

College graduation rates are too low

Institutions must focus on aligning their missions with the goals of students

BY ROBERT A. SCOTT

A bachelor's degree program is designed for completion in four years. Yet only 60 percent of those who begin a degree at four-year colleges or universities actually graduate within six years. For the 40 percent who do not, employment prospects are hindered and the likelihood of repaying student loans is hampered. While these students end up with some employment advantage over high school graduates, they receive a smaller percentage of what they would have earned if they had graduated with degrees.

Recruiting college students is expensive:

- Higher education enrollment is increasingly competitive.
- The number of high school graduates is declining in some areas, yet the number of colleges remains relatively constant.
- And the number of employers providing tuition reimbursement is lower than in the past.

Therefore, college boards of trustees should focus on the

alignment among the institutional mission, admissions criteria, learning goals, allocation of resources, support services for students, and results.

In virtually all institutions, the goal, beyond educating students, of course, is graduation in four years. However, even on Long Island, graduation results vary. At Molloy College, Stony Brook University and Adelphi University we see six-year graduation rates in the high-60 percent to mid-70 percent range, above the average. At SUNY Old Westbury, LIU Post, New York Institute of Technology and Farmingdale State College, rates hover in the 40 percent range for six years. Hofstra University is in the middle of the two groups.

So, why do so few students complete degrees on time? The answers lie in the following issues: fit, preparation, advising and other student support services, institutional priorities, excessive general education requirements, inadequate communication between colleges and employers, student financial assistance and the funding of pub-



Graduation rates in four-year colleges underscore a need for change.

lic colleges and universities.

By fit, I mean that the interests of the student and the college are mutually supportive. More than one-half of attrition occurs after freshman year because students have work commitments that interfere with studying, do not become involved on campus because of debt or discomfort, are not prepared academically or lack a commitment to study. Other students leave because they think the college doesn't care about their success, con-

clude that a degree is not worth the effort and expense, or spend extra time commuting to classes.

Colleges can do more to assist student success without compromising academic standards. They should be committed to the students they admit and not presume that attrition simply shows students couldn't hack it. Admission is a promise that the institution thinks a student is ready to learn, that the student is committed to trying and that the institution would be helpful.

Institutional priorities also play an important role. Does the institution examine the causes of student attrition so the reasons can be addressed? Does the institution's strategic plan give priority to student success? Does the budget match the priorities for student learning (and faculty teaching), or is the priority on big-time athletics?

A major impediment to student graduations at public colleges and universities is state funding. In many cases, reductions in funding combined with increased demand result in required courses not being available. Both public and private college leaders should maintain good relations with employers such as hospitals and social service agencies that provide clinical placements necessary for graduation in some degree programs.

The challenges to four-year institutions are known and must be overcome. Otherwise, both institutions and families are wasting money.



Robert A. Scott is Adelphi University's president emeritus.



LIRR commuters transfer to the No. 7 train at Hunters Point station in Long Island City in July 2017.

for shuttle buses used by many businesses to connect to both stations.

All this could make Hunters Point Avenue a lot more useful in general and for Amazon.

Ron Troy,
East Northport

Objections to group home are unfounded

My wife and I have lived in Smithtown for 36 years with a group home on our corner. We moved in with 5- and 2-year-old children and never

experienced any problems in our neighborhood, so I am wondering why a woman who lives near a proposed home in Smithtown would be concerned about little children living "next door to that" ["Group home plan for men with autism draws concern," News, Nov. 13].

She feels bad for young couples (which we were), but what are her feelings about people with special needs who would now have a nice home?

Another neighbor quoted in your story sounded like the typical NIMBY, using the standard "traffic and noise" reasoning. The group home near us causes no more traffic and noise than in an average neighborhood, and our property values have not been affected.

Give people with special needs a chance.

Jim Stearns,
Smithtown

I was taken aback by the ob-

jections of two neighbors in your story and think you should interview some of the lovely families that have children living in group homes and/or the countless numbers of families that have no idea where to find housing for their children.

As a parent of a young man with autism, my heart breaks that Newsday didn't highlight how wonderful our adult children are, the unconditional love they provide, or how excited they might be about moving into a new home.

Lisa Davis,
Baldwin

Reopening precincts is too expensive

I thought the whole purpose of the closing two Nassau County police precincts in 2012 was to save money ["Wrong move to reopen precincts," Editorial, Nov. 11].

Crime has not increased, so

why the need to reopen them? Once again, someone apparently has found a couple of bucks, so we are back to square one.

If new detectives are needed to staff these precincts, where will the money for their pensions and severance checks come from?

Let's try to save a dollar for a change and not burden our grandchildren with the exorbitant contracts that are surely going to be "worked out." When is anyone in county government going to face reality?

Lew Montgomery,
Rockville Centre

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