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Opinion Editorial Writing Sample

The College Conundrum

College is a widely cherished institution in America. It provides a bridge from adolescence to the responsibilities of adult life. A traditional four-year stay offers opportunities for academic development, workforce preparation, and cultivating meaningful relationships. But with rising tuition costs and intense sociopolitical strife on campus, many are reconsidering higher education's value proposition. Graduates leave campus lacking basic historical knowledge, professional maturity, and even practical life skills. Is college a worthy investment, or a pricey rite of passage that underdelivers?

Democratic lawmakers champion collegiate subsidies and student loan forgiveness. They see education as the answer to everything; the more time students sit in lecture halls reading textbooks, the better. A college degree is considered essential in combating income inequality – but it doesn't. A [bachelor's degree](#) nets you 65% and more than a high school graduate, whereas a master's degree nets 100% or more. Gen Z wants free college, but why should those not in college subsidize those in college? Parents invest in their kids' academic performance, not their consumer experience.

Here are some stories from recent years highlighting attempts to improve the consumer experience of college students. [Texas Tech](#) has one of the largest waterparks in the United States. [University of Missouri's](#) recreation center has a lazy river inspired by the Playboy Mansion. The [University of Wisconsin](#) removed a large boulder for symbolizing racism. [Brandeis](#)

[University](#) requires a trigger warning before using the phrase, trigger warning. [NYU](#) has a “Bias Response Line” for students to report biased professors. And even internationally, [Oxford](#) banned applause, dubbed it a “microaggression,” and replaced the gesture with jazz hands.

Colleges nationwide also sport large quantities of administrative staff. [Yale](#) has roughly 5,400 administrative jobs, and [Stanford](#) has 11,252 jobs deemed "managerial and professional staff." Professors, on the other hand, do not experience good job security. [US colleges](#) hire more than 70% of professors as "Non-Tenure-Track,” similar to the job security of an independent contractor (i.e., plumber or electrician). My alma mater, [Virginia Commonwealth University](#), offers non-tenure track faculty “terminal contracts” due to budget restrictions. The first year out of three years in a professor’s terminal contract is their audition year. A professor meeting or exceeding performance expectations earns the additional two years of employment.

Academic outcomes raise further questions. The [United States](#) is ranked 18th in science literacy, 13th in reading, and 37th in math worldwide. In [2022](#), the country issued more undergraduate degrees in performing arts than in math, science, or computer information. That isn't [appealing](#), given students got A's 15% of the time around the 1960s, whereas today, 45% of college students earn A's. Students also have [buyer's remorse](#) about their degrees. 44% of college graduates regret their chosen major: liberal arts, sociology, education, communications, journalism, and general studies.

The financial stakes are high for students, parents, and other taxpayers alike. Since [1985](#), tuition has increased by over 404%. The [National Taxpayers Union](#) calculates that canceling student debt hikes taxes by \$2,500. The [Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget](#) estimates that Joe Biden’s student debt cancellation policies “...will cost a combined \$870 billion to \$1.4 trillion.” Furthermore, a [CNBC](#) survey on student loan forgiveness applicants shows 73% would

spend their extra money on "non-essential" costs (vacation, alcohol, smartphones), 52% on clothing, and 46% on fine dining.

Pennsylvania Governor [Josh Shapiro](#) signed an executive order in March 2023, removing 4-year degree requirements for state government jobs. His legislation models that maybe employers dial back degree requirements for entry level jobs, putting higher valuations on experience, skill set, drive, and resilience. Shapiro's legislation or my message doesn't suggest that higher education lacks any value – but it might not be for everyone. That seems counterintuitive given that college is marketed as the main path to a respectable future. US colleges need some deep soul searching, while bolstering affordability, academic excellence and respectful open inquiry. Not doing so widens the class divide between haves and have-nots, robs opportunities towards upward mobility, and ultimately makes hard work not worth it.