

With the title of an American citizen comes the right to choose. There is the high school student who deliberately chooses to enlist in the U.S. military before ever graduating. There is the girl that reluctantly decides to go to a community college to further her education. There is even the boy that selects a trade in which education after high school is unnecessary, and chooses to stay far away from the typical college experience. Unfortunately for America and the world alike, our lives revolve around the constant flow of money. For these students and all high schoolers, money has become the determinant force behind one's own future. Think about it. Without undermining the decisions of students nationwide who wish to enlist in the army, enroll in community college, learn a trade, etc. most of these individual decisions point back to one thing and one thing only: money, money, and more money. In today's era, with most careers come the need for post-secondary education in order to be successful. With such astronomical costs for furthering one's education, are colleges and universities eating a hole in all the pockets of American citizens? Is it then time for America to become the giving tree and provide free college to high school graduates across the country?

For one, eliminating the tuition factor would allow for students to make a decision on which college is best for them, without worrying about, you guessed it: cash. Instead, high school graduates could focus on creating a unique college experience that better defines what individual path is right for them. For example, students might be more definitive about choosing a major when entering college if they did not have to worry about financially affording withdrawing the necessary thousands of dollars from their bank accounts. This would also allow

students to get “the most for their money” (pun intended) without having to give up a single penny for tuition. As a major benefit to free college education, students would be able to get outside of their comfort zones and maybe experience college in a state they never considered attending, since costs for tuition and travel combined are too massive. Most exciting would be to apply the tuition money to a new cause, such as advancing one’s education by studying abroad. This would enhance the overall education of students across the nation who otherwise could not afford to do so. In general, cutting the tuition factor creates a more level playing field for students nationwide, similar to how affirmative action provides minorities a better chance of being admitted to colleges and universities. This would, in turn, create more equal footing for students to obtain the same opportunities of those who might not struggle as much financially.

On a more macroscopic scale, free college education would lessen the financial burden on American families who make countless sacrifices to save up money in their bank accounts for the big college purchase. Eliminating this burden would increase the level of happiness of all United States citizens, creating a more stress-free environment for parents especially. Also, one of the main contributors to the national debt crisis is that college graduates are unable to pay off their student loans in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond. In fact, with such hefty prices, grandparents are STILL trying to pay off their debt that seems to keep accumulating. Should they be faced with this burden for the rest of their lives and when does this suffering end? Instead of graduating in debt, imagine college graduates who are able to achieve greater stability by putting their very first paycheck in their bank accounts instead of sending it directly to the government. What a good feeling that must be...

However, if college education were to be free, then the national debt crisis would still be a major dilemma since the government would have to get the tuition money for each student from somewhere. They cannot just pull these huge sums of money out of thin air, nor is America made of money by any means. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In addition, a college degree would become the norm, meaning that earning a master's degree, for example, would become the basis for every college student and the expectation of employers nationwide. Some colleges are set apart from others by academic prestige and the sticker price that comes with earning a college degree from that school. This means that Ivy League schools that value prestigious academic performance and come with a higher price point would be more equalized to community colleges, for instance. Without stereotyping the two types of schools, "higher-end schools" would lose what makes them "higher-end".

Generally, high school students work hard, partly because they know they will be rewarded for their academic dedication in the future. Most students would lose ambition and settle for grades without challenging themselves to learn and achieve more without proper incentive. In other words, taking the college fee out of the question diminishes this spark in students to go the extra mile. This goes along with determination to receive good grades in hopes of acquiring scholarship money. However, eliminating the college fee would therefore eradicate student scholarships. This is because extra money from the government would not be needed if students did not have to take any cash from their pockets for college to begin with. Thinking less microscopically about each individual student is the consideration of each specific college.

If students are no longer paying for this education, these colleges would not receive enough money for maintenance and additions to fund their school and their students properly. In

other words, students would not get the most benefits out of the college of their choice, and professors in turn, would most likely not receive the same amount of pay with such a depletion of money. Like the domino effect, free college education would work in a similar manner, negatively affecting first each student, then each teacher, next each individual college, and lastly the nation as a whole.

One possible solution to this controversial issue is to further reward those who work diligently in school. Those who meet standards for outstanding academic performance could receive a free college education. This decision could be based on reaching a certain GPA requirement or achievement on SAT scores. Each specific high school could set these standards, since each run on an independent grading system, or this could be a county, state, or national decision for the criteria to achieve this honor. This would likely push students even harder than they currently work because in the back of their minds, they realize that the more dedication, the bigger the benefit in the long run. This positive correlation would, in turn, make the teacher's job easier, with more motivated problem-solvers in class. Academic scholarships could still be available to those who do not directly hit the grade mark for free college education, showing that they too are being rewarded for their high school academic performance. This is a win-win situation since free college education is obtainable, but not a government hand-me-out that every student receives regardless. Another way of putting this is that if America is to become a money tree, let the tree not lose all its leaves all at once.