

Why Students Can No Longer Work Their Way Through College

As a current senior at a private college, I know firsthand how expensive the cost of college is today. For the upcoming 2017-2018 academic school year, the full sticker price of attending my school is \$53,950. Wow.

Many could criticize me for picking a pricier private college instead of a cheaper public one, but when all is said and done, an expensive private college is the most cost-effective for me.

Granted, I do receive more financial aid than most because I have a fellow sibling in school and a single-parent household.

Yet this financial aid doesn't cover all costs. In an attempt to make up the difference, I've taken on a number of summer jobs. Four to be exact.

However, working all these jobs is not enough to pay my yearly tuition and I will still graduate with a decent amount of student loans.

So what gives? Why is it that students in my parents' generation were able to pay their way through college with a summer job, yet I am unable to do so with four?

The answer to this question was recently explored by Anya Kamenetz in an article for NPR. As she explains it, tuition during my parents' time in college was around \$3,000. Subtracting for financial aid, a student would have to work a nine-hour day at minimum wage in order to cover costs.

The scenario is much more grim today:

“A student would now have to work 37 hours a week, every week of the year, at the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, to get by. ...

To cover today’s costs with a low-skilled summer job? Over 90 days, a student would need to work 21.9 hours a day.”

Kamenetz implies that such numbers wouldn’t be a problem if only the Federal Pell Grant would keep pace with the rising cost of college, but I wonder if she isn’t barking up the wrong tree.

The [chart below](#) shows the cost of college tuition (inflation adjusted) in comparison to the costs of other basic items. Not surprisingly, college costs have exploded at a much higher rate than items like food, shelter, and medical care.

Is it possible that students like myself can no longer work their way through college because the sticker tag of higher education is simply too inflated?



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[Image credit: Vimeo]