

# Other ideas of note:

Thoughts on cost-cutting gleaned  
from unpublished essays

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When Lumina Foundation for Education issued its *Call for Solutions*, it hoped for a variety of responses from people with differing stakes in the college cost problem. The submitted essays indeed spoke with many voices. Although the responses differed and the solutions varied, one thing was clear: The cost of a college education is simply too high. On this point, there is no debate. Although only eight essays were selected for publication, many others offered ideas that deserve mention in this conversation; this final chapter will summarize several of the most thought-provoking ideas from those essays not chosen for publication.

Several respondents noted that a partial solution may be found in our nation's high schools. Like Bill Coplin and Virginia Gov. Mark Warner, Nancy Hoffman suggests that dual-enrollment programs in which high school students earn college credits may reduce college costs. She describes

Florida's success with its dual-enrollment program, in which all the state's community colleges and four-year institutions must participate. However, Hoffman writes that the implementation of most dual-enrollment programs reflects parent or teacher pressure to challenge advanced students. She suggests that

other students could also benefit, yet Maine is the only state specifically to have targeted academically underprepared students for its concurrent-enrollment programs. The more college credit is earned while the student is in high school, the less time and money he or she must spend on campus as a college student.

When high school students apply to college, admissions and financial aid decisions engender another set of cost issues. Roy F. Heynderickx contends that merit-based discounting of tuition must be eliminated. Heynderickx argues that, because of merit aid, full classrooms no longer mean financial stability

for most institutions, which necessitates higher tuition rates. Heynderickx proposes an association of college presidents, CFOs, admissions officers and financial aid staff address this issue; the collaboration, he suggests, is essential to navigating concerns over antitrust law. Another suggestion for financial aid strategies comes from J.C. Strauss, who writes that selective independent colleges might agree jointly to moderate tuition costs. Strauss points out that parents and students likely would be more drawn to these institutions. He makes the unlikely but intriguing suggestion that federal monies compensate institutions that pursue such a strategy for some of their lost tuition revenue.

Admissions considerations are complex. Harry C. Stille says the quality of admitted students is more important than their financial means. Thanks to what Stille calls

higher education "cheerleaders," pursuit of a four-year college degree is almost *de rigeur* in the United States today. Stille accuses colleges and universities of capitalizing on this standard, pursuing enrollment over quality and serving only their pocketbooks in the process. Stille points to the increasing numbers of unprepared college freshmen and wonders

why institutions continue to accept these students, especially because underqualified students are expensive for the institution, necessitating additional attention and services from faculty and staff. Moreover, more selective institutions have higher retention and graduation rates. Quality, Stille writes, should be the bottom line.

Like Timothy M. Kuehnlein Jr. and Olin Joynton of Alpena Community College in Michigan, Stille suggests that many students would benefit from two-year colleges. Stille therefore proposes that some four-year institutions be transformed into two-year schools that

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would provide technical and job training and thus better serve students who are ill prepared for the academic rigors of a four-year college. Matching students to the learning environments best suited for them would save not only their money but taxpayers' as well.

Once students are on campus, they can reduce their costs with on-campus employment. This idea is not new; however, Forrest M. Stuart sheds new light on the concept. Stuart describes Rhodes College's innovative Student Associate Program (SAP) as more than just a traditional work-study program. SAP significantly reduces tuition by allowing students to fill staff positions. The program benefits the university by saving it the cost of a regular employee's salary and benefits, and students gain meaningful work experience designed to complement their classroom experiences.

For many institutions, retaining students is a key concern. In part because of high college costs, more than half of students who begin college at one institution finish at another, and these transfers sometimes occur with little or no planning. Michael Riccards therefore suggests a broad partnership that would create "articulation compacts" among colleges across the country. Riccards argues that overlapping the requirements of certain core courses—especially in common entry-level or general education courses in English, biology or mathematics, for example—would save money for students by allowing them to transfer credits from institution to institution with impunity, thus saving time and money.

Another curriculum suggestion is Harry C. Stille's contention that universities should offer a limited number of majors in order to concentrate faculty in specific areas. He believes that duplication of efforts

and ineffective use of faculty are two major hindrances to reducing college costs. The latter idea in particular echoes similar ideas expressed by Bill Coplin, Carol Twigg, Mary F. Bushman and John E. Dean in the preceding essays.

Authors also pointed to graduate programs as part of the problem. Robert Berdahl, like Coplin, suggests curricular reform at this level. Berdahl would like to see doctoral degrees offered jointly between institutions in areas that public interest deems valuable. Moreover, Stille is concerned that universities emphasize faculty's research over their undergraduate teaching; he therefore advocates separate state funding for graduate and institutional research. Thus the money that currently funds this research would have its own revenue stream, independent of undergraduate tuition.

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Many of the respondents to Lumina Foundation's *Call for Solutions* ultimately advocate reconceiving the very mission of higher education. Stille worries that universities are growing too concerned with image rather than quality; he points to expensive athletic programs—almost always funded by tuition revenue—as one

particularly egregious example of prioritizing image over substance. However, the need to address a core mission permeates higher education. Berdahl calls for a highly differentiated public system of higher education. Concerned about mission drift and unconvinced that current regulatory practices will suffice, Berdahl calls for state policies to enforce public institutions' distinctive missions. He suggests state incentives to reward institutions that respond to the public's needs and collaborate with the K-12 system and with other sectors of society. Stille also calls for adherence to a state mission for its colleges and universities, with accountability built into that system. He argues that

boards of trustees often are narrowly focused on the particular institution they serve and therefore lack a sense of higher education's broader social mission. Stille contends that state oversight would help counter that problem.

The essays that Lumina Foundation received in response to its call—whether selected for publication or summarized in this chapter—range from modest,

practical changes to paradigm-shifting overhauls. Both types of solutions should be considered in the important work of addressing burgeoning college costs. College costs cannot be cut solely in financial aid offices, as these essays vividly demonstrate. The discussion—and the solutions—must be carried out in all corners of the campus, at every level of society. Let's hope that these essays help catalyze that discussion and hasten the solutions. ■