

Phi Beta Cons

The *Right* take on higher education.

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Neal McCluskey on The Attack on For-Profit Higher Ed

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 15, 2010 1:25 PM

The Cato Institute's Neal McCluskey weighs in on a topic that has lately appeared on PBC, for-profit higher ed, in [this piece](#).

I'm in complete agreement. The attack launched by Senator Harkin, et al. on for-profit higher ed is just scapegoating. The non-profits are just as much interested in raking in money and just as unscrupulous in enrolling weak students, stringing them along with simpleton courses and inflated grades.

This is a replay of the housing debacle. The federal government set the stage with ultra-cheap interest rates and pressure on lenders to forget traditional lending standards so the country could enjoy the supposed benefits of increasing homeownership rates. When that came crashing down, the blame was put on "greedy capitalists" and "deregulation" to shift people's attention away from the fact that it couldn't have happened without government intervention. The same thing is true here. Lots of unfortunate people are discovering that they're deeply in debt for college and can't pay it off, but without federal meddling in higher education, that couldn't have happened either. Now the pols need a scapegoat.

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Lumina Foundation Wants To 'Drastically Improve' College-Graduation Rates

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 15, 2010 12:43 PM

According to [this story](#) in the *Chronicle*, the Lumina Foundation is shifting its focus and will "work to enact the changes needed to drastically improve college graduation rates." Its goal is for 60 percent of Americans to have a postsecondary degree by 2025.

Whether there is any need to do that was the topic of the PBS debate Lumina helped sponsor last February. I believe that Rich Vedder and I, arguing against the proposition, showed that we have already badly oversold higher education, and that efforts to put more kids through college will have minimal benefit at high cost. I wrote about the debate [here](#). Following the debate, I suggested to Lumina president Jamie Merisotis that the foundation ought to do some serious research to find out if its crusade to increase graduation rates makes any sense. No research, evidently. Full speed ahead!

If getting a college degree is so beneficial, why don't more people do it? Could it be because lots of young Americans are so academically weak that they can't or won't tackle the work required, even though at many schools the curriculum has been watered down to middle-school level? Or could it be because it's now widely known that many college graduates end up in jobs that high school kids can do? It's a combination of both, and I can't see what changes Lumina can help enact that would change either.

Aiming at some specific college-graduation rate strikes me as just as nonsensical as for politicians to aim at some specific homeownership rate.

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Bollinger on Journalism

By [Jane S. Shaw](#)

Posted on July 15, 2010 11:21 AM

Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia University, has just written an article — in the *Wall Street Journal*, no less — that illustrates the arrogant sense of self-congratulation that permeates higher education, along with a deep-seated rejection of the institutions that underlie the prosperity and freedom of the United States.

Bollinger proposes that the federal government support journalistic enterprises financially, following the model of public support of state universities and the disbursal of federal research grants to public and private schools. After all, he says, “state support does not translate into official control” in the higher-education sector, and he doesn’t see any reason why the same wouldn’t be true in journalism. He particularly likes the idea of “strengthening our public broadcasting role in the global arena.”

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This Would Be a Waste Even If It Cost Nothing

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 14, 2010 2:11 PM

I read on the front page of the new (July 16) issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in an article entitled “Obama Begins Rebuilding Academic Ties to Indonesia,” that “at the recent G-20 summit meeting . . . Mr. Obama announced that the United States would spend \$165 million over the next five years on programs to help strengthen higher education in Indonesia through educational exchanges and university partnerships. The two countries will also hold a higher education summit next summer.”

OK — \$165 million is now just pocket change in Washington, but I can’t see that this expenditure will do anything to make Indonesian higher education better, how it would make life better in Indonesia even if it did, or what this will do for Americans (other than those who will get to participate in the “education summit,” of course).

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Is Higher-Ed Globalization ‘Reshaping’ the World?

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 14, 2010 12:08 PM

In today's [Pope Center *Clarion Call*](#), I review Ben Wildavsky's recent book [The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World](#).

Some of Wildavsky's arguments are excellent, especially his point that because knowledge is not constrained by national boundaries, we ought to stop worrying about supposed national gains or losses with respect to higher ed "investments," university prestige and so forth. He also acknowledges that for-profit institutions are filling some important educational niches.

Other parts of the book are less convincing, however. I think he makes too much out of the trend toward international expansion by American universities, which as I argued [here](#) seems to be mostly glitz and conspicuous consumption rather than true educational advance.

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Slush Fund and Diversity at the Naval Academy

By [Roger Clegg](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 6:03 PM

That's the focus of a report by the Navy's inspector general, according to [this story](#) in *The Marine Corps Times*. Lots of money was wasted on the academy's diversity efforts, which the commandant said was "the number one priority" there. Not finding, educating, and graduating the best possible naval officers, period — no, the key was that they have the right skin color and have ancestors from the right foreign countries.

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Re: Profit Motive

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 5:30 PM

I'd like to toss in my two cents' worth.

There is nothing wrong with profit-seeking in any sort of education. Government subsidies are the villain here, as they are in every market in which they appear.

A market I'm very familiar with is music education. It's a truly free market: no licensing, no regulations, no subsidies, no price controls. (In North Carolina, at least. I wouldn't be too surprised

if a few of our more dirigiste states have begun subjecting it to political control.) People who want musical education for themselves or their children can search for teachers, work out deals, and quit at any time they don't think they're getting their money's worth. I don't think you'll find any high-pressure sales tactics. My 20-year-old son has been taking lessons since he was five, and while some of his teachers have been less than ideal, we've been overwhelmingly satisfied with the music instruction.

Now, what if the feds passed a law to give more young people "access" to music, setting up a program whereby the government would give grants of, say, \$2,000 per year toward the cost of music lessons with "qualified" instructors. Very soon we'd find a) most teachers increasing their rates to capture at least some of that new music money, b) schools scouring the neighborhoods for parents of kids who might have great hidden musical genius in them, c) music schools employing financial-aid personnel to help all the new students sign up for their grants, d) politicians and consumer advocates bemoaning the shoddiness of some of the music teachers and schools, alleging that they pocket the money but actually teach very little music, and e) a new bureaucracy to promulgate and enforce standards for music instruction.

In short, the simple efficiency of music education as we know it would be supplanted with a wasteful, bureaucratic mess. And if the educational market for non-musical skills and knowledge had never been poisoned with federal money, it would be as clean and efficient as the music market is today. When people are spending their own money, they're careful to weigh costs and benefits. That is the powerful "regulation" that disappears when you introduce third-party funding.

Sure, some for-profit higher ed is a scam. So is a lot of non-profit higher ed. The root of all evil: government money.

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Harvard Awards Fellowship to Alleged Terror Accomplice

By [Nathan Harden](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 4:56 PM

According to Harvard University, Hollman Morris is a courageous and talented war journalist, known for his reports on human-rights abuses by paramilitary organizations in Colombia. Recently, Harvard awarded him [a prestigious journalism fellowship](#). Meanwhile, Colombian president Alvaro Uribe has publicly identified Morris as "an accomplice of terrorism."

The U.S. Embassy declared Morris ineligible to enter the country under the “Terrorist Activities” section of the Patriot Act, according to a [report](#) from the Associated Press. Apparently, he has been traveling around with FARC guerrillas and even accompanied them on an insurgent “liberation” of Colombian security force members. Morris says he was simply there to do his job and cover an important story.

So whom should we believe: Harvard or Uribe? It’s a tough call. Politics in Colombia is a notoriously murky business. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, media reports in Colombia have linked Uribe’s relatives to various violent paramilitary groups. And while Uribe is a strong U.S. ally, he has been linked to Colombian drug cartels in the past. In 2004, the NSA released a [1991 report](#) calling him a “close personal friend of Pablo Escobar.” Uribe denied the relationship.

Harvard officials have appealed to the State Department in hopes of getting Morris’s visa approved. Ironically, Harvard seems to be battling one of its own in this case. Uribe studied there in the early 1990s.

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The Pursuit of Profit

By [Jane S. Shaw](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 1:38 PM

Carol Iannone asks a [fair question](#). Why do some conservatives defend for-profit colleges when those schools exploit the “overselling” of college even more than non-profits do?

Her question is largely directed at me, because I have pointed out that these schools must be doing something right to keep getting customers, and because I have raised questions about the attacks on for-profits. (And now we learn that [those attacks](#), complete with congressional hearings, were orchestrated by a short-seller who wanted to drive down the price of the schools’ stocks!)

I don’t defend the actions of individuals or institutions that mislead or dupe people, whether instigated by profit-making corporations or non-profit organizations. (That includes any deception by the short-seller.) But if we are concerned about solving a societal problem, rather than simply directing moral opprobrium, we should place the blame where it belongs, which is on the easy money provided by the federal government for college-level education.

Let me step back a bit and summarize some elementary facts. Economists who study the wealth and

poverty of nations recognize that prosperity stems from the actions of individuals seeking opportunities for rewards. “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest,” wrote Adam Smith.

The United States and many other countries have become prosperous — the average person has wealth way beyond what kings had two centuries ago — because they allowed individuals to pursue their self-interest, often in the form of profit-making companies. Three things have restrained people from harming others in this pursuit: competition, individual responsibility, and government protection against force and fraud. Essentially, that’s all that is needed to bring about a prosperous nation.

What throws gum into the works of education is the extraordinary amount of money supplied by the government through aid and subsidized loans. This money goes to for-profit and non-profit schools alike — the amount determined by individual choices. Unfortunately, as the Pope Center has observed from time to time, when expenditures are subsidized, people often make poorer choices than they would if they were fully responsible for their spending.

Student aid and loans are just part of the picture, of course. Public universities and community colleges (the prime competitors of for-profits) have many additional government resources, such as state appropriations and research grants, to draw on. Anyone who feels that the for-profits’ pursuit of students and their money is unseemly should consider the university lobbying that goes on in a state legislature or look at the federal earmarks that go to universities.

I hope my point is clear. I abhor deception and duplicity. But the pursuit of self-interest, which the for-profits are doing, is the way that a prosperous society operates. The problem, and it is a big problem, is that the government is providing too much money.

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FIRE Holds ‘Empty Holster’ Protests on Campus

By [Robert VerBruggen](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 1:08 PM

Here’s a video:



Details [here](#).

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An Update on Professor Howell

By [David French](#)

Posted on July 13, 2010 12:04 PM

After receiving [ADF's letter](#) and a deluge of e-mails from concerned citizens, the University of Illinois [has asked](#) the Urbana-Champaign's Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure to review the [termination of Prof. Kenneth Howell](#). But is the university prejudging his case? Read some of these quotes:

"We want to be able to reassure ourselves there was no infringement on academic freedom here," UI President Michael Hogan told faculty senators on Monday.

Don't you mean that you want to discover the facts, President Hogan? Or do you really mean that you just want to reassure yourselves that you did the right thing?

Prof. Jeff Dawson, outgoing chair of the committee, said he would meet Tuesday with Prof. Matt Finkin,

who will take over the chairmanship on Aug. 16, to discuss a timetable. Finkin said the case would be placed on the agenda for the committee's next meeting, but he's not sure yet when that will be, given that many faculty are out of town.

Finkin said Easter's Aug. 23 deadline is "a fast track, but not impossible."

So, you can fire a man without due process in a day, but it's going to take weeks to determine if that snap decision — a decision that the news story reports could cost him dearly — was correct?

"My understanding is that there have been longstanding questions about this relationship," said Professor Nicholas Burbules, professor of educational policy studies and a member of the Senate Council.

Burbules, who was a religious studies major at Grinnell College in Iowa, said "a religious studies program is not a seminary. There's a difference between teaching about religion and teaching religion."

He said the case isn't "just about one e-mail or the issue of homosexuality."

"My understanding is this line has been crossed a long time ago, and repeatedly. This email was kind of a last straw," Burbules said.

Now this is a nice piece of subtle slander. Reporting that the "line has been crossed a long time ago, and repeatedly," yet providing zero details? Such a statement virtually screams bias. It's designed to harm Professor Howell in the court of public opinion without having to come forward with any evidence. The university, however, is going to have a hard time running from the actual record in this matter, and the record demonstrates that offended students trump academic freedom, due process is discarded at will, and that even professors who've been recognized by the university for excellence in [2009](#), [2008](#), [2007](#), [2006](#), [2004](#), and [2003](#) can lose their jobs in the blink of an eye — if their speech make the wrong people angry.

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Not Much Intellectual Diversity Here

By [David French](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 3:43 PM

While perusing the [website](#) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I ran across [this little statement](#) attached to information about the LGBT/Queer minor:

Note: Due to the similarity in the curriculum, GWS [Gender & Women's Studies] Majors and Minors

can **not** earn a minor in LGBT/Queer Studies. GWS majors and minors may, however, use required and elective LGBT/Queer Studies as part of their coursework. GWS minors may elect to drop the minor in GWS and add the minor in LGBT/Queer Studies.

So there's not much daylight between women's studies and queer studies? That's a bit of an inconvenient fact for those who'd argue that women's studies programs offer a broad range of views and examine women's lives in all their diversity and complexity.

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Don't Join the 4-H Club

By [Jane S. Shaw](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 3:02 PM

Russell Nieli has a [jaw-dropping essay](#) on *Minding the Campus*. Describing a major study, he reveals that elite colleges and universities severely discriminate against low-income white students. Furthermore, having a leadership position in an unsavory group such as 4-H, ROTC, or the Future Farmers of America severely reduces your chances of admission.

The findings make a mockery of Harvard's defense of affirmative action in the Supreme Court *Bakke* case: "A farm boy from Idaho can bring something to Harvard College that a Bostonian cannot offer. Similarly, a black student can usually bring something that a white person cannot offer."

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Firing A Professor for Teaching His Subject?

By [David French](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 1:45 PM

Has our university culture become so sensitive, so easily offended, that it cannot even allow professors to teach their subjects without monitoring the campus for hurt feelings? Apparently so. The University of Illinois [has summarily fired](#) a professor after he described Catholic moral teaching on human sexuality in a class *about Catholic moral teaching*.

The professor, Dr. Kenneth Howell, was fired because a student *who was not even in Dr. Howell's class* fired off an e-mail to, among others, the "director of the LGBT resource center" and the

“founder of the queer studies major.” The student was offended by an [e-mail](#) Dr. Howell sent to his class that compared and contrasted utilitarian moral frameworks with Catholic teaching on sexuality. Unfortunately, some students don’t want to be exposed to ideas they find unpleasant. Even worse, university officials agreed. So they fired Dr. Howell without even giving him a chance to defend himself.

This morning, the [Alliance Defense Fund Center for Academic Freedom](#) (full disclosure: I’m the director) sent the university a [letter](#) describing Dr. Howell’s First Amendment rights and urging the university to reinstate Dr. Howell immediately.

Let’s make no mistake about the facts: The university is making a conscious decision to enforce ignorance on its students. The university would rather see its students remain ignorant of one of the world’s most common moral theories than have their delicate feelings damaged. This is not education; it’s indoctrination in its purest form. The University of Illinois not only wants to teach its preferred ideology (see, e.g. the [LGBT resource center](#)), it will go to great lengths to ensure that students don’t even hear about alternative ideas.

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Despite Budget Woes, UNC Gets More Money

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 1:04 PM

In today’s [Pope Center piece](#), Jay Schalin writes about the success the UNC system had in mau-mauing the North Carolina General Assembly into actually increasing its budget this year, despite the state’s budget woes.

More money will go into dubious research projects and futile efforts at social engineering, especially “retention and graduation” programs meant to increase the numbers of low-income students the system enrolls and graduates. The legislators just couldn’t say no to UNC’s claims that to cut its spending would mean doing great damage to the state’s future.

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Dixie Chicks and Activism for Dummies

By [Candace de Russy](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 12:42 PM

What do they have to do with the Muslim Students Union at the University of California, Irvine?

Lots, says Joe Hicks.

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The For-Profit Problem

By [Carol Iannone](#)

Posted on July 12, 2010 11:26 AM

For the life of me, I don't understand why conservatives continue to defend the for-profit colleges. The Pope Center objects rightly and strenuously to the overselling of the college degree. Well, the for-profits are taking that overselling and squaring it, making sure even more people start thinking that they must have a college degree. They are charging high tuition for cooking skills, for example, that people could get at entry-level restaurant jobs. Why should we praise them, or even excuse them, for being more successful at such an objectionable activity? Yes, the problem is federal loans and grants, but that doesn't excuse adding a whole other dimension of "higher" education to take money from the federal purse, and to put it into the pockets of "investors" at that. Their "profits" are something like 80 percent taxpayer money. The loans the students take are higher, the default rate is greater, and students wind up in debt and often do not find suitable employment.

This is from a *New York Times* article:

"They tell people, 'If you don't have a college degree, you won't be able to get a job,'" said Amanda Wallace, who worked in the financial aid and admissions offices at the Knoxville, Tenn., branch of ITT Technical Institute, a chain of schools that charge roughly \$40,000 for two-year associate degrees in computers and electronics. "They tell them, 'You'll be making beaucoup dollars afterward, and you'll get all your financial aid covered.'"

Ms. Wallace left her job at ITT in 2008 after five years because she was uncomfortable with what she considered deceptive recruiting, which she said masked the likelihood that graduates would earn too little to repay their loans.

As a financial-aid officer, Ms. Wallace was supposed to counsel students. But candid talk about job prospects and debt obligations risked the wrath of management, she said.

"If you said anything that went against what the recruiter said, they would threaten to fire you," Ms.

Wallace said. “The representatives would have already conned them into doing it, and you had to just keep your mouth shut.”

And:

Jeffrey West was working at a pet store near Philadelphia, earning about \$8 an hour, when he saw advertisements for training programs offered by WyoTech, a chain of trade schools owned by [Corinthian Colleges Inc.](#), a publicly traded company that last year reported revenue of \$1.3 billion.

After Mr. West called the school, an admissions representative drove to his house to sell him on classes in auto body refinishing and upholstery technology, a nine-month program that cost about \$30,000.

Mr. West blanched at the tuition, he recalled, but the representative assured him the program amounted to an antidote to hard economic times.

“They said they had a very high placement rate, somewhere around 90 percent,” he said. “That was one of the key factors that caused me to go there. They said I would be earning \$50,000 to \$70,000 a year.”

Some 14 months after he completed the program, Mr. West, 21, has failed to find an automotive job. He is working for \$12 an hour weatherizing foreclosed houses.

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Spongeworthiness Studies

By [Robert VerBruggen](#)

Posted on July 09, 2010 5:32 PM

Princeton economics professor Avinash Dixit has [a lot of spare time](#).

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Re: Young, College Educated, and Unemployed

By [David French](#)

Posted on July 09, 2010 12:40 PM

Nathan, you [consistently find](#) the most interesting [cultural articles](#). I am particularly intrigued and disappointed that in an era of an ongoing two-front war and an expanding military, so many young people don't even seem to *consider* the military as an option. We're living in a time when a tiny fraction of the population is bearing the burden of multiple deployments, while the vast majority of

their peers — enjoying the freedom and leisure guaranteed by the sacrifice of their high-school and college classmates — don't even think about taking their turn on the line.

Of course the military is not for everyone, but of the 37 percent of college grads who are unemployed, a large number are men and women who — with the right training and leadership — could do great things for their country and could help relieve a crushing burden borne by their fellow citizens. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Why not join the fight?

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Another Ford Foundation Folly

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 09, 2010 11:57 AM

This article in *Diverse Education* informs us that the Ford Foundation has chosen Nevada as the first state to participate in its “Educational Equity and Postsecondary Student Success” project. The plan is to raise college-graduation rates (especially among minority, low-income, and first-generation students) by examining graduation rates from a “systemwide perspective.”

The problem is that systems don't graduate students. Students graduate themselves — or not. Minority, low-income, and first-generation students who are adequately prepared for college and have the discipline to complete their coursework graduate; many others in those groups, however, are ill-prepared and disengaged. Nevada's higher-ed system can't do anything to change that. Neither can the Ford Foundation.

Naturally, the higher-ed establishment likes this program. Spending Ford money to generate some publicity can't hurt. The chancellor justifies the program, saying, “If students can't get the education they need to enter the work force, they will wind up in the social system or the prisons.” But students can get whatever education they're willing to work for, and those who don't graduate from college can still find employment and avoid becoming welfare dependents or criminals.

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Do Student Evaluations Improve Education?

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 09, 2010 10:57 AM

In today's [Pope Center piece](#), Prof. Robert Weissberg argues that they are more likely to do the opposite. They tend to promote mediocrity and cause some profs to pander to students in the quest for nice evaluations.

In a course where most of the students are actually interested in learning, the professor certainly might benefit from their feedback. On the other hand, where the typical student is disengaged, ill-prepared, and enrolled in college principally to have fun, evaluations are at best a waste of time.

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Linda Chavez on For-Profits vs. the Obama Administration

By [Roger Clegg](#)

Posted on July 09, 2010 9:08 AM

She favors the former in [her column](#) this week.

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Why Is a Student Like This in College Anyway?

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 08, 2010 2:38 PM

Prof. Jason Fertig has written an illuminating [piece](#) for NAS on the difficulty of dealing with students who would rather try to manipulate a professor into a gift grade than doing the work necessary to earn one.

The student in the piece already has a job he evidently is capable of doing. So why is it necessary for him to take the professor's course? I think the answer is: credential mania.

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Young, College Educated, and Unemployed

By [Nathan Harden](#)

Posted on July 08, 2010 10:42 AM

The *New York Times* has a piece today about the swelling ranks of college graduates who remain unemployed — even one or two years after graduation. They have degrees, and plenty of college loans, but no paychecks.

For young adults, the prospects in the workplace, even for the college-educated, have rarely been so bleak. Apart from the 14 percent who are unemployed and seeking work, as Scott Nicholson is, 23 percent are not even seeking a job, according to data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). The total, 37 percent, is the highest in more than three decades and a rate reminiscent of the 1930s.

Wait a minute: 23 percent aren't even looking? Have they given up because they failed to find quick success? Have we become so soft? If it is really true that one out of four young people in this country is unemployed and not even looking for work, one has to wonder: What are all these people doing with their time? It seems we are suffering a great waste of energy, opportunity, and potential.

The article describes the sense of entitlement some of today's graduates feel. Some are refusing jobs for which they feel overqualified, even after two or more years of futile searching.

In terms of their employment rate, college graduates are still faring better than non-college graduates. But, with more than a third of the young adults in America out of work, some degree-holders are having a difficult time coming to grips with the reality of the job market.

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Someone Else Who Understands That College Has Been Oversold

By [George Leef](#)

Posted on July 08, 2010 10:27 AM

Robert Wenzel, editor of [EconomicPolicyJournal.com](#), gets at the truth, [writing](#), “The wholesale creation of degree factories, as a result of government sponsored programs, has diluted the value of a college education. 1. Because many more have them and 2. The quality of knowledge by those who have graduated has declined dramatically.”

Wenzel is right. Because of government interference in education (from top to bottom), we now have huge numbers of college graduates with less knowledge about the world and less in the way of basic skill than the typical ninth grader used to. They keep hearing that a college degree is the ticket to a good career. For a few, it is, but for many others, college is just an expensive detour before

landing the sort of mundane, low-skill job that they could have done while they were in high school.

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