

## True experts need to navigate our colleges

Once again, Robert Samuelson is onto something.

"The fixation on college-going, justified in the early post-war decades, stigmatizes those who don't go to college and minimizes their needs for more vocational skills," Samuelson argued in a recent column. "It cheapens the value of a college degree and spawns the delusion that only the degree – not the skills and knowledge behind it – matters."

"The real concern is the quality of graduates at all levels," he concluded.

The key question is not whether college is for everyone (of course not); it's more a matter of what students who do choose to attend encounter once they arrive there.

Being able to "document" that students are provided with the requisite knowledge and skills that will empower them to be productive members of society is not the same as actually endowing them with those attributes.

As long as colleges and universities are more obsessed with credentialing than educating – and there is a huge difference – we have little chance of overcoming our current dilemma.

Here's how the system used to work: If you earned an "A" in a particular class, the inference was you had mastered the content covered in that course. If we can no longer make that assumption – and there are many who believe we can't – then we need to address the core problem instead of constantly wiring around the symptoms.

Creating complicated, tedious and ultimately useless "accountability" schemes in order to provide some assurance that an "A" actually means something represents a colossal waste of time as well as a meaningless distraction from the real educational process.

The only way to truly "fix" higher education would be to get rid of the micromanagers, the gatekeepers, and the checklist-wielding enthusiasts and let the true experts navigate at will.

Samuelson has it exactly right.

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