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Rising College Cost not the Fault of Student Demand, but the Universities Themselves

By Robert Weiner and Jonathan Person

Today, the average college student borrows around \$30,000 in student loans in order to receive a bachelor's degree. Oberlin College (in which Robert Weiner, a co-writer of this oped, is an alumni prior to University of Massachusetts Graduate School), had a tuition price around \$3000 per year between 1965 and 1969. Mr. Weiner then went on to attend UMASS Graduate School for the price of \$1000 a year. For this coming academic year, out-of-state tuition and fees at UMASS is \$35,714, in-state \$17,399. This is simply not due to natural inflation.

While recent steps have been made by President Biden to forgive student loans and debts, it is still avoiding the major problem. Colleges have retained a flawed administrative structure that has hired and is paying too much to its deans, administrators, and faculty. According to recent studies, the average dean at UMASS makes on average \$168,025 a year. This is in line with the national average, which is between \$90,000-\$150,000 per year. Just for reference of how big these salaries are for administrators, they make just a little less than members of the Senate, who make \$174,000, in which there are only 100 of. The US President makes an annual salary of \$400,000. According to recent numbers from US News there are around 50 college presidents that make more than double that. Looking at the statewide payroll published by CTHRU, the state of Massachusetts has a total payroll of \$6.23 Billion. UMASS, a public university, takes the biggest percentage of that with a payroll totaling \$1.07 Billion. UMASS has a total of 24,000 employees, 17,500 of which are full-time employees. This breakdown is indicative of mass over-employment and administrative bloat.

As a result of rising tuition costs across the nation, students are starting to ask for and expect a college experience that matches the high prices that they spend to attend. In order to fix these problems, schools have adopted the mindset of hiring more administrators to handle student issues. This can be seen around the US, as everyone from community colleges to top-tier private institutions have seen an uptick in structural spending and administrative positions. As a result of this growth, the number of people employed to administrative positions by these colleges are also going up. This has led to a structural bloat in higher academia, with the average school in the US having many deans for different positions. Today the administrator growth rate is higher than both the faculty (professors or anyone who teaches) as well as the student growth rates. Traditionally, colleges worked to have only a handful of deans and administrators. Today, the average college employs 1 administrator for every 4 students. This is significantly higher than the average faculty is at 1 member for every 11 students. This is drastically bigger at prestigious research colleges such as MIT, which has 9 times more administrators than faculty. This is the true culprit for why college prices are rising, and it's up to the colleges and universities to fix it.

When looking at potential fixes to this problem, universities must first realize that they are just overstuffed. This is due to the excessive amount of administrators and what they are being paid. There is a chance that this growth will meet at a head, and that this bubble will eventually pop, and student enrollment will drop. The government can step in and offer more financial aid for incoming students, which could deter college price spikes, however, the seemingly best option could come from Purdue University, who in an effort to keep costs low, uses tuition to simply maintain rather than expand their infrastructure. This is the best course of action, as colleges should hold themselves responsible in maintaining a healthy administrative infrastructure and keeping student tuition low.

Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses. He was communications director of the House Government Operations Committee and senior aide to Congressmen John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, and Ed Koch; Senator Ted Kennedy; and Four-Star General/ Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey.

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