



College Golf Courses, Water Parks, Etc.--Paid for by Taxpayers

By Neal McCluskey

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Have you seen this quiz? The one that asks you to guess whether the thing you are looking at belongs to a college, country club, or prison? Give it a look, then continue reading. We'll wait...

Okay, so what did you discover? Yup: Some pretty fancy golf courses, water parks, and buildings belong not to country clubs (or prisons, even in Switzerland), but to colleges. Of course, the difference between country clubs and colleges has been getting harder and harder to tell for years. Indeed, while featuring amusement park caliber water attractions at Texas Tech and Colorado State, the quiz didn't even mention one of my favorites: the University of Missouri's "resort quality" Tiger Grotto. But the Tiger Grotto website isn't quite as blatant in its celebration of leisure as Texas Tech's: while you watch Tech's video about the "largest college leisure pool," a tune plays that ends with a refrain of the famous Lionel Richie song "All Night Long": "fiesta forever!"

Fiesta, indeed!

In other college excess news, Penn State University just hired a new Athletic Director: Former UC Berkeley AD Sandy Barbour. Her reported compensation? \$700,000 per year, with "a \$100,000 retention bonus and incentive compensation that can reach as much as \$100,000 annually." That deal may well be what's needed to attract someone to take on responsibility for a big operation like PSU athletics, but it is way too much to justify the sentiment Barbour expressed upon taking the job. "When you spend a professional lifetime serving institutions and, most importantly, students, you dream about coming to a place like Penn State," she said.

When you are making at least \$700,000 a year, it is hard to believe it is mainly about serving institutions and students. It is very much about serving yourself.

Of course, getting back to the aquatic centers, golf courses, etc. – and the research showing the self-interested actions of students and college employees – it is clear that higher education is awash not in selflessness, but self-interest. There's nothing wrong with that – it is completely normal – except for one thing: government, especially, treats higher education like charity work,

with big subsidies and big tax favors. From excessive fun, to massive pay in supposed service of students, many deleterious effects of that are easy to see. Worse, though, are the painful effects that are harder to detect: massive noncompletion, rampant credential inflation, and quite possibly, a net economic drain.

It's time to treat higher education like the human – and therefore self-interested – institution it is. Stop giving it huge subsidies and preferential tax treatment, and make people foot the bill for their own fiestas.

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