

College Low Expectations Game

Cost Students, Parents & Taxpayers Thousands of Dollars

During a recent conversation with a client, he shared with me his frustration when registering his son for his first year at Big 10 University. This university would only allow his son to register for 12 hours. The university's position was the "expectation" that 12 hours was very, very difficult and for him to expect more as a parent was not realistic.



I suggested for my client to have a new conversation with the university and simply ask the following question: Since my son is earning a 4-year degree, how can he do that only taking 12 hours per semester? With most 4-year degrees average 120 hours, taking 12 hours per semester requires 5 years (12x2x5). Given that some required courses are only offered once a year and may have additional criteria, 5 years can easily stretch into 5.5 or 6 years. This expectation game of taking only 12 hours per semester may be one of the answers as to why the national average is 5.3 years to earn a four-year degree.

Many parents are planning for their children to attend a post-secondary experience at a local junior college, a public or private university. In 2003-04 academic year, the average tuition investment for one year in a four-year public college or university was \$4,694. This represented a 14% increase over the previous year. Room and board costs could increase that investment by \$10,636 for a total of \$15,330. With books, supplies and additional fees, this total could increase by another \$1,000 to \$3,000. Given that college costs continue to rise much greater than the cost of inflation, each additional year becomes more expensive than the previous one.

Not only are colleges costing students and parents directly with the additional one to two years, they are also affecting the future of these young people. If the students agree with the university's expectation game and stay in college another year or two, they are losing earning dollars and two potential years of gainful experience. This loss affects their ability to move up the corporate ladder.

Parents suffer because college is expensive even when planned and parents have other needs to direct those college dollars. By not being proactive and insisting on at least 15 hours, the parent's financial future is jeopardized.

Taxpayers are also losing in this game of low expectations because young people who aren't in the workforce full time are not contributing to significantly to the local, state and federal taxes especially social security. Communities suffer because loss of income contributes to negative economic development.

The only winners in this game of Low Expectations are the private college, public universities and their professors who incidentally many of whom are paid with taxpayers' dollars. Given that the U.S. is graduating the same percentage of college graduates as in the early 50's, this game of low expectations demonstrates when you set the bar low, you receive low performance.

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