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Our University – Discrimination

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Our University – Discrimination

When selling my house a few years ago, bankers refused to underwrite a loan to an individual because he did not appear to have the ability to carry the note successfully. Too bad there are not more discriminating bankers who, to the best of their ability, make an assessment of an individual's ability to pay, and, should that individual appear not to have the capacity to "tote the note", the bankers just say no.

Bankers, the good ones, discriminate for the benefit of all.

Good universities discriminate too. When students apply, their records are reviewed and an assessment is made, usually by well-informed and well-intended people, to determine the ability of the student to "make the grade" and succeed in an academic environment. It is not the right of the university to exercise discriminatory insight; it is the appropriate exercise of responsibility.

Admitting students who may do a good job in their studies, but who have not exhibited the combination of desire and ability to succeed in academic work, is a legitimate and entirely appropriate reason to just say no.

In fact, not doing so becomes a form of theft on the part of a university.

Nearly three quarters of the students attending public universities are enabled to do so through various loan and work programs. More and more extramural support comes from government - state and federal. This is a good thing, as human capital and its development is a precious resource for any society and it should always be fully developed.

However, to admit a student who, based on every bit of evidence and past performance, will not succeed in the university is theft of opportunity and resources. This is most egregious when the student is borrowing money. The issue is not as important when someone can pay. It is nearly criminal when the university knowingly accepts people lacking the intellectual acumen and motivation to do well when they are borrowing to attend.

Some students show every ability and potential for success but flunk out. OK. But when students enter the university with the idea that, because they were able to borrow to attend, success is deserved or guaranteed, a troubling downward spiral is initiated.

Those students carry heavy debt load, do not finish their course of study, and have disdain for learning in all forms.

Nobody wins.

Faculty lose the desire to discriminate by assigning failing or low grades. Sometimes they are even overridden. A friend at a prestigious New England university assigned a student the grade "F" in a course and was informed by his dean that students at this institution did not earn "F's". My buddy ended up sticking to his guns in the face of significant challenges and left the university a year later. The student probably stayed and graduated. Nobody knows.

Nobody wins.

Students are able to sustain themselves on pabulum for a few years but eventually flunk out, and this in turn causes university retention and reputation to fail.

Nobody wins.

A lack of discrimination on the part of the banking industry in granting home loans has caused an industry-wide failure that will mark our current economic era for all human history. We will get over it, but it will always be remembered as a dark period in the history of the United States.

Less riveting, but equally pervasive, will be the long term effects of admitting students who are unqualified by past performance. The veracity of intellectual capital will sink and higher education will suffer.

The truly heartless thing to do is tell someone they can when they can't. The thoughtful thing to do is tell someone to go get ready and come back when they are prepared and motivated.

Discriminate.