



Increasing cost of college is unsustainable

Posted: Tuesday, May 7, 2019

“A college degree has long been a ticket to the U.S. middle class,” Josh Boak and Emily Swanson noted in last Sunday’s Daily News. “While college still offers a path upward, that route has been narrowed by student debt loads, an outpacing of home prices relative to wages and widening economic inequality.”

When I attended college back in the late 1970s, only about 25 percent of my high school peers opted to extend their education beyond the secondary level. I also attended college at a fraction of the cost today’s students typically incur. As such, I can make a convincing argument that I have been able to give immensely more back to the society that funded my college experience than I have gained personally.

Indeed, society in general – and state legislatures in particular – used to understand and accept that investing in higher education benefited more than just the immediate recipients of the support provided. Historically, it was not unusual for public institutions to receive as much as 70 percent or more of their operating budgets from the state coffers. The belief that those who attend college should be required to shoulder most of the financial burden because they are the primary beneficiaries of the venture is widespread even though it is complete fiction.

This is an issue that must be addressed if the United States is to retain its pre-eminent place at the top of the global educational and economic hierarchies. Taxpayers can reasonably support a realistic and selective percentage of high school graduates attending college; they cannot support a system where virtually everyone enrolls. The exponentially increasing cost of attending college is unsustainable – both for the students themselves and the communities they serve. We need to seriously address this crisis and stop needlessly jeopardizing our collective future.

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