

Introduction

Should College be Free for all People?

Free college education has been a much-debated issue in recent years as advocates argue for its many benefits. Detractors warn about the potential burden it may place on taxpayers. Those in favor of free college point to the positive impact on society at large stemming from increased educational attainment. Proponents contend that removing the financial barrier to a postsecondary degree would drive greater access and opportunity for students who would otherwise be unable to afford college or take on crippling student loan debt. Free education supporters also suggest that a more highly educated populace could have broader economic implications, including greater higher-paying jobs and improved social mobility. On the other hand, opponents are quick to note how free college could add to the existing federal debt and, in some cases, lead to an uneven distribution of government resources that rewards those already likely to attend college. Even though 62% of Americans believe that higher education should be made free, it might be a good idea as it can reduce federal revenue and can increase the burden on taxpayers. Moreover, they suggest there are other methods through which existing debt can be decreased rather than increased. Making free college to increase accessibility options comes with worsened economic inequality, racial inequality, and a high risk of low-quality education that mars the probability of integration into the workforce.

Evidence

Body Paragraph

Open accessibility to higher education has been touted as a great equalizer – one that promises equal access to knowledge regardless of socioeconomic status. However, when higher education becomes widely accessible, it attracts not only the traditional low-income student seeking an edge for better career prospects but also high-income students who can afford college tuition but opt to take advantage of free college opportunities. This leads to "mixed enrollments" and overcrowded classrooms, which can have a detrimental effect on faculty satisfaction and

quality of education. The resulting increased teaching workload for faculty members can push them away from such institutions altogether, which can create a sort of brain drain in which experienced teaching staff migrates to more lucrative private colleges, exacerbating already existent disparities between public and private educational establishments. A recent study conducted by Papík and colleagues (2022) on the relationship between the quality of education and the unemployment rate in the youth revealed that nine months after graduation, there was a substantial decrease in the quality of high school education. According to the study, graduates suffering from lower-quality education were found to be more likely to remain unemployed. This lead to broader implications regarding how educational institution should focus efforts on improving their teaching strategies and reducing inequality amongst students on factors such as socioeconomic backgrounds. The Middle East and North African (MENA) region is facing a significant issue of high unemployment rates due to the poor quality of education. This was reinforced by the results of various tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The assessments provide important insights into educational performance across different countries, with MENA countries consistently achieving lower-than-average scores (Boudihaj & Sahli, 2022). These results suggest that many were lacking in essential knowledge or had been subjected to outdated methods of instruction. This leads to a greater proportion of graduates leaving universities without the requisite skills or capacity to implement them in their fields, resulting in a high rate of unemployment. This shows that quality of education is important for the employment of the students, and overcrowding the classes through free college education could lead to reduced quality and, ultimately, higher unemployment rates.

Many schools prefer to enroll students from rich backgrounds rather than people from lower-class. This is because the cost of college goes far beyond tuition. College students also have to pay for books, supplies, lab fees, transportation, and room and board if they live away from home. While free college would cover the cost of tuition, it does not address these additional expenses which are necessary for a student's success. Many low-income students lack the funds to cover these basic costs of college, making it difficult for them to complete their education. Even if the tuition is free, they may still be unable to attend college due to a lack of financial resources. Free college tuition will likely lead to greater benefits for upper-class students because they are more likely to have the resources needed to cover the additional costs associated with attending college, such as books and transportation. Lower-income students may still struggle with these extra expenses, as they would have to cover nearly \$18 billion in annual out-of-pocket expenses, which can make it harder for them to take advantage of free tuition (Chingos, 2016). Furthermore, since lower-income students typically have fewer resources available to pay for college, they are more likely to take on larger loan amounts than higher-income students. As a result, free tuition may lead to greater benefits for upper-class students with the ability to cover additional costs and less of an impact for lower-income students who are unable to access these resources. Thus, free college might not be the solution to reduce the existing economic inequality; rather, it might worsen it by reducing the burden on the rich while the poor have to cope with loans and living expenses.

Racial inequality can be exacerbated by economic inequality brought about by free college tuition. If lower-income students are unable to take advantage of the offer due to their inability to cover additional expenses, they may not have access to the same educational opportunities as upper-class students and thus face greater barriers in terms of starting a career or

achieving success later on in life. Additionally, since minorities are disproportionately represented in lower-income households, the racial wealth gap may be further widened by free college tuition, creating an even greater disparity between white and minority populations. The stark economic disparity between black and white households in the United States is a significant source of racial discrimination and inequality. With a median net worth of only \$17,100 for black households and \$171,000 for white households, the difference between the two communities is vast (O'Rourke, 2018). Without adequate wealth to start with, American blacks are much less likely to have access to education or stable employment opportunities, creating a cycle of poverty that will only be reinforced over generations if left unaddressed. This economic gap can become even wider if free college tuition becomes more widely available. With many low-income black children unable to access free education due to its strict eligibility criteria, wealthy whites would disproportionately benefit from this privilege, expounding the gap between the races even further. Thus, a free college education could lead to higher economic and, ultimately, higher racial inequalities.

The quality of education and tuition can be closely related. As the quality of education increases, so does the associated cost of attending a college or university. Higher-quality schools often require more resources to maintain their standards, which leads to higher tuition costs. Furthermore, many institutions are investing in better faculty members, updated curricula, and state-of-the-art facilities that also increase tuition prices. In addition to increased educational expenses, universities may also raise tuition rates due to inflation or fluctuations in student enrollment numbers. When enrollments decrease due to either lack of funding for students or fewer potential students, institutions must make up for lost income by increasing tuition rates for those who still qualify for attendance. This can have a direct impact on the quality of education

since fewer resources are available for upgrades and improvements. Ultimately, the quality of education and tuition hikes often go hand-in-hand. Quality schools require additional funding to maintain their standards, and tuition prices may increase due to a variety of factors, including inflation and student enrollment numbers. Thus, to cover the tuition fee and the non-tuition fee, students have to take a loan. The debate on free college rages on, with opponents claiming it will help eradicate student loans. According to them, tuition-free college would reduce the number of debt students accumulate while in school. This is because tuition-free college would reduce the cost of the degree significantly, which would require less money to be borrowed by the students. But as mentioned earlier, the tuition fee is not the only expense in college. Many students acquire student loans to deal with the living cost, traveling costs, and other non-tuition costs which are not covered by tuition-free college. Even though only 38 percent of undergraduates in 2015-16 took out loans, and a third of those borrowers opted to take out more than their tuition and fees, an even more alarming statistic becomes apparent when zooming in on just those who did take out student loans (Bidwell, 2018). It is estimated that over three-quarters of these borrowers took out more than they paid in tuition and fees. This indicates that students are not just utilizing student loans for academic necessities but for daily living expenses as well. Thus, eliminating the tuition fee will not help reduce the student loan for the students. The opposing side argues that even if making college free raises quality concerns, gaining low-quality education would be better than having no education at all. The argument that low-quality education is preferable to no education at all has been used both as a rallying cry to buck up teachers attempting to work in underfunded schools and as an excuse for the substandard provisions that many children suffer when it comes to their primary education. In reality, though, it appears that this claim should not be taken at face value. This is because the quality of education matters the most. College students

are making a conscious effort to prioritize quality in an educational setting over financial considerations. The Harvard study reveals that this is largely due to the increased probability of integrating successfully into the workforce upon graduation (Mitchell et al., 2017). With a preference for high-quality education, college hopefuls can be assured that they will be armed with the specific knowledge and skill set demanded by employers. Training programs and courses that facilitate learning at their highest level provide concrete evidence for their eventual career prospects, thereby giving them an edge over those with inferior educational backgrounds.

Setting a price cap for college tuition is a proposed solution to help subsidize the overall cost of college for low-income students. Price caps are a promising remedy to create tuition-free college, as they help prevent the exploitation of government and other funds. Price caps involve setting an upper limit to how much can be charged for tuition. The potential advantages of this approach are twofold. It helps stop institutions from passing on hidden costs beyond what is paid by students and helps reduce costs due to competition between educational providers. Not only would price caps increase affordability for students, but they would also encourage welfare-enhancing investments such as increasing the quality of faculty, improving faculty-student ratios, and investing in higher standards for student outcomes. While this could have positive effects, it does also come with several drawbacks that must be discussed. For instance, some critics argue that price caps favor those already in higher-income brackets over those who are not as financially secure. Since pricing would remain the same regardless of income level, upper- and middle-class individuals will benefit more from such measures than their lower-income counterparts - potentially leading to further financial inequality (Smith, 2017). Therefore, while we must explore the possibility of implementing price caps on college tuition fees, we must also

recognize the potential consequences and alternatively consider making college tuition free to ensure that higher education is accessible to all.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is evident that free college is not a step in the right direction as far as solving the issue of college inaccessibility is concerned. This model can be detrimental to low-income students due to an increase in discrimination, exploitation of opportunities by privileged groups, and lowered standards of education. Similarly, high-caliber universities often rely heavily on donor funding which can result in unfair admissions practices and a lack of support for low-income students who may not qualify academically or financially for these tuition waivers. All in all, the very base of this initiative is defective, for research has proved that it is the non-tuition fee that compels students to opt for student loans. Thus, the plausible remedy is price caps, as it prevents the exploitation of government and other funds. Ultimately, if we want to improve educational outcomes at all levels, it is important to ensure that these programs aren't widening existing inequality but instead providing a bridge for disadvantaged groups.

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