

English II Essay 2: Should College Be Free?



Prompt

As college costs grow in the United States, both Democrats and Republicans have been arguing that we need to do more to control the cost of attendance. Some has gone as far as to argue that college tuition should be free.

In a well-developed essay, defend, refute, or qualify the argument that college should be free.

Requirements

- Please submit a typed response that uses a legible 12-point font, 1" margins, a double spaced body, and a simple single spaced header.
- The response should be between 600-800 words long.
- Your response should include both an introduction and conclusion, both of which should be short and direct.
- The essay needs to include at least five and no more than seven quotes from the articles provided and your own research.
- In addition to the four sources, you need to find and use two of your own research.
- Make sure to follow all MLA formatting and rules for citation.
- Do not plagiarize!

Tips

- Have a well-developed thesis that you stick with. Organization is paramount.
- Focus on a few things in this essay:
 - An engaging introduction.
 - A strong thesis statement that suggests a concession.
 - Incorporating specific details into your paragraphs to give them power and interest.
 - A strong conclusion.



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The Problem Is That Free College Isn't Free

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“Free public college” is a great political talking point, but it is flawed policy.

First, free college isn't free, it simply shifts costs from students to taxpayers and caps tuition at zero. That tuition cap limits college spending to whatever the public is willing to invest. But it does not change the cost of college, or what institutions actually spend per student. If the past is any guide, that cost will [continue to grow](#), and an influx of federal money may lead profligate administrators to spend even more. Enrollments will also [increase](#), further multiplying the cost of free college. The key question, then, is what happens if public generosity does not keep pace with rising college costs, increases in demand, or both? Barring a drastic improvement in efficiency, tuition-free colleges won't have the resources to serve additional students without compromising the quality of their offerings.

As progressive advocates of free college are so eager to point out, public funding hasn't kept up with such changes in the past. For instance, California has the cheapest community college fees in the nation. During the recession, enrollments boomed and the state budget for higher education took a hit. Unable to raise additional revenue through a tuition increase, California's community colleges [turned away 600,000 students](#).

A national push for tuition-free college would strain public budgets even further, leading to shortages rather than increased access. And because middle and upper-income students will gobble up many of the free public slots, rationing will hurt those who need access the most. Advocates will likely argue that federal policy can simply force policymakers to increase funding in response to changes. But today's political coalition will be hardpressed to tie the hands of tomorrow's, especially when times are tough.

Second, free college plans assume that tuition prices are the main obstacle to student success, looking past problems of educational quality and college readiness. Take community colleges, where federal grants cover the [price of tuition](#) for the average low-income student. Despite free tuition, just [one-third of students](#) from the bottom income quartile who started at a community college in 2003 finished a degree or certificate by 2009. Two-year students from the top income quartile didn't do much better.

These numbers suggest that lackluster outcomes are not entirely, or even mostly, a function of tuition prices, but reflect deeper problems. Like the fact that [60 to 70 percent](#) of community college students have to take at least one remedial course, as do 40 percent of those at public four-year institutions. Or the fact that students who attend public four-year colleges with lower graduation rates are [less likely to finish](#) than similar peers who attend better schools.

Rather than spread scarce federal money across all students, policymakers should instead target those resources toward those who need it most and empower them to choose the option — public or private — that fits their needs. A valuable degree is worth the investment even if you have to pay something

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for it.

New York Times. January 20, 2016

Public Higher Education Should Be Universal and Free

[Sara Goldrick-Rab](#) is a professor of educational policy studies and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the founder of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, the nation's first translational research laboratory on college affordability and the author of the forthcoming "[Paying the Price](#): College Costs, Financial Aid and the Betrayal of the American Dream."

College should be affordable. It's hard to find an American family who doesn't agree. But most politicians continue to think that the way to make college more affordable is to target financial aid to low-income students. After 15 years studying public higher education, and testing the effects of financial aid, I disagree. Targeted financial aid isn't getting the job done. It's time for universal public higher education.

Today's targeted financial aid provides too little to too few. The onerous and inaccurate Free Application for Federal Student Aid divides American families into two unlucky groups. On the one hand, students deemed deserving of help receive aid that is usually far short of the resources required to effectively pursue their studies and graduate. On the other, students from middle-class families are treated as if they can manage with loans alone.

This is both bad public policy and bad politics. Efforts to make college affordable via targeted financial aid are divisive. Families that don't get aid resent those that do. Over time, the purchasing power of programs like the Pell Grant has eroded for lack of political support, and recipients have been denigrated as lazy, "academically adrift" and akin to "welfare recipients." Compare that to the solid support for Medicare and Social Security, which offer benefits to all senior citizens.

How we finance public higher education is a matter of political will. Universal public higher education recognizes that college must be affordable for all if it is to help drive our economy and our democracy. Lowering prices for students is just the start — it also comes with shared responsibility for funding higher education and ensuring quality. It helps students focus on learning rather than working so that they complete degrees faster and having acquired more skills. Best of all, it recognizes that ability to pay is not a marker of talent in America — unleashing the potential in us all.

New York Times. January 20, 2016

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Free Tuition Is a Needless Windfall for Affluent Voters and State Institutions

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Nothing in life is truly free — but don't tell that to dogmatic liberals and their pandering politicians, who would turn the first two years of college into a new universal entitlement. This idea has the same fatal flaws as universal pre-school: a needless windfall for affluent voters and state institutions that does very little to help the needy.

Start with the expense. Today, millions of families save their own pennies and dollars to pay for kids' college. While they would surely love to slough this burden onto taxpayers, doing so would probably shift billions of dollars a year from programs that help talented poor kids access higher education and improve our schools. In a time of scarce resources, why is this a priority? Nor would it help disadvantaged students. Most “free college” proposals focus on community colleges, turning them into “grades 13 and 14” of a new public-education system. Yet these schools have the worst track record with poor kids, especially those with exceptional academic promise. (They're also “free” to poor students today, thanks to federal Pell grants.) We know from a [ton of research](#) that these students do best at more challenging state schools and private colleges.

Yes, it might entice more students to enroll in the first place, as advocates claim. But is that a good thing? We know from multiple sources —including the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) — that just 40 percent of 12th graders are college-ready, even though nearly 70 percent already head straight into college. This is why more than half of those entering many colleges start in remedial courses — high school-level classes from which most will never escape. That's no good way to enter adulthood.

Far better to prepare more disadvantaged students to succeed in college by investing in K-12 reform (and targeted pre-K) while adopting the kinds of reforms [set forth this week by Jeb Bush](#), such as giving students a line of credit while giving colleges' “skin in the game” via well-crafted income-based repayment plans. I would add one more: Colleges seeking more public subsidy must stop admitting students who are clearly unprepared academically and therefore have virtually no shot at leaving with a real degree or credentials.

Policymakers are right to address college affordability but let's make sure their “solutions” don't worsen today's acute college-completion crisis.

New York Times. January 20, 2016

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Tennessee Is Showing How Free Tuition Community College Works

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Across Tennessee, several thousand volunteer mentors are in training to help almost [60,000 high school seniors](#) take advantage of free community college through the [Tennessee Promise](#).

The program, which is in its second year, offers some early lessons for similar proposals from the White House, presidential candidates and other states. Importantly, “free community college” is effective at getting more students into college, particularly when combined with mentoring. My [colleague William Fox](#) and I came to this conclusion when [we studied Knox Achieves](#), an early model for Tennessee Promise. Last fall, in the first year of the statewide program, [freshmen enrollment rose 10 percent](#) across Tennessee’s two-year and four-year public college systems.

Returning mentors will tell you that the program’s message is compelling: It transforms the way students view college and their place in it. The price of college is a critical piece of information for students who are unsure about going, and yet, it is a mystery until after admission and financial aid decisions are in, often late in their senior year (if they applied at all). Tennessee Promise eliminates that uncertainty with a blunt and simple message: Free tuition for high school graduates of any income and any aptitude. The state can secure that promise at relatively low cost: [\\$1,020 per student](#) this year. In a state where one in four under age 18 are in poverty, 45 percent of Tennessee Promise students are eligible for federal Pell grants that cover community college tuition and fees.

Other lessons from Tennessee’s take on free college will take time to unfold. Programs like Promise may be changing the conversation about going to college, but the harder work begins when new college plans become reality. Tennessee Promise students enter a system where just [28 percent of first-year students graduate within 6 years](#) of enrolling. Many require remedial courses to catch up to college-level work. Others, enticed by free tuition, are starting at a community college rather than a four-year university with hopes to transfer and eventually complete a bachelor’s degree. With tuition out of the equation and renewed interest in college, opportunities and challenges faced by Promise students at all degrees of readiness will be a clearer reflection of the broader education system, from kindergarten to college degree.

New York Times. January 20, 2016