



UPEI's recent protest has brought student concerns over rising costs of higher education to the front of our local newspapers again. Last year, I offered a possible solution to this situation, one that reflected the reality of this era of fiscal restraint. I would like to offer it again.

Step one would have the administration announce that on a given date, say September of 2000, most students will be required to cover the full costs of their education. I say most students because some of us will be allowed to go for free. Anyone with an average of 80% or more will have a full tuition scholarship that would cover all courses, books and fees. Everyone else pays. If you have the scholarship and your marks drop below the required average, then the next year you pay. If you pay one year and make the golden standard, then the next year you go for free. Simple.

Next, governments must take back control of the student loans from banks. They then issue loans with only 2 percent interest and make them non-dischargeable. This means that you are stuck with your loan for the rest of your life. If you don't want to saddle yourself with a massive loan, then you will have to remain in the work force until you save the money to come.

My final condition is this: the university must institute a minimum age requirement for admission. No one under 21 years of age on the first day of registration will be permitted

to study effective September 2000. Anyone at university before that date who doesn't qualify may continue, but future high school students must wait. This will benefit future students in two ways.

First, it is no secret that many of us were not mature enough to start university when we did. We went from seventeen years of dependance to absolute freedom in three months. The resulting effects upon our marks, not to mention our livers, have made university students that butt of comedians' jokes for decades. We need a few years to taste the real world before we realize the value of an education.

Second, the extra four years will allow those of us who do not have an 80 percent average after high school to save the money required for first year's tuition. This will lower the number of first year students who enter into debt to experience an education that they do not properly understand. After their first year, if they are set on continuing, then government loans are their for their use. I assume that most students, though, would work until they can afford to pay themselves.

The final results? The number of graduates with B.A.'s will drop significantly, thereby making the degrees worth more due to an increased demand. This will take time, as that there is a current glut, but eventually, though, a B.A. will give us the same benefits it gave our parents.

Also, the university will

no longer be a place to bide one's time until goals are found. Students will have to be very serious about pursuing a degree if they do not have the money or the marks. Once enrolled, though, there will be a great deal of motivation to perform at one's best. This means that only three groups of people will be able to get degrees: the very rich, the very smart, and the very dedicated. In my opinion, the last two groups are the only ones who deserve them. Reality dictates that the first group is going to get them regardless.

What of those people who do not get a degree? They will continue to have the option of pursuing an education at colleges that teach necessary and important practical skills. Many of these graduates will go on to earn decent money as computer programmers, hospitality managers, and other skill-oriented professions. Their potential earnings will remain as great as they remain today, just not as high as those with academic degrees.

Have I described a society of have and have-nots? True, the educated will become the elite of society, but they already are. Independent entrepreneurs will still start as many businesses as before, and jobs will continue to be created. Doors will be closed to some and open to others. What I have described, then, is reality -- with one catch.

It will be a reality where a degree is worth something again.

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