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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not the Right Way to Fix High Tuition Rates

To the Editor:

Ostensibly discussing high tuition rates, Dorothy Blaney proposes solutions that would do nothing to reverse the trend ("[Who Should Pay the Bill for a Private Education?](#)," *The Chronicle Review*, April 2). First, she proposes that aid follow students, not institutions. How would tuition vouchers for students restrain increases? On the contrary, the higher the tuition, the higher the financial need, which is the key criterion for aid programs such as Pell Grants. Private institutions currently get more dollars per student from direct student aid than do public ones, precisely because of higher tuition. ...

Dr. Blaney also proposes indexing public-college tuition to family income. Should not that apply to private colleges as well? Both public and private institutions discount tuition through financial aid, however, so the retail price is not the real price for all. ...

Besides, how does an institution fashion a budget without reasonable revenue projections? Requiring public institutions to write budgets only after they know who is attending and what their income is would introduce chaos to budgeting. ...

Dr. Blaney's claim that "the cost of educating an undergraduate student in a particular subject area is roughly the same at Pennsylvania State University, a public institution, as it is at Cedar Crest College, a private one" is flat-out wrong. Although the state subsidy per student at Penn State is higher than that per student at Cedar Crest, when you add subsidies to tuition and fees at the two institutions, Penn State's price is about 70 percent of Cedar Crest's. The state gets a real bargain from its investment in public institutions. ...

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To the Editor:

I agree with Dorothy Blaney that "we need a new paradigm ... related to tuition increases," but not the anticompetitive price discrimination she proposes, where one group of students subsidizes the education of another group of students based on the alleged financial stability of the students' parents. Keep in mind that it is not the students who may or may not be wealthy, but their parents. ...

If it is illegal for a manufacturer to sell the same product at different prices, why shouldn't it be illegal

for colleges and universities to discount their tuition, a euphemism for price discrimination? ...

Would eliminating tuition discounting prevent access to education? No, because there are loans available, as Ms. Blaney suggests. Would eliminating tuition discounting lower the cost of education? Of course! If, for example, the \$6-million that the University of California at Davis spent to provide 800 students with \$7,500 each in scholarships ([Online, The Chronicle](#), April 2) had instead been used to reduce tuition, the other 6,000 admitted students could have paid less. ...

Congress would do well to reduce the cost of education for everyone, not just the offspring of parents with limited means.

Donna J. Laut
Neshanic Station, N.J.

To the Editor:

Dorothy Blaney, the president of a private college in Pennsylvania, states: "In Pennsylvania, for example, 6 percent of the students who attended private institutions in 1999 had family incomes of less than \$18,000, compared with 7 percent of those who attended universities in the state system and 4 percent who attended other state-related institutions."

President Blaney's presentation of these figures, which are taken from a publication of the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Pennsylvania, is not entirely accurate. The denominator of the percentages represents only dependent students who applied for financial aid in each of the three sectors. So what she represents as proportions of the entire student body are actually not.

How inaccurate the association's figures are would depend upon how many students there are in each sector who did not apply for financial aid or are independent students. That is, if one of the sectors had a much higher proportion of students who did not apply for aid (most likely because they come from families with higher incomes), then the percentages she presented would be reduced proportionally more in that sector than in the others. Without knowing the number of independent students and those not applying for aid in each sector, it is impossible to calculate the true proportion of low-income students in each sector.

While this may appear to be a small point, it is an important one considering that the essay tried to make the case that the private sector in Pennsylvania serves proportionally as many low-income students as does the public sector. Unfortunately, President Blaney and the association do not present the data to demonstrate that.

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<http://chronicle.com>
Section: The Chronicle Review
Volume 50, Issue 37, Page B4

