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6-25-2010

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Recommended Citation
Wendler, Walter V., "Our University: Fiscal Integrity" (2010). *Higher Education Policy Commentary.* Paper 61.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc/61

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Our University: Fiscal Integrity

Second in a series on integrity.

This is not about double dipping as was reported last week in the Seattle Times; lavish trips to distant lands under the guise of recruiting additional students; fancy offices and luxury cars; incessantly increasing tuition and fees; or uncontrolled pensions and contracts for the friends of the institution.

Too easy.

This is about a lack of integrity far more malignant and complex eating away at U.S. public higher education.

The mortgage industry fell apart because political leadership wanted to make homes available to everyone in America, regardless of the borrower's predicted ability to repay a loan.

Only a misguided integrity-less sense of entitlement could allow such a course of events.

Political leadership helped the process by setting up agencies that would guarantee poorly conceived loans from economic missionaries committed to giving everything to anyone who wanted it. Lenders and borrowers were both happy for the responsibility-less environment created by people trying to please people.

In the absence of fiscal integrity universities are doing likewise by selling opportunity to those who have not earned the right to pursue it.

When students are able to secure a loan for an education without having demonstrated that they have the determination or ability - and I can attest that a small measure of either will carry the typical student a long way - we have lied to them.

With a high school record like this: sub 20 score on the ACT, lower-quarter of the class, and poor college preparatory course selection, the odds are less than 50-50 that the students with these earned credentials will continue into the sophomore year.

They will flunk out, with a bundle of unpaid bills.

Unfortunately, for nearly 75% of these unprepared, undedicated, property-right pursuing students, they will leave with enough debt to have financed a car, which could carry them to gainful employment, community college, or some other more productive way to spend limited resources and time.

But universities accept such students without warning that the students' "Credit Score" is very low and they are poor risks for a student loan.

Universities could give Academic Success Probabilities, based on statistics and history.

Community colleges offer college preparation opportunities, and the University of Arizona found, in a recent study, that students who completed associate's degrees in community colleges graduated at a higher rate than did the students who were admitted straight away at high school graduation.

This doesn't say much for the ability of college admissions offices to predict success.

Here is a five-option multiple choice question that you will not see on a civics exam:

Question One: Universities admit students who, by their past performance, show a less than 50-50 chance of completing their freshman year and continuing into the sophomore year, and through an admission letter, provide students authority to borrow money with no promise of helping them pay it back should they be unsuccessful. Moreover, unlike a house, a student loan survives bankruptcy forever. It never goes away.

Why do universities do this?

a. Because the misguided short-sighted notion that enrollments are more important than quality or integrity rules.

b. Because the university never has to assume responsibility for high risk loans to students.

c. Because of the pervasive pressure to never really reduce costs.

d. Because the university has a heart for the underdog, or lacks the courage to tell anyone no, even in the face of facts, science and reason.

e. All of the above.

Universities that lack fiscal integrity have less than a 50-50 chance of attaining intellectual integrity, but will falsely perpetuate hope and heavy debt on young people who are their prey.