

Fail U.: The False Promise of Higher Education

Department of Education recently proposed new regulations to punish colleges that attract students with misleading claims. But what if *the whole system* of higher education in America is guilty of that?

Fail U.: The False Promise of Higher Education gives the reader a sweeping view of our collegiate landscape and the scenery is not at all attractive.

It includes debt-ridden students who weren't prepared for college in the first place, well-paid professors who teach little but devote most of their time to research that nobody reads, campus cry-bullies who live to air their grievances and protest, inflated grades and puff courses, extravagant spending on athletics and luxury amenities for students more interested in having fun than in studying, and much more.

Profscamp published in 1988—but a major extension of his case that higher education was losing its focus on teaching students and instead becoming a game of extracting the greatest amount of money from parents and taxpayers. All of the bad trends he observed 28 years ago have continued and worsened, but in addition, a host of new troubles have arisen.

Such as?

One is the proliferation of college graduates who can only find jobs that don't call for college education. As the number of Americans holding college credentials has skyrocketed at the same time the economy was going stagnant, many graduates now wind up working in low-skill jobs like customer service representative, theater usher, and taxi driver. "In 1970," Sykes notes, "less than 1% of taxi drivers had college

degrees. Four decades later, more than 15% do.”

In the past, when relatively few Americans went to college and had to show good academic progress to stay in and graduate, higher education generally was a sound investment, leading to lucrative careers. That’s no longer true. Defenders of the higher education system keep talking about the supposed “college premium,” but it’s extremely misleading. “Rather than benefiting from a wage premium,” Sykes writes, many students “find themselves actually worse off than if they had not enrolled at all.”