



The Five-Year Party: How Colleges Have Given Up on Educating Your Child and What You Can Do About It

Craig Brandon

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Colleges look much the same as they did five or ten years ago, but a lot has changed behind the scenes. While some mixture of study and play has always been part of college life, an increasing number of schools have completely abandoned the idea that students need to learn or demonstrate that they've learned. Financial pressures have made college administrations increasingly reluctant to flunk anyone out, regardless of performance, although the average length of time to get a degree is now five years, and for many students it's six or more. Student evaluations of professors—often linked to promotion and tenure decisions—have made professors realize that applying tough standards, or any standards, only hurts their own career progress. For many professors, it's become easier and more rewarding to focus on giving entertaining lectures and to give everyone reasonably good grades.

The worst of these schools are the "subprime" colleges, where performance standards and accountability have been completely abandoned. Students enjoy a five year party with minimal responsibilities while their parents pay the bills. These schools' investment decisions (first-class gyms and dining centers) are all geared to attracting students that want to have a good time, and their brochures all emphasize the fun aspects of the college experience—there are very few pictures of students actually studying or in class. And after graduation, former students are frequently unable to find work in their chosen fields, thanks to their school's reputation with employers, and unable to afford the payments on sizeable student loans.

The subprime colleges, which "teach" a significant percentage of college students, are only the tip of the iceberg. All colleges, even the most elite, have moved in this direction to some extent. If you are a parent sending your child to college, The Five-Year Party will give you critical information you need about what is really happening at your child's college, and what you can do to ensure help your child gets a real education.

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