For Whom Is College Being Reinvented?
'Disruptions' have the buzz but may put higher education out of reach for those students likely to benefit the most

By Scott Carlson and Goldie Blumenstyk

Last year, leading lights in for-profit and nonprofit higher education convened in Washington for a conference on private-sector innovation in the industry. The national conversation about dysfunction and disruption in higher education was just heating up, and panelists from start-ups, banking, government, and education waxed enthusiastic about the ways that a traditional college education could be torn down and rebuilt—and about how lots of money could be made along the way.

During a break, one panelist—a banker who lines up financing for education companies, and who had talked about meeting consumer demands in the market—made chitchat. The banker had a daughter who wanted a master's in education and was deciding between a traditional college and a start-up that offered a program she would attend mostly online—exactly the kind of thing everyone at the conference was touting.

For most parents, that choice might raise questions—and the banker was no exception. Unlike most parents, however, the well-connected banker could resolve those uncertainties, with a call to the CEO of the education venture: "Is this thing crap or for real?"

In higher education, that is the question of the moment—and the answer is not clear, even to those lining up to push for college reinvention. But the question few people want to grapple with is, For whom are we reinventing college?

The punditry around reinvention (including some in these pages) has trumpeted the arrival of MOOC's, badges, "UnCollege," and so on as the beginning of a historic transformation. "College Is Dead. Long Live College!," declared a headline in Time's "Reinventing College" issue, in October, which pondered whether massive open online courses would "finally pop the tuition bubble." With the...
advent of MOOC's, "we're witnessing the end of higher education as we know it," pronounced Joseph E. Aoun, president of Northeastern University, in The Boston Globe last month.

Read beneath the headlines a bit. The pundits and disrupters, many of whom enjoyed liberal-arts educations at elite colleges, herald a revolution in higher education that is not for people like them or their children, but for others: less-wealthy, less-prepared students who are increasingly cut off from the dream of a traditional college education.

"Those who can afford a degree from an elite institution are still in an enviable position," wrote the libertarian blogger Megan McArdle in a recent Newsweek article, "Is College a Lousy Investment?" For the rest, she suggested, perhaps apprenticeships and on-the-job training might be more realistic, more affordable options. Mr. Aoun, in his Globe essay, admitted that the coming reinvention could promote a two-tiered system: "one tier consisting of a campus-based education for those who can afford it, and the other consisting of low- and no-cost MOOC's." And in an article about MOOC's, Time quotes David Stavens, a founder of the MOOC provider Udacity, as conceding that "there's a magic that goes on inside a university campus that, if you can afford to live inside that bubble, is wonderful."

But if you can't, entrepreneurs like him are creating an industrialized version of higher education that the most fervent disruptionists predict could replace mid-sized state institutions or less-selective private colleges. "I think the top 50 schools are probably safe," Mr. Stavens said.

A 'Mass Psychosis'
Higher education does have real problems, and MOOC's, badges—certificates of accomplishment—and other innovations have real potential to tackle some of them. They could enrich teaching, add rigor, encourage interdisciplinarity, reinforce education's real-world applicability, and make learning more efficient—advances all sorely needed.

But the reinvention conversation has not produced the panacea that people seem to yearn for. "The whole MOOC thing is mass psychosis," a case of people "just throwing spaghetti against the wall" to see what sticks, says Peter J. Stokes, executive director for postsecondary innovation at Northeastern's College of Professional Studies. His job is to study the effectiveness of ideas that are emerging or already in practice.

He believes that many of the new ideas, including MOOC's, could
bring improvements to higher education. But "innovation is not about gadgets," says Mr. Stokes. "It's not about eureka moments. ... It's about continuous evaluation."

The furor over the cost and effectiveness of a college education has roots in deep socioeconomic challenges that won't be solved with an online app. Over decades, state support per student at public institutions has dwindled even as enrollments have ballooned, leading to higher prices for parents and students. State funds per student dropped by 20 percent from 1987 to 2011, according to an analysis by the higher-education finance expert Jane Wellman, who directs the National Association of System Heads. States' rising costs for Medicaid, which provides health care for the growing ranks of poor people, are a large part of the reason.

Meanwhile, the gap between the country's rich and poor widened during the recession, choking off employment opportunities for many recent graduates. Education leading up to college is a mess: Public elementary and secondary systems have failed a major segment of society, and the recent focus on testing has had questionable results.

Part of the problem is that the two-tiered system that Mr. Aoun fretted about is already here—a system based in part on the education and income of parents, says Robert Archibald, an economics professor at the College of William and Mary and an author of Why Does College Cost So Much?

"At most institutions, students are in mostly large classes, listening to second-rate lecturers, with very little meaningful faculty student interaction," he says. "Students are getting a fairly distant education even in a face-to-face setting."

If the future of MOOC's as peddled by some were to take hold, it would probably exacerbate the distinction between "luxury" and "economy" college degrees, he says. Graduates leaving high school well prepared for college would get an even bigger payoff, finding a place in the top tier.

"The tougher road is going to be for the people who wake up after high school and say, I should get serious about learning," Mr. Archibald says. "It's going to be tougher for them to maneuver through the system, and it is already tough."

That's one reason economists like Robert B. Reich argue for more investment in apprentice-based educational programs, which would offer an alternative to the bachelor's degree. "Our entire economy is organized to lavish very generous rewards on students who go..."
through that gantlet” for a four-year degree, says the former secretary of labor, now a professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. As a country, he says, we need to "expand our repertoire." But it's important that such a program not be conceived and offered as a second-class degree, he argues. It should be a program "that has a lot of prestige associated with it."

With few exceptions, however, the reinvention crowd is interested in solutions that will require less public and private investment, not more. Often that means cutting out the campus experience, deemed by some a "luxury" these days.

Less Help Where It's Needed

Here's the cruel part: The students from the bottom tier are often the ones who need face-to-face instruction most of all.

"The idea that they can have better education and more access at lower cost through massive online courses is just preposterous," says Patricia A. McGuire, president of Trinity Washington University. Seventy percent of her students are eligible for Pell Grants, and 50 percent come from the broken District of Columbia school system. Her task has been trying to figure out how to serve those students at a college with the university's meager $11-million endowment.

Getting them to and through college takes advisers, counselors, and learning-disability experts—a fact Ms. McGuire has tried to convey to foundations, policy makers, and the public. But the reinvention conversation has had a "tech guy" fixation on mere content delivery, she says. "It reveals a lack of understanding of what it takes to make the student actually learn the content and do something with it."

Amid the talk of disruptive innovation, "the real disruption is the changing demographics of this country," Trinity's president says. Waves of minority students, especially Hispanics, are arriving on campus, many at those lower-tier colleges, having come from schools that didn’t prepare them for college work. "The real problem here is that higher education has to repeat a whole lot of lower education," Ms. McGuire says. "That has been drag on everyone."

Much of the hype around reinvention bypasses her day-to-day challenges as a president. "All of the talk about how higher education is broken is a superficial scrim over the question, What are the problems we are trying to solve?" she says. The reinvention crowd has motivations aside from solving higher education's problems, she suspects: "Beware Chicken Little, because Chicken Little has a vested interest in this. There is an awful lot of hype about disruption and the need for reinvention that is being
fomented by people who are going to make out like bandits on it."

Siva Vaidhyanathan, a professor of media studies and law at the University of Virginia and a frequent commentator on technology and education, believes that some of the new tools and innovations could indeed enhance teaching and learning—but that doing so will take serious research and money.

In any case, he says, the new kinds of distance learning cannot replace the vital role that bricks-and-mortar colleges have in many communities.

"To champion something as trivial as MOOC's in place of established higher education is to ignore the day-care centers, the hospitals, the public health clinics, the teacher-training institutes, the athletic facilities, and all of the other ways that universities enhance communities, energize cities, spread wealth, and enlighten citizens," he says. "Not only is it not about the classroom, it is certainly not just about the direct delivery of information into people's lives. If that's all universities did, then publishing and libraries would have crushed universities a long time ago."

Unfortunately, Mr. Vaidhyanathan says, the discussion of college reinvention represents a watering down of higher education's social contract—a process that has been in the works for decades. "What it is going to take to reinvigorate higher education in this country," he says, "is a strong political movement to champion research, to champion low tuition costs as a policy goal, to stand up against the banks that have made so much money lending for student loans, and to reconnect public institutions to their sense of public mission."

"That is going to be a long process," he says. "It has taken 20 years to press universities down into this cowering pose, and it is going to take 20 assertive years to get back to the point where Americans view American higher education the way the rest of the world does."
Great article, Scott and Goldie. Those who teach non-elite students have been scratching their heads about the breathless enthusiasm most media coverage has expressed for the so-called tech revolution. It's vaguely dismissive to pretend that this complicated, difficult work can be done remotely.

What a pile of drivel. I'll guarantee you that none of those who "liked" this article were a student or employer. We in the higher education industrial complex feed at the taxpayer trough while complaining about cutbacks. We smile when MOOC is labeled a "gaget." We know what's best for students and we never need to measure outcomes. But after the revolution, most will finally be forced to do something productive with their lives. There's little worth saving in the status quo, and society is discovering that the emperor wears no clothes. State universities and colleges have become glorified votechs to provide unnecessary college degrees for future prison guards, police, hotel managers, salespeople, and trades now requiring college degrees. Fewer than one in five graduate with a college degree, and even that figure is overstated by including communications majors. Our grads get little or nothing from college that 4 years at a sports bar wouldn't do far more cheaply (as Murray Sperber writes in "Beer and Circus").

College U.S. style is now a way station for partying where students punch tickets to qualify for a sheepskin and access to State U.'s network of future job contacts and alumni weekends. We always put down Japan's weak universities as rewards for good high school scores. America has done them one better with no research, no grad programs (MBA and law are professional degrees), no rigorous core, no math, no science. See what a smug, jingoistic system did for the once bright "Rising Sun" economy. Permanent stagnation is what happened to Tokyo.

OK, I don't know what college you teach at, but no math no science no rigor is not true at my institution - and I teach at a community college. As to measuring outcomes, what outcomes do you mean? No research, no grad programs is also untrue. Seems the jingoistic one here is you.

It's probably one of the people paid by U of Phoenix to astroturf the world so it looks favorable.

Ellen, The Chief of Staff in the Wayne State Provost office is a faculty member at the University of Phoenix. You may know him. His name is John Schiavone.

Who are you and where do you teach? Or do you teach at all?
I know at my second-tier university students work very hard at jobs and classes. Some do less than they should, certainly, but for those students who want to be challenged there are fantastic opportunities to work with real tenured faculty, even for students who did not do overly well in high school.

It's true that high ed institutions need to do more to ensure students who start college graduate, but there is equally no doubt that higher ed attainment is one proven equalizer for the underprivileged.

They work hard? What about the outcomes? What are they studying? Graduation outcomes you mention are merely throughput. What can they do that they couldn't do when they left high school. That's the only outcomes that matter. And we refuse to measure that. Why? Because we'd be too embarrassed by the findings. Ignorance is bliss, at least for those of us cashing our university checks.

Wrong-o bastard.

Wow, no reason, no argument, no deliberation, just a knee-jerk ad hominem that impugns someone's legitimacy. Is this what we have to look forward to in the world where outcomes are paramount? klwi3329, you make arguing against darcy too easy. Coming here with that kind of puerile reaction allows for a number of rather unflattering assumptions to click into place that make it much easier to dismiss your "assertions" out of hand and bring into question the value of even acknowledging them, let alone answering them.

My purpose here is to challenge, chide, and otherwise poke at the professorate I perceive as self-satisfied, self-referential, and self-righteous. I acknowledge that at times it may take acting like an ass. I try to add substantive comments when I believe I can contribute. But I take glee in challenging the established view. This entire article was rife with whining and poor-moism. Besides, you failed to notice the condescending tone of the post I replied to.
Actually, we measure outcomes every semester. It’s called program assessment and grading. Ever heard of that?

What can they do that they couldn’t do in high school? – are you serious? They can write thoughtful, well composed essays. They can build a substantial argument drawing on primary and secondary sources. They know the difference between an opinion and a fact. My list goes on and on. Most of our feeder high schools are listed in the top 100 of the nation, but students still come to us with limited writing experience and competence. I’m not sure where your bitterness comes from, but I really pity your students, if you teach at all. I think it’s time to find a new job or retire. Seriously.

Sure you would be happy if "most of your feeder high schools are listed in the top 100 of the nation ...

But tenuredobserver not every body is happy as you are. There are 60 million K12 students in roughly 60,000 schools. 100 / 60,000 = ????? You are that much lucky. I envy you.

No, that's not what I said.

I said that even in place where we allegedly have "great" high schools, students still have a lot to learn. If you live in place with a weak K-12 system then college is even more important to refine the skills students need to be ready for the workforce.

Dear tenuredobserver-- you bring up an important point -- namely, that graduation in and by itself is not the only "good" that can come from education. Unlike a bond, one's education does not suddenly mature and acquire value at the moment of matriculation. As you say, if a person does nothing else but take a couple courses that teach how to write thoughtfully, how to distinguish between knowledge and opinion, that person would have gained a tremendous amount. While I would like to see every student graduate, we should not dismiss the value of what we teach.

Dear aicaiel: I think we could do a better job giving credentials beyond the final degree, too. Why can’t a 4 year institution offer an associates degree, for instance? Students leave school for many different reasons, they shouldn’t be penalized if they get deployed or have to move for a job transfer, etc.
Grading is an acceptable outcome measure, really? Given everything that goes into grading one can hardly claim it to be an objective enterprise. Try again.

Another strawman. Assessment and grading. According to who? The professor who decides what constitutes competence and how to measure it. Some do it well; many do not.

And your implicit solution is not a straw-man? We rely on professors to be as objective and prepared as they can, and everyone knows that there are flaws in such a system. Does yours resolve that problem? Did no child left behind do anything to resolve the problems that exist in public education, or did clever people learn that they could get a cash reward by teaching to a test and then getting government money? Are you really willing to allow some outcome to become the measure of all educational quality? Can you be so obtuse as to think that the infinitude of variables that compose our student bodies can all be measured by the same standard, and that this is a just outcome for students of all range of skills and abilities? Does it seem wise to you that all curriculum and pedagogical progress should draw to a stultifying halt because we have been forced into a world where the tyranny of imposed outcomes has a chilling affect on innovation and genuine progress?

Sure, there are risks inherent in all education, but the reality is that you would like to impose perpetual mediocrity on every institution in existence, while the present model, whatever its flaws, is ideally supposed to allow for all the potential possible for every educational institution. Does it happen? Certainly not. Is such a wonderful at least possible currently? Absolutely. Is such a thing possible where some bureaucrat or government appointee somewhere is establishing outcomes that apply equally to everyone? Absolutely not! Why would any sane person wish to shackle potential so completely?

Implicit? You’re putting words in my mouth. I said nothing about, nor do I endorse, standardized testing. Quite the opposite. Testing is full of problems. Authentic assessments, learning portfolios, peer review - those are the things I advocate. Certainly not high-stakes tests.

You know, you outcomes zealots always trot out the same sophistry—the sophistry of self-interested utilitarianism. Newman answers you quite well,
should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured.
They argue as if everything, as well as every person, had its price; and that
where there has been a great outlay, they have a right to expect a return in
kind. This they call making education 'useful,' and 'utility' becomes their
watchword."

Your argument, I think, hinges on what can be measured from education,
and then what can be shown to be of utility. I suppose the rest (i.e. that
which doesn't, for example, land someone a job, or establish their ability to
operate within some market complex—which, I hope, you inveigh against
with commensurate enthusiasm--) is largely educational dross. Thus, your
objection appears to be in the public good. What I hear is, "we don't need
more thinkers, we need more doers." As if thinking and doing for the public
good were not inextricable from one another.

Newman continues, in answer,

"There is a duty we owe to human society as such to the state to which we
belong, to the sphere in which we move, to the individuals towards whom
we are variously related, and whom we successively encounter in life; and
that is philosophical or liberal education, as I have called it, which is the
proper function of a university, if it refuses the foremost place to
professional interests, does but postpone them to the formation of the
citizen, and, while it subserves the larger interests of philanthropy, prepares
also for the successful prosecution of those merely personal objects, which
at first sight it seems to disparage."

I'm persuaded by Newman's assertion that your outcomes are, in the end,
quite selfish. Training to be a cog somewhere seems like a public good,
inasmuch as every machine needs cogs, but the motive of the cog isn't to
make the machine work, but to be a cog where the cog is trained to
work—no matter the health of the machine.

A liberal education understands that many of the benefits it offers society
are intangible and unmeasurable. We instruct and assess, provide feedback,
assign qualitative measures, and then, essentially, hope that our students go
into the world trained to do some constructive work AND see outside of
their training or their own little lives something great—something worth
preserving and something beyond them toward which they ought to
stretch. The cog knows very little of this, and if it starts to stretch toward
something beyond its cog-hood, it ceases to be a cog.

Riotous cries of "OUTCOMES" deserve to be heard only in the context of a
university's honest self-assessment, where it judiciously examines itself and
what it hopes to do. I suppose this is an outcome of sorts, but it goes far
beyond your utilitarianism. It recognizes that honest self-awareness leads
to growth, and that the university has a contract with society that it will
produce individuals who will not only work, not only be trained for a job,
but who will vote intelligently, who will not be jerks, who will not rail
against things they don't understand—but who will try to gain
understanding. In short, individuals who will participate equally in both the
burdens and benefits of society.

Now, how do you measure this?

1 person liked this. Like

klwi3329 2 weeks ago

Sorry, but your question is old school and largely beside the point. The fact that
you teach says nothing about the quality of your teaching. Yes, anyone with an
opinion about how education is carried out should have teaching experience (not
just in a classroom). I continue to be amazed that, after 60 years of arguing about
it, the "professorship" still reserves the right to do what they want in THEIR
classroom (online or off) regardless of its effectiveness. Obviously, I leave out a
host of teachers who get it and include research-based methods and data.
However, the profession as a whole continues to stand behind this "have you
taught" straw man, among others.

Like

kyushuphil 1 month ago

Thanks for your ref to Japan.
I see others have objected to your “comment,” though, because they feel their particular specializations get well taught at their institutions. Maybe true, but they miss the point about the overall culture in education. Smugness about one’s particular department disguises the fact that, across “higher” ed, most people in most departments have no contact with those in others. And a stunted literacy gets stunted further, more and more shorn of references outside the orthodox ones in each department.

America bears some attention to what happened -- and continues happening -- in the land of what is now a falling sun. So many so self-satisfied with what the status quo has done nicely for them, thank you, are reducing the larger literacy. In Japan this begins in the high schools, where nobody learns to write anything, let alone question anything. But, boy, the stress and cram schools for all those stupid standardized tests. In America the high schools similarly fail, for different reasons, to teach writing skills. And then, in college, all that smug departmentalism further shears literate reach.

6 people liked this.

Thanks. Someone gets it. We are resting on our laurels while not generating the math-science applicants. Worse yet, we bribe our best and brightest into med schools and Wall St. jobs instead of rewarding research study paths. Only our remaining international student population keeps America scientifically productive. But if India ever gets its act together, we’ll be up a creek in R&D and innovation.

10 people liked this.

Just to play the contrarian:

“What Scientist Shortage?” by the Columbia Journalism Review, Jan-Feb 2012 issue http://www.cjr.org/reports/wha...

"[A]ccording to the National Science Board's authoritative publication Science and Engineering Indicators 2008, the country turns out three times as many STEM degrees as the economy can absorb into jobs related to their majors.

So what’s going on? Simply put, a desire for cheap, skilled labor, within the business world and academia, has fueled assertions—based on flimsy and distorted evidence—that American students lack the interest and ability to pursue careers in science and engineering, and has spurred policies that have flooded the market with foreign STEM workers. This has created a grim reality for the scientific and technical labor force: glutted job markets; few career jobs; low pay, long hours, and dismal job prospects for postdoctoral researchers in university labs; near indentured servitude for holders of temporary work visas.

....

[F]or many years reporters have repeated, without scrutiny, the assertions about shortages by representatives of industries and universities that employ large numbers of STEM workers, and thus have strong financial interests in keeping salaries down.

The public perception of a dearth of homegrown talent has shaped national policy, permitting companies and universities to import tens of thousands of foreign scientists and IT workers who toil for artificially low wages.

....

In fact, American college students have for decades shown strong and consistent interest in STEM; year after year, just under a third of all college students in this country earn degrees in those subjects. But, ironically, dismal career prospects drive many of the best of those students to more promising professions, such as medicine, law, or finance."

See also Stanford math prof Keith Devlin's op-ed "All the Math Taught At..."
Worthy of The New Yorker's old "Which Newspaper D'ya Read?" Dept.:

Quoted as authoritative by Unemployed_Northeastern:

"...year after year, just under a third of all college students in this country earn degrees in [STEM] subjects. But, ironically, dismal career prospects drive many of the best of those students to more promising professions, such as medicine, law, or finance." [Emphasis mine]

Previously from Unemployed_Northeastern, on another thread:

"As for the law itself, 2500 people pass the Massachusetts bar exam every year for 700 jobs at any salary level, most of which are unequal to the task of making timely student loan payments."

Well, patent attorney positions increasingly require a MS or PhD in the hard sciences or engineering in addition to the law degree, so perhaps one simply has to roll the dice more often to beat the odds. But of course, there is a bit of cognitive dissonance in the article in that while attempting to shed a different perspective on the STEM-to-jobs ratio, it fails to recognize what has become nearly mainstream knowledge: that law school is a disaster. Finance has cut back, too.

Imagine if, in a trial, Now-employed_Northeastern, had asked a witness to read those sections of the CJR article on the stand.

The opposing attorney would have asked, "Isn't there is a bit of cognitive dissonance in the article in that while attempting to shed a different perspective on the STEM-to-jobs ratio, it fails to recognize what has become nearly mainstream knowledge: that law school is a disaster? And hasn't finance has cut back, too?"

Just tryin' to help.

Two different studies by two different groups* with two different conclusions. Such things have happened before, pianiste. Let's say there is a trial. I don't know what the hell it would be about - I'm just following through with your snark - but let's presume it is a claim
of fraud or making false statements levied against some pro-STEM group or for-profit college with 2% graduate placement. Opposing counsel's statement, as you frame it, has nothing whatsoever to do with the case at hand, and a) it wouldn't meet relevance and b) would make that counsel look rather foolish.

Also, both statements can be true: STEM grads can be forsaking MS & PhDs in favor of MBAs and JDs, and the legal market can be a hot mess.

*Columbia Journalism Review for the STEM, Massachusetts Bar Association for the legal numbers.

archie_kelvin 1 month ago

Now that's like a lawyer!

1. Bleat all over the the CHE threads that "law school is a disaster" tantamount to fraud, that the employment prospects for newly minted lawyers from other than Harvard Law is practically zilch, and that one's own situation is emblematic of the dire situation. Cite the statistic that in Massachusetts, only 700 jobs exist for every 2500 lawyers who pass the state bar exam.

2. Post quotes from an article saying that the predicament of STEM-field graduates isn't so good, either, including, uncritically "dismal career prospects drive many of the best of those students to more promising professions, such as medicine, law, or finance." [Emphasis mine]

3. When called out on the discrepancy (does Unemployed_Northeastern really agree with his own quoted source that law--whose employment market he describes as a "hot mess"--is indeed a "more promising profession" than the STEM fields?), weasel: "Two different studies by two different groups with two different conclusions." (When it's convenient for him, the Massachusetts Bar Association study isn't representative of anything outside Massachusetts. One supposes that to Unemployed_Northeastern the CJR article applies only to Morningside Heights.)

But for the fact that I'm thinking of using it, I'd hope that Unemployed_Northeastern might catch on as a reader for LegalZoom.

Unemployed_Northeastern 1 month ago

It's sad to see you grasping at straws.

1. The legal market is a mess, in MA and very nearly every other state (you can find a state-by-state breakdown of bar passers v. available jobs on the NY Times Economix blog; even Alaska has like 70 new lawyers for 40 jobs each year)

2. Parts of STEM are in trouble from low wages, international competition, too many entrants, and so on. If there is a problem with the CJR article, it is that it lumps everyone in STEM together. The job prospects of a
petroleum engineer are very different than those of a MS in biology or physics, say.

3. Some of the latter group may be acquiring MBAs, MDs, or JDs instead of MSs and PhDs, as the article states.

So, where is the discrepancy? All of these assertions can be literally true without contradicting each other. I suspect you know this. And let’s be clear about how broad the statement is: the aspirants of FOUR different professions (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) are sometimes pursuing THREE other professions (medicine, law, and finance). I’m not exactly sure what you are trying for here: that the legal market is fine, that the STEM market is fine, or if you’re simply trying to force a false "gotcha" moment, but in any event, it is one of your poorer efforts. You can write informed, detailed analyses as well as anyone on CHE, but your trolling efforts need work. Do try and enjoy the holiday season.

Objection overruled: whingey, evasive, hair-splitting—is or is not the law a "more promising profession" than the STEM fields? And the court requests that trolls not call other trolls "trolls," as if it's an insult. Pot, kettle, etc.

archie_kelvin, I think the thing that you are missing is that the average undergraduate of the average college, of any major, who then stops is better off than the average student who goes to law school. You quote "many of the best of those students to more promising professions, such as medicine, law, or finance." I think the key word is best one can imagine that if this means the top 1% who get top 1% LSATs who then are admitted to the T14 then they might do OK.

Arun and Roksa’s 2nd report page 20 shows only 36.9% of Science/Math majors in their study being employed full-time. This is the lowest number among the major categories. Those employed full-time had an average income of $31,721. Social Sciences/Humanities, Communications and Business are among the majors that do better. Computer Science/Engineering does the best at $50,625 illustrating the importance of major.

http://highered.ssrc.org/wp-co...

Such a low average of $31,721 indicates that many Science/Math majors are not getting work in the area they studied.

The BLS May 2011 stats give the misleading view of full-time Mathematicians in the survey, which amounts to under 3,000 of which over a third are Federal government employees. Graduates aren’t even getting paid
at the bottom decile level of the BLS survey.
http://www.bls.gov/oes/current...

New Science/Math graduates aren't being paid well and aren't getting many jobs. Their job situation has little to do with those who have been working their specific field for 20+ years.

1 person liked this.

archie_kelvin 1 month ago

from bscmath78:

"the average undergraduate of the average college, of any major, who then stops is better off than the average student who goes to law school." [Emphasis mine]

quoted uncritically by Unemployed_Northeastern:

"dismal career prospects [in the STEM fields] drive many of the best of those students to more promising professions, such as medicine, law, or finance." [Emphasis mine]

You guys work it out.

R Evans 1 month ago

Job opportunities open up for those with "both" STEM Ph.D.s and law degrees that do not exist for those with only STEM or law degrees.

1 person liked this.

bscmath78 4 weeks ago

The CHE has blocked viewing of all comments on many articles, including this one, including my critiques of the work of Arum and Roksa.

http://chronicle.com/article/A...

1 person liked this.

spottytoes 2 weeks ago

Students who work hard and make their grades still get STEM jobs in engineering, etc. My son just graduated from a public university and had a job lined up with a major company before his last semester ever started. Some of the problem lies with the student who is unmotivated to learn or achieve.

1 person liked this.

3rdtyrant 6 days ago
And here the variable that cannot be accounted for. Deep thinkers of darccity's ilk must imagine that all students are equally motivated, equally capable, equally driven, equally clever, and equally prepared both by their primary and secondary educations as well as their home lives to engage a topic fully and make absolutely no errors in judgment regarding how hard to work for grades, or even whether or not to finish college.

Much of higher education's problems lie squarely on the shoulders of this problem, because no one wants to admit that some students will succeed and some will not, so we gravitate to a low common denominator which most students can meet—we nail an outcome measure square in the teeth—and then darccity, et al. come screaming out from under the sidewalk about how education is failing. Education might have failed, but simply in letting go of its ideals, preferring the relativism of utility to the good of public virtue.

Don't worry. Obamacare will alleviate the "best and brightest" going into med school.

I like this comment because it inadvertently makes the point against darccity's outcomes argument, who cleverly also likes this comment, stating that "someone gets it." If, as you say, Japanese students are cramming for the standardized tests—the only way we'll ever see outcomes universalized, by the way—and these same students are being successful, then the system will always say that it has met its outcomes goal. Surely this means that education is working. Why would you complain about a system that meets its outcomes? Certainly you and darccity should be salivating over the Japanese model, since it has measurable outcomes that are met. The cogs are turning where they are supposed to. Is this not the measure of success?

You bemoan the lack of literacy, but what outcomes does one impose on literacy? I can think of some basic ones, like sentence crafting, subject/verb agreement, thesis and support, proper attribution and integration of source material, etc. Does this make a good essay? Well, we can sure as heck measure it, so it must be an A. Can you not see how this is exactly in counterpoint to the assertion about outcomes? Perhaps our current system of higher education is (to echo Winston Churchill on democracy) "the worst form of [education] ever tried, except all the others that have been tried," including one buckling under the tyrannical mediocrity of artificial outcomes.