

The Five-Year Plan

Heather Moore, *The Review*, U. of Delaware

Give 'em credit. Please.

Getting some college students to graduate in four years is like getting a politician to leave office after one term. For many students, what used to be a short-term experience has turned into a full-time career.

The four-year degree is becoming a thing of the past, something prefaced by your parents' wistful stories of "When I went to college...." Four years don't allow you to take a range of courses or to decide confidently on a major, some argue. Then there's that dismal job market looming beyond the fun of mom-and-dad-sponsored campus life. It's just too damn hard to leave.

At the U. of North Carolina, the choice may be a little easier. If you're up for paying a 25 percent tuition surcharge to stay enrolled after eight semesters and 128 credit hours, go ahead. Otherwise, get out in four years. Still, many university officials around the country refer to the five-year plan as a problem — an "academic epidemic."

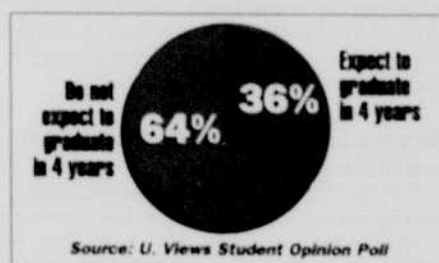
"If students don't graduate in four years, it's usually their own fault. They don't talk to upperclassmen or advisers.... They screw around too much," says Rick Roberts, director of Colorado College's career center.

Au contraire, say most five-year students. A new generation of learners seems to believe the extra year is worth it, since it allows time to switch majors, study abroad and deal with financial and personal problems. Sure, they fall victim to name-calling from their four-year

colleagues who call it Star Trek Plan: The Never-ending Voyage. But for the most part, these super-seniors feel no remorse.

Under Major Pressure

Julie Solomon, 22, a fifth-year senior at the U. of Georgia, says that her advisers didn't clearly explain her academic options. Like many college newcomers, she wasn't sure what she wanted to major



in. "You feel all this pressure to decide a major [while] you're trying to get to know yourself," she says.

Solomon started out as a journalism major with a minor in food and nutrition. Three switches later — after deciding against culinary school and med school — she was (and is, as of 4 o'clock this afternoon) a dietetics and nutrition major.

"All my friends graduated last year," Solomon says. "I think they sort of pitied me."

Murray Solomon, Julie's dad and financial means of prolonging the college experience, says he assumed that his daughter would graduate on time until about two years into college.

"When her mother and I went to college 35 years ago," he says, "it was unusual to take more than four years to graduate. We knew we were to complete our education in four years. Period. [But] drop/add was also unheard of in our day."

Taking the Scenic Route

Going to France was worth staying an extra year at Colorado College for fifth-year senior Kris Kimber, 23. Nearly all the credits from his year-long studies in France transferred, but none went toward his biology major. He had to return to Colorado for another year.

"I was sick of school," he says. "This was my excuse for a year off."

Kimber has no regrets about graduating in five years. "Had I pushed through, I wouldn't have had the time to enjoy myself. I really should've taken a year off after high school," he says. "I wouldn't recommend graduating in five years *per se*, but I'd recommend studying abroad."

Super-seniors do experience a degree of four-year-centrism, Kimber says, in addition to facing relatives' nagging questions of, "Well, are you going to graduate this year?" Initially, Kimber's parents "weren't real enthused" about him taking another year, but his mom says the extra money spent was "part of Kris' educational process" and that she and her husband no longer have any misgivings about it.

Kimber's mom says that it's more difficult for students to graduate on time from public universities than private schools because a chunk of public students' time is generally set aside for a job to pay tuition. "Most people have to worry about where their next dollar is coming from. That's more true at public schools than private, liberal arts colleges."

By golly, give this woman an academic analysis degree! In fact, in Minnesota, the graduation rates at \$10,000-a-year public schools are 48 percent lower than those at \$20,000-a-year private schools. Who says that time isn't money?

Flying the Co-op

Warren Williams, 21, is a "pre-junior" in his fourth year at Drexel U. in Philadelphia, with one more year to go. At Drexel, 95 percent of the students are on the co-op cycle — they spend half the year in class and half on internship. And one more year in school.

"It used to bother me when I'd go home and have to explain [co-op] to my friends. They'd think I was on a remedial plan; that couldn't be further from the truth," says Williams, an accounting major who interns with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. "I used to try to explain the co-op program to everyone to justify graduating in five years. There's no need to justify it. I just don't see what the rush is."

Williams asks the same question as many five-year students: "If you can afford it, why not stay in school? This is the best time of your life anyway."



Roadrunner U. Meep! Meep!

Just the opposite of the five-year plan is the often self-created (not found in a course catalog) three-year or less-than-four-year plan. Many hyper-motivated students who come into college with Advanced Placement credits and want a head start in the job arena find the warp-speed taste o' college most definitely to their liking.

Nicki Johnson, 22, a '93 Duke U. graduate in economics, entered college with 18 AP credits. After realizing it wasn't too much extra work to graduate early, she decided to do it and save money. "It would've been nice to graduate with my good friends, but it wouldn't have been worth \$20,000."

Johnson's advisers were no help. "They couldn't understand why I'd want to miss the fourth year of 'the Duke experience,'" she says. Now, in retrospect — with a master's in accounting from the U. of North Carolina and a job with one of the Big Six accounting firms — she says graduating in three years gave her "a leg up on the competition."

Jeff Ladwig, a 20-year-old sophomore at Colorado College, will graduate next year, after three years and two summer sessions, to save both himself and his parents the \$17,142 per year tuition bill. But he feels he may be missing out by doing so. "I'd recommend four years — you get more out of college; you have more time to hang out."

Not all three-year students feel that way about prolonging the college party scene. "I have senioritis," says Leslie Bilawsky, 20, who will graduate from the U. of Delaware this May after only three years. "I love UD, but you can only do smoke-filled, cheap-beer frat parties for just so long."

Hey, Leslie. Speak for yourself.



Illustrations by: J. Thurston, The Auburn Plainsman, Auburn U.