

# Time to control costs for higher education students

Les Cochran 12:02 a.m. EST January 5, 2015



Rising medical costs have long been in the public eye, and for good reason. Over the last 35 years, medical costs have grown at a rate double that of inflation. With wage-earner income remaining essentially constant, the burden on the average person shot up six-fold.

At the same time, public college tuition skyrocketed over 12 times, nearly doubling the rate of medical increases. Like heart disease, the “higher education silent killer” has already taken its toll — \$1.3 trillion in student-loan debt that has limited access for millions of people and greatly curtailed their economic purchasing-power.

Trying to address these costs, the federal government increased Pell Grant funding by a whopping 1,700 percent. But, because of the spiraling costs of higher education and the soaring number of students, the amount of the tab covered by these grants dropped from 72 percent to 34 percent.

Horrific as these percentages may be, the dollar impact on individual students was even more exorbitant. In 1997, Pell Grants paid for 72 percent of the costs for students attending a public university. By 2013, the federal contribution had dropped to 34 percent. (Had university tuition costs followed inflationary rates, students would have paid \$2,064.) Instead, the average student at a public university paid \$8655.

During this time frame, universities did nothing to change. They plodded along like the proverbial dinosaur acting as if nothing had changed. Corporations faltered and failed. Kodak almost died. General Motors was too big to collapse but it did.

There are countless ways in which higher education could reign-in spending, starting first with how personnel are evaluated — assessing staff by the value they add, measuring faculty by the qualitative learning they produce, and evaluating leaders by their budgetary effectiveness.

Inside the academy presidents could take simple cost-cutting actions to reduce the bloated size of mid-management. They could apply the same concepts to reduce inefficiencies in the way faculty loads are determined. Add-on curriculums could be streamlined; thereby, eliminating deadwood-courses taught by “retired-on-the-job” professors.

Similar changes must be made in big-time athletics. The most recent five-year study found only eight universities of the nation’s 125 largest programs made a profit. The rest of the institutions drained millions of dollars from their university coffers.

Governors and state legislators need to tie new funding to cost-cutting measures. Board members need to demonstrate greater fiscal responsibility. Budgetary expertise should be added to the selection criterion for presidents and annual financial training made a condition of employment.

The federal government, too, has failed miserably in its role to serve and protect the best interest of the general public. There are no checks and balances for higher education. University tuition increases are simply passed onto students, mushrooming student-debt levels even more.

We can’t afford to risk the demise of one of our country’s greatest resources. Action must be taken to reform higher education; once again, making high quality education available to all who qualify.

Les Cochran, a San Carlos resident, is former president of Youngstown State University.

Read or Share this story: <http://newspr.es/1BosITy>

## MORE STORIES



**[Remembering what Rev. King did — and that there is more to do](#)**

[\(/story/opinion/2015/01/19/remembering/21966811/\)](/story/opinion/2015/01/19/remembering/21966811/)

[\(/story/opinion/2015/01/19/remembering/21966811/\)](/story/opinion/2015/01/19/remembering/21966811/)

Jan. 19, 2015, 9:09 a.m.



**Experience rewarding one for citizen board members**

[\(/story/opinion/2015/01/18/experience-rewarding-one-citizen-board-members/21932125/\)](/story/opinion/2015/01/18/experience-rewarding-one-citizen-board-members/21932125/)

**(/story/opinion/2015/01/18/experience-rewarding-one-citizen-board-members/21932125/)**

Jan. 18, 2015, 12:11 a.m.



**We don't need guns on college campuses**

[\(/story/opinion/2015/01/18/need-guns-college-campuses/21931691/\)](/story/opinion/2015/01/18/need-guns-college-campuses/21931691/)

**(/story/opinion/2015/01/18/need-guns-college-campuses/21931691/)**

Jan. 18, 2015, 12:11 a.m.