



Do we really need a new public university in Kentucky?

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“A comprehensive study of Kentucky higher education, including an analysis into a potential university in the southeastern region, is now underway,” a front-page article in the July 15th edition of the Bowling Green Daily News proclaimed.

“A group of legislators in the interim Government Contract Review Committee approved \$632,952 for the study, which will be completed by the Council on Postsecondary Education with some contracted help from Ernst & Young.”

Interesting timing – and a potentially dubious expenditure of tax dollars, especially in light of current enrollment projections.

“The number of high school graduates is projected to peak at 3.9 million with the class of 2025,” according to Craig P. Smith, Director of Higher Education and Strategy at CommunicationWorks. “After 2025, the U.S. should expect successively fewer annual numbers of graduates in virtually every graduating class with the class of 2037 projected to be about the same in number as the class of 2014 (3.5 million).”

As noted in a recent op-ed Karl Laves and I wrote for the Lexington Herald-Leader, “It is becoming readily apparent to everyone except those whose livelihoods are directly tied to the enterprise that we have too many colleges and universities. Moreover, each institution wants to have all the programs, all the amenities, all the luxuries. Which would be great if supply matched demand. Unfortunately, there are just not enough students to fill the seats.”

In case you haven’t noticed, the southeastern region of Kentucky, the area being studied for a new public comprehensive university, is already served by Union College, Alice Lloyd College and the University of Pikeville. What would a new institution do to their enrollments?

Don’t get me wrong, I believe in higher education. But at what point do bragging rights outweigh practical necessity. When is enough truly enough?

Asking for a friend.

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