College Students Do Not Get Their Money's Worth

by Phyllis Schlafly

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When I worked my way through college in the 1940s, tuition was $200 to $250 a year. My children's tuition was $2,000 to $2,500 a year, and my grandchildren's college education each cost $20,000 to $40,000 a year for tuition alone.

College is so expensive that only about half of today's college graduates think their degree was worth the cost, according to a survey by Gallup-Purdue. The more debt the student incurs, the more likely he is to doubt that he received his money's worth.

The total amount of student debt in the United States is a staggering $1.2 trillion, which exceeds even the annual discretionary spending of the entire United States government, including military spending. College debt burdens more than 40 million Americans, of whom more than 4 million are in default on their student loans.

Student loan debt is now more than 50% higher than total credit card debt held by American consumers. Many students are saddled with more than $50,000 in obligations upon graduation, without any good job prospects that would enable them to pay down that debt.

While college costs have skyrocketed, the value of the experience has declined. For example, free speech has become an endangered species at most colleges, and conservative commencement speakers are almost unheard of at public universities.

Liberal Hollywood actors and Democratic politicians are perennial picks as speakers on Commencement Day, and this spring's ceremonies are no exception. A study last year found that liberal speakers outnumbered conservatives by a six-to-one margin for commencement addresses at the top 100 universities, and if the study had compared liberal to social conservative speakers the imbalance would have been even greater.

New terminology is needed to justify the rampant censorship that is imposed by liberals on college campuses today. A "safe space" is an area on campus where conservatives are not allowed to speak freely, and a "trigger warning" is an alert that something politically incorrect is about to follow.

The Obama Administration, through the federal Department of Education, is partly responsible for the vanishing amount of free speech on campus. Under the George W. Bush Administration, a federal standard had protected free speech by proclaiming that "the mere expression of views, words, symbols or thoughts that some person finds offensive" could not alone constitute harassment.

But in 2013 Obama changed that standard to expand the concept of sexual harassment to include words that are merely "unwelcome." Liberal colleges then widened this further to include as prohibited "unwelcome" speech anything that might offend with respect to any of these vast categories: gender, race, veteran status, and religion.

The test of what constitutes harassment is no longer objective, but is subjective based on how the listener views the words spoken. If a professor or even another student says something that is unwelcome, then it could constitute harassment under the Obama rule.

The result has been a paralysis in discussion and debate at many colleges. Far from being a dynamic environment encouraging independent thinking, colleges have become mental straight-jackets that suffocate the minds of the students.

Choice of a major can make a big difference as to whether the college experience is a waste of time, or something that might lead to a good job. Anthropology, Film, and Fine Arts are rated by Forbes magazine as three of the worst college majors, and to those I would add Women's and Gender Studies, which not only fail to teach an employable skill but also mislead students into disastrous ideologies.

Good majors can be pursued in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), but even there the future is not as rosy as it should be. Employers tap into foreign labor in those fields, exploiting the H-1B visa and other programs to hire workers who are bound to employers like indentured servants, and more profitable than American college graduates.

In medicine, large health systems such as the Mayo Clinic are bringing in foreigners to practice medicine in the United States. Minnesota reportedly has more than 400 immigrant physicians who are not licensed to practice medicine yet, but plan to be.

There’s a shortage of good residency programs for Americans who graduate from medical school, who are then unable to obtain the training necessary to start their careers. Yet employers are bringing in foreigners to fill some of those residency positions, which is bad policy for American physicians and patients alike.

The big majority of students in college today are women rather than men, in contrast with a generation ago. But many of those women will want to choose careers of homemaking rather than 9-to-5 jobs in the workforce, raising the question of whether it was worth it for them to incur debt of $50,000 or more in going to college, debt that they cannot get rid of even by declaring bankruptcy.

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