free-speech zone. And a student at Blinn College in Texas abolished her campus’ free-speech zone in a lawsuit after administrators demanded she seek special permission to advocate for self-defense.”

Check it out at <http://time.com/4530197/college-free-speech-zone/>

And the higher education institutions used to be bastions of free speech. Where is academic freedom for the students? How far we have fallen.

#### QUALITY OF THE PRODUCT

There has been a pervasive understanding that the quality of the higher education experience has been declining. The *Economist*, which can be found at <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21567373-american-universities-represent-declining-value-money-their-students-not-what-it>, had this to say:

“a federal survey showed that the literacy of college-educated citizens declined between 1992 and 2003. Only a quarter were deemed proficient, defined as ‘using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential’ Almost a third of students these days do not take any courses that involve more than 40 pages of reading over an entire term. Moreover, students are spending measurably less time studying and more on recreation. ‘Workload management’ however, is studied with enthusiasm” students share online tips about ‘blow off’ classes (those which can be avoided with no damage to grades) and which teachers are the easiest-going.”

#### ACADEMIA BIAS

It’s well known that conservatives believe college faculties lean heavily toward the left and let their bias influence the thinking of their students. Dreifus and Hacker had some interesting observations in this regard. They point out that at Stanford and UC Berkley faculties registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a 9:1 ratio. For philosophy professors, it was a 14:1 margins with sociologists being even higher. With the economists, a group we expect to reason rationally, the margin was down to 3:1. But as to the question of whether the faculties influence their students in thinking of political issues, they had the following observations. Referring to a Pew Research study they found that 40% of college graduates believe that abortion should be a generally available option while only 28% of high school graduates held that view. Asked about homosexuality, 58% of college graduates believed that people were born that way, while only 30%

of high school graduates shared that opinion. This does suggest that somehow college students are influenced to adopt liberal positions.

I could go on airing my complaints, but you're probably saying enough already. I hope you're convinced that we have a big-time problem.

## SOLUTIONS

---

I don't pretend to be wise enough to provide all the solutions required to fix this broken system, but I do have a few ideas. The people who are smart enough are those in the universities and colleges. **It is my contention that higher education is an industry that needs to re-invent itself.** They have the brains to do it if they can find the will.

### High Costs of Instruction

*Online.* One step in the right direction will be to expand distance learning opportunities. Many institutions are beginning to offer online courses. This should be expanded aggressively as it could produce a number of cost reduction benefits.

- a. For starters, it would allow more students to study from home and save living costs that are usually equal to or in excess of tuition.
- b. It could spread costs of a top of the line professor over more students. Instead of lecturing 100 students in a classroom, he could be reaching 1,000 or more. I could envision a system where professors do not work for any one institution, but are free to sell their courses to any number of institutions. That would introduce the concept of competition between professors. The students would be assured of the quality of the course by the fact that it would be offered (sanctioned) by the university. Students would be advised, have their questions answered and be graded by lower priced people, such as graduate assistants at each university, who would operate within the parameters of guidelines set up by the professor. (I don't look for this practice to be widely adopted in my lifetime).
- c. Some courses could be taught with interactive computer programs. First year algebra could be taught, almost entirely, online. Subject matter would be introduced online, students would take a computer based quiz after each lesson. The computer would grade the quiz and prompt the student on each missed question. Which would go on until he/she gets it all correct before moving on to the next section. Graduate students could monitor each student's progress and counsel them when required. Major exams would be written in a proctored setting, which the university would have to have arranged in each community.

*Student Loans.* I would end all subsidized student loans. If a family/student needs to borrow money, go to a conventional lending source. If they can't qualify for a loan or abide by the terms of a loan, then go to plan B, which might be to get a job and go to school part-time, get a part-time job, live at the parents' home while going to school, etc. But the point of this is that if we dry up the source of easy education money the colleges and universities will find

ways of reducing their prices. I recognize that this will cause considerable inconvenience and turmoil for a time, but it will ultimately lead to success.

#### Research

My solution here is quite simple. Undergraduate students would be taught by "teaching" professors. They would have no research or publishing responsibilities. Professors who are particularly good at teaching and who love teaching would not be distracted by other obligations. Publishing would be removed as one of the criteria in hiring and compensating teachers.

The professors who teach graduate students would also pursue research. The graduate students would assist with the research projects for a modest stipend and as part of their studies.

#### Athletics

As you read these next recommendations, please bear in mind that I love watching college athletics, especially football, basketball, and baseball, which I refer to as the major sports. But at division I schools these sports have become commercial enterprises which provide entertainment for the fans and pre-professional training for the athletes. So, I would treat those three men's sports as commercial enterprises.

- They would operate as independent "club" teams, having, with one exception, no direct connection with the university.
- Players might or might not be students.
- Some of the players would be paid some form of compensation. But some would probably not be paid.
- University students could try out for the teams and if good enough might even be paid.
- Since the universities already own the stadia and arenas, the clubs would lease the facilities from the university, paying a reasonable rent. The clubs would be responsible for the upkeep and operation of the facilities. They would be responsible for any improvements or expansions, and probably would eventually take over ownership of the facilities.
- The universities would grant no athletic scholarships for any sports. Not for men, not for women, not for track, not for volleyball, not for gymnastics, etc.
- The universities would, at their discretion operate some or all of these minor sports, minimizing as much as possible the financial drain on the university. The purpose of these sports would be entertainment and relaxation for the student body and the physical development and satisfaction of the participants.

I must admit that I don't know how these proposals would "pencil out" so they may or may not be financially feasible. But I would like people in the know to give it a serious look.

#### Scholarships

I would limit scholarships to "needs" based. No academic scholarships. I don't believe that those students who are able to pay, should place a drain on university resources. And no athletic scholarships. It might be argued that some private schools have endowments that pay for the scholarships, and I am sure this is true. However, I submit that if the endowment proceeds are

utilized help to defray operating expenses, tuition costs will be lower and fewer students will be in need of a scholarship.

#### Tenure

Dreifus and Hacker recommend doing away with tenure. In its place, they would put a system wherein professor's performance is subject to review periodically, say every five years. I don't know why professors shouldn't be subject to review at any time, much as are most professionals who toil for a living.

#### Free speech

Students need to stop worrying about being offended, listen to opposing views, and engage in civilized debate. Students will change their ways if the faculty stops fostering the "offense" phobia. Whatever happened to the advice we were given when I was growing up; "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"?

Of course, those who are given to using words that are known to be inflammatory must choose less offensive words

How to make all of this happen? I have no idea, but someone must have a good idea.

#### Bias

I don't know how to stop the bias thing. It is self-perpetuating since to become a professor one must go through the biased system. I suppose more on-line learning from a distance might reduce the biasing influence.

#### Sabbaticals

If I were king, sabbaticals would universally be limited to one semester every 7 years. I'm not convinced they are needed at all.

#### Committees

Committees would generally be limited to departmental and curriculum related assignments. Leave the running of the institution up to the administration. That's their job.

#### Bare Bones

We need institutions without all the frills; schools with dormitories that sleep at least two to a room with a bathroom down the hall, schools without expensive exercise facilities, etc. The problem is that existing schools already have many of these frills and it's tough to get rid of them. So, solutions in this regard are likely to come from new institutions.

#### SIGNS OF CHANGE

Dreifus and Hacker, in their 2010 book, cite some encouraging signs of change, and I quote:

Relative to utilizing technology, "MIT has taken the lead, having filmed almost 2,000 of its classes. This courseware, as it is called, is now a widely used supplement. A professor in Kansas can project an MIT luminary on a screen to cover cutting-edge material."

Broadening a professor's reach, "John Gerassi often teaches in three classrooms simultaneously at the University of Hawaii. While he is physically with one group in Oahu, he has monitors beamed on others on the Maui and Kauai campuses. Via sound equipment, all three join in discussions. "Needless to say, three at once brings a substantial cost-saving."

And another. "Professors in Mathematics and the sciences now send students to what can be called techno-tutoring, eliminating section once led by salaried assistants. Students call up programs, which guide them through formulas and equations, telling them to try again if they get a step wrong. "Many undergraduates say they find programmed explanations clearer than those given by graduate students."

They cite another instance at Florida Gulf Coast University, a relatively newly established school. They require all students to complete a survey course, "Understanding Visual and Performing Arts." When first established, in an effort to reduce costs, the course was taught by adjuncts hired from the local area. The results were unsatisfactory. Then they discovered on-line learning. The course is now taught entirely by interactive computer programs, supported by a traditional textbook. The only human intervention is in the reading and grading of reports and exams by "preceptors." Preceptors don't necessarily live in the area. They must have a bachelor's degree and received their training for this job is via on-line manuals. Apparently, the system works well.

## CONCLUSIONS

---

- It appears that there are many changes in the right direction taking place.
- But, we have yet to see a general lowering in education costs.
- We need a revolution in the industry

## DESERT HIGHLIGHT

---

Arizona readers may be interested to note that Dreifus and Hacker placed Arizona State University in their top ten favorite schools, not necessarily the tops academically, but their favorites for a variety of reasons. What they liked about ASU was its vibrancy and openness to innovative ideas. Students are offered a broad variety of choices. They were surprised that a mega university could display so much excitement. They credit this to Michal Crowe who has been president for about 15 years.

Respectfully Submitted

Gilmore R. Tostengard  
July 2017

