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OUR VIEW

Free community college worth considering

Bills come and go in the Oregon State legislature. It is hard to become too enamored or too frightened of one, knowing it can change considerably or never even make it to the floor.

But one bill stands out as an interesting concept that if not yet ready for passage, is at least ready for deeper study.

That is Senate Bill 81, which would waive tuition at all Oregon community colleges for recently graduated in-state students who maintain a respectable GPA.

It sounds too good to be true, right? With the cost of college vastly outpacing inflation, attending one our state's finest institutions can leave a young person saddled with debt.

College remains a good investment for nearly all of them, significantly increasing lifetime earnings as you move from an associate degree to a bachelor's to a master's and beyond. But teens have a hard time imagining themselves as mid-career professionals, much less retirees.

And when they graduate high school they have two options: earn minimum wage somewhere or, if their parents aren't rich or they're not an exceptional student, take on a boatload of scary debt. Many young men and women make the wrong choice, taking the short-term money while later finding themselves stuck in a dead-end job with few skills to make a career change.

Senate Bill 81 would change the dynamic. It would allow young Oregonians to see a diploma as not the end of their studies, but the beginning. It does require some buy-in from students. They would pay $50 per term, and also be required to maintain a GPA of 2.5 or better.

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It's also expensive, and would cost the state somewhere between $14 million and $16 million, depending on the number of students who take advantage of the program.

The state just doesn't have that kind of money, and its current philosophy is to invest available dollars early into the education system — from preschool to third grade — in an attempt to get everyone on the same page when the real learning begins.

It's doubtful Senate Bill 81 will pass. But we have to continue thinking about ways for post-secondary education to become the norm for the majority of Oregon high school students. It's the only way our sons and daughters will be able to compete in tomorrow's economy.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Good prospects for college grads

The Oregonian

This year's college graduates will enter the best job market since the early stages of the Great Recession, which officially started when this year's seniors — at least those who finished in four years — were freshmen in high school.

For a 22-year-old, eight years feels like a lifetime — and in this case that's appropriate since graduating into a welcoming economy can have lifelong benefits. College graduates who get their first jobs during recessions earn about 9 percent less annually in the early stages of their careers than do those who enter the job market when the economy is growing, according to a National Bureau of Economic Research paper. It takes a decade for them to catch up. Other studies have estimated the penalty for bad timing to be even higher. And some of the consequences, such as waiting longer to buy a home or start saving for retirement, can last a lifetime.

So the class of 2015 is fortunate in many ways. They have a degree, which on average is worth $830,000 more in lifetime earnings compared with what high school graduates earn, according to the Federal Reserve Board of San Francisco. They have a better chance of getting a job than their slightly older peers did and probably will get higher starting salaries, too. They are less likely to start their "professional" lives serving coffee or waiting tables. But the post-recession job market is different from the previous employment landscape.

One of the most significant shifts has been the increase in the importance of work experience. Employers always have valued experience of course. But the recession and other socio-economic changes have conspired to make it harder to obtain relevant work. From the start of the early 2000s recession to the end of the most recent one, the number of teen job seekers without previous experience nearly doubled.

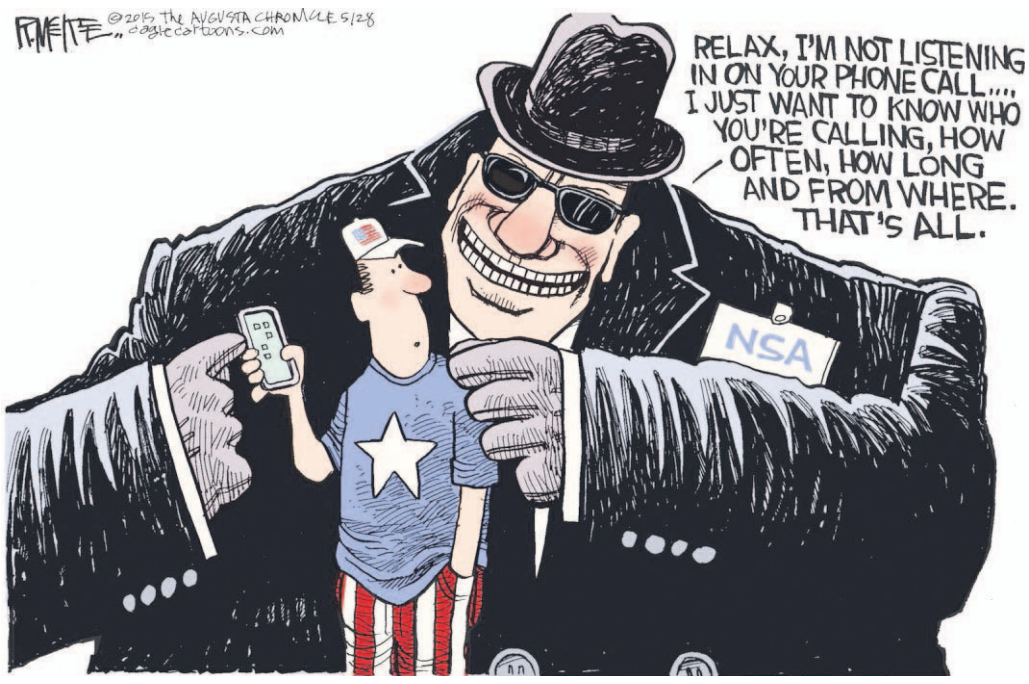
Once in college, many students have to work to help pay the tuition bill, but those who find jobs related to their eventual career — which was difficult to do during the recession and early stages of recovery — will reap the biggest benefits.

The more difficult it becomes to gain relevant experience, the more valuable that experience is to those who have it. All of this magnifies the importance of internships. And it also puts pressure on students to pick a career path early so they know what type of job, internship or otherwise, to pursue. The implications for colleges: Increase counseling and beef up internship programs. The good news for students: Ann Mestrovich, employer relations coordinator at Portland State University, said that, in a shift from recent years, employers are calling her to inquire about offering internships instead of the university having to proactively seek partners.

Speaking of picking a career path, the recession didn't do any favors for those who don't like math. The top 10 highest earning majors for 2015 graduates all require engineering degrees of one sort or another, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers. A state-by-state study by Georgetown University, which looked at career earnings rather than just entry wages, added nursing, forestry, business, accounting, finance and architecture to the best-pay list for Oregon. The lists underscore the need to improve math education in Oregon, which continues to graduate large numbers of students who are unprepared to pass even entry-level college math classes. The cost of that shortcoming will only grow.

The Employment Department study of young workers highlighted another area where students need help — job searches. Young workers rarely take advantage of free employment help that is available and, counter-intuitively, over-rely on the traditional resume and application while putting too little effort into networking. Portland State's Mestrovich said students sometimes need to be reminded that networking involves more than updating a LinkedIn profile. "Regardless of the technology and tools we all use these days, personal contact is the best way to understand the world of work ... and get you connected," she said.

Thankfully for the Class of 2015, an increasing number of employers want to make connections with this year's graduates.



OTHER VIEWS

Talent loves English

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Eight hundred years ago next month, English noblemen forced King John to sign the Magna Carta. It's still having amazing effects on the world today. The Magna Carta helped usher in government with a separation of powers. It helped create conditions in which centralized authority could not totally control fiscal, political, religious or intellectual life. It helped usher in the modern Anglo-Saxon state model, with its relative emphasis on the open movement of people, ideas and things.

The Anglo-Saxon model has its plusses and minuses, but it is very attractive to people around the world. Today, as always, immigrants flock to nations with British political heritage. Forty-six million people in the United States are foreign born, almost 1 in 6. That's by far the highest number of immigrants in any country.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand are also immigrant magnets. The British political class was a set abuzz last week by a government report showing a 50 percent increase in net immigration in 2014 compared with 2013. The government has a goal of limiting immigration to 100,000 a year, but, in 2014, net inbound migration was estimated to be 318,000. Britain has the most diverse immigrant community of any nation on earth.

> In short, it might be time to revise our stereotypes about the immigration issue.

Some of the those people went to Britain from outside of Europe, but a great many flow from the sclerotic economies in the European Union: Italy, Spain and France. Compared with many other European countries, Britain is a job-creating paragon.

Across the English-speaking world, immigrants are drawn by the same things: relatively strong economies, good universities, open cultures and the world's lingua franca.

The nature of global migration is slowly evolving, too. We have an image of immigrants as the poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free. According to this stereotype, immigrants are driven from their homes by poverty and move elsewhere to compete against the lowest-skilled workers.

But immigrants do not come from the poorest countries. Nations like Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Niger — some of the poorest countries in the world — have some of the lowest outmigration rates. Less than 3 percent of their populations live outside their borders. Their citizens don't have the resources to move.

Instead, immigrants tend to come from middle-class countries, and they migrate to rich, open ones. You might have thought that as the world gets more middle class, global immigration would decline because of more opportunity at home. In fact, the reverse is happening. As the developing world gets more middle class, immigration has increased because educational and income gains have led to ever higher aspirations.

The situation is complex. Less than a decade ago, six Mexicans migrated to the United States for every Indian or Chinese. But as Mexico has prospered, immigration has dropped. Meanwhile, as India and China have gotten richer, the number of Indians and Chinese living abroad has doubled.

Some of the Asian immigrants are quite wealthy. According to the China International Immigration Report, among Chinese with assets of more than $16 million, 27 percent had emigrated abroad and an additional 47 percent were considering such a move. The real estate website Soufun.net surveyed 5,000 people and found that 41 percent of such people were drawn to move abroad for better living conditions, 35 percent for better educational opportunities for their children and 15 percent for better retirement conditions.

And this talent pool has barely been tapped. According to a Gallup survey in 2012, 22 million Chinese wanted to move to the United States, as did 10 million Indians, 3 million Vietnamese and a surprising 5 million Japanese.

In short, it might be time to revise our stereotypes about the immigration issue. A thousand years ago, a few English noblemen unwittingly heralded in a decentralized political and intellectual model. This model was deepened over the centuries by people ranging from Henry VIII to the American founding fathers. It's a model that is relatively friendly to outsider talent. We didn't earn this model; we're the lucky inheritors.

Meanwhile, globalization, with all its stresses and strains, has created a large international class of middle-class dreamers: university graduates who can't fulfill their aspirations at home and who would enrich whatever nation is lucky enough to have them.

In this context, Hillary Clinton's daring approach to immigration, supporting a "path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants already in the United States, is clearly the right one. The Republican Party is insane if it conducts a 21st-century immigration policy based on stereotypes from the 1980s.

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David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

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