



## Refresher On How Feds Got Here, What They've Wrought

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November 19, 2015

When you follow higher education policy for years, it is easy to start losing track of how we got to where we are. There have been so many laws with so many provisions, it gets pretty tough to remember which did what, when. It can also be challenging to recall all of the consequences of the laws – including, especially, the outcomes that are hard to see – versus just accepting the simplistic, misleading, “they made college more affordable” explanations.

To help people cope with the painful problem of Federal Fiddling Overload, Cato budget guru Chris Edwards and I just updated the [higher education entry on the Downsizing the Federal Government website](#). There you can revisit numerous federal higher education laws from the Morrill Act of 1862, to relative newbies like the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act of 2008 and the Affordable Care Act of 2010, which so many people forget included not just the stuff called “Obamacare,” but also a big higher education piece that made Direct Lending the only name in the federal loan game.

With the history done, we move on to the consequences of escalating federal involvement in postsecondary education, including rampant price inflation; over-the-top frills (behold, the [Tiger Grotto!](#)); credential inflation; and increasingly bureaucratic control by Washington. And, of course, there’s a goodly amount of fraud, waste, and abuse to recall, as well as the current \$100 billion-plus price tag – depending on how you slice it – of all this “help.”

Hopefully, in one place that people can spend about ten minutes reading, we have captured both what Washington has done *in* higher education, and has done *to* higher education. Because after a while, it can be awful difficult to keep all those things straight in your head.

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