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# Lies Our Professors Tell Us

Thursday, October 1, 2009

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On Sunday, the *Washington Post* ran an [op-ed by the chancellor and vice chancellor](#) of the University of California, Berkeley, in which the writers proposed that the federal government start pumping money into a select few public universities. Why? On the constantly repeated but never substantiated assertion that state and local governments have been cutting those schools off.

As I point out in the following, unpublished letter to the editor, that is what we in the business call “a lie:”

It’s unfortunate that officials of a taxpayer-funded university felt the need to deceive in order to get more taxpayer dough, but that’s what UC Berkeley’s Robert Birgeneau and Frank Yeary did. Writing about the supposedly dire financial straits of public higher education (“Rescuing Our Public Universities,” September 27), Birgeneau and Yeary lamented decades of “material and progressive disinvestment by states in higher education.” But there’s been no such disinvestment, at least over the last quarter-century. According to inflation-adjusted data from the [State Higher Education Executive Officers](#), in 1983 state and local expenditures per public-college pupil totaled \$6,478. In 2008 they hit \$7,059. At the same time, public-college enrollment ballooned from under 8 million students to over 10 million. That translates into anything but a “disinvestment” in the public ivory tower, no matter what its penthouse residents may say.

Since letters to the editor typically have to be pretty short I left out readily available data for California, data which would, of course, be most relevant to the destitute scholars of Berkeley. Since I have more space here, let’s take a look: In 1983, again using inflation-adjusted SHEEO numbers, state and local governments in the Golden State provided \$5,963 per full-time-equivalent student. In 2008, they furnished \$7,177, a 20 percent increase. And this while enrollment grew from about 1.2 million students to 1.7 million! Of course, spending didn’t go up in a straight line — it went up and down with the business cycle — but in no way was there anything you could call appreciable “disinvestment.”

Unfortunately, higher education is awash in lies like these. Therefore, our debunking will not stop here! On Tuesday, October 6, at a Cato Institute/Pope Center for Higher Education Policy debate, we’ll deal with another of the ivory tower’s great truth-defying proclamations: that colleges and universities raise their prices at astronomical rates not because abundant, largely taxpayer-funded student aid makes doing so easy, but because they have to!

It’s a doozy of a declaration that should set off a doozy of a debate! To register to attend what should be a terrific event, or just to watch online, [follow this link](#).

especially when it impacts their wallets!

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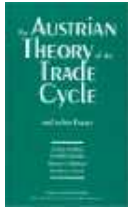


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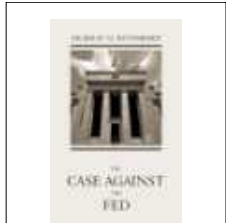
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