

A childhood friend recently passed away. Ricky McWhorter was the quickest witted, and maybe the most intelligent person I have ever known. He was street smart from the beginning and, like the rest of my peer group growing up, we had trouble with teachers and administrators. Not the kind of vitriolic disrespect seen in K-12 students today, we were just kids in need of an adjustment every now and again. And there were always teachers and administrators capable of providing that adjustment.

Mr. Robinson, our vocational agriculture teacher, was a willing provider of the discipline he felt we needed. On three occasions during the first semester of our freshman year, he paddled the entire class at one time (minus the handful of girls) with his custom-made wood weapon. He whooped Ricky at the end of the first week because he had neglected to turn in an assignment we were saddled with, and noncompliance required three licks as a consequence. Everybody but Ricky had made some feeble attempt.

We were headed to the sale barn for class that morning, and Mr. Robinson's attention was turned outside to his pickup where the class was loading themselves into the back. (We didn't have to worry about seats or seatbelts in those days.) Ricky grabbed me in the shop and said, "Help me stuff this towel down the butt of my pants!" He had neglected the assignment but prepared himself by bringing a towel from home. Well we stuffed it like a Thanksgiving turkey, and it looked smooth enough to work as long as he kept his shirttail out. Mr. Robinson came into the shop and ran me out so he could proceed with the deed. Several years later he told me that Ricky could take licks better than anyone he had ever whooped. "I hit him as hard as I ever hit anyone and he just turned around and smiled at me." I kept the secret until now and have laughed about it many times over the years. That was Ricky.

It was a classic case of the student fooling the teacher, whereas today we see the higher-education system fooling students and their parents. It has been substantiated time and again that college tuition and fees have climbed like a rocket over the last few decades. A few years back, a *New York Times*

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND Sleight of Hand

The need for a serious adjustment.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

article reported that between 1980 and 2014, tuition costs on average quadrupled. At my institution a 15-credit semester fee in 2003 cost \$1,335 and \$3,232 in 2017, almost two-and-a-half times more. University administrators tell the story that state appropriations



RICKY ENJOYS FISHING

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have decreased requiring an increase in tuition revenue, when in reality state appropriations have increased, reaching an inflation-adjusted high in 2009 before the Great Recession, and increasing by another \$81 billion since then. Some university administrators call this increase in spending a "cut."

Yes, there are more students attending colleges and universities today than there were 20 years ago, and yes, the cost of doing business has increased. However, we still have to ask where all that money is going. The same *Times* article investigated the salaries of full-time university faculty and found that on average they are nearly the same as they

were in 1970! Faculty salaries are not the culprit.

So where is the money going? Most has been allocated to the ever-expanding administration. As an example, a Cal Poly-Pomona professor conducted a study that found the full-time faculty head count in California's state university system increased from 11,614 to 12,019 between 1975 and 2008. In contrast, the number of administrators grew from 3,800 to 12,183. The U.S. Department of Education has reported a 60 percent nationwide increase of university administrators between 1993 and 2009. My institution has a new administrative position called diversity officer, who is responsible for developing, in collaboration with multiple university representatives and offices, a diverse, inclusive and welcoming environment for all university community members. I'm certain that was not one of the criteria I considered when choosing an institution of higher learning.

As long as the feds continue to increase dollar amounts for Pell Grants and student loan caps, there is no incentive for colleges and universities to even attempt to cut their costs. In fact, the Center for Responsive Politics reports that the 2017 higher education lobby in Washington, D.C., consists of 854 registered lobbyists who have already spent over \$19 million. Land-grant institutions that house agriculture programs are not exempt from the trend either.

Ricky put one over on Mr. Robinson all those years ago, and university administrators have been doing the same to taxpayers. Here's something for you to ponder: the Oxford Dictionary defines the word parasite as "an organism that lives in or on another organism [its host] and benefits by deriving nutrients at the host's expense."

Hasta la vista, Ricky. ■

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