

## Other Viewpoints

### Graduates have noncollege option

As student debt rises and the job market is saturated with degree-holders, a question has surfaced: Should fewer students pursue college?

Probably so. It seems a counter-intuitive answer, because a college education has long been defined as the pathway to success in America.

Yet, schools already have recognized alternative means to achievement. Some programs gear students for nursing and emergency medical technician, commercial construction, automotive mechanics, consumer science and renewable energy careers, to name a few.

And community college offers short-term degrees and vocational training in demand, from nursing to emergency dispatching.

Of course, a four-year university will always have a place for higher, specialized training or for those who crave higher education and not just a ticket to a job.

But there are truths we cannot ignore: Two-thirds of students graduating from four-year schools owe money on student loans. The average student debt load in 2008 was \$23,200 – a nearly \$5,000 increase over five years.

Federal statistics show that only 36 percent of full-time students starting college in 2001 earned a four-year degree within that allotted time.

The unemployment rate for college graduates still trails that of high school graduates – 4.9 percent to 10.8 percent – but the number has more than doubled in less than two years.

Passing up college may mean giving up the experience of a lifetime exploring an education broader than job training, meeting people from many walks of life and opening one's mind to many perspectives and critical thinking.

But for those who wish to be more practical in their goals, and to avoid the heavy burden of college loans, Kansas educational institutions have the programs to help students carve out a successful career in a trade. And that is a good option for many students.

– The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press

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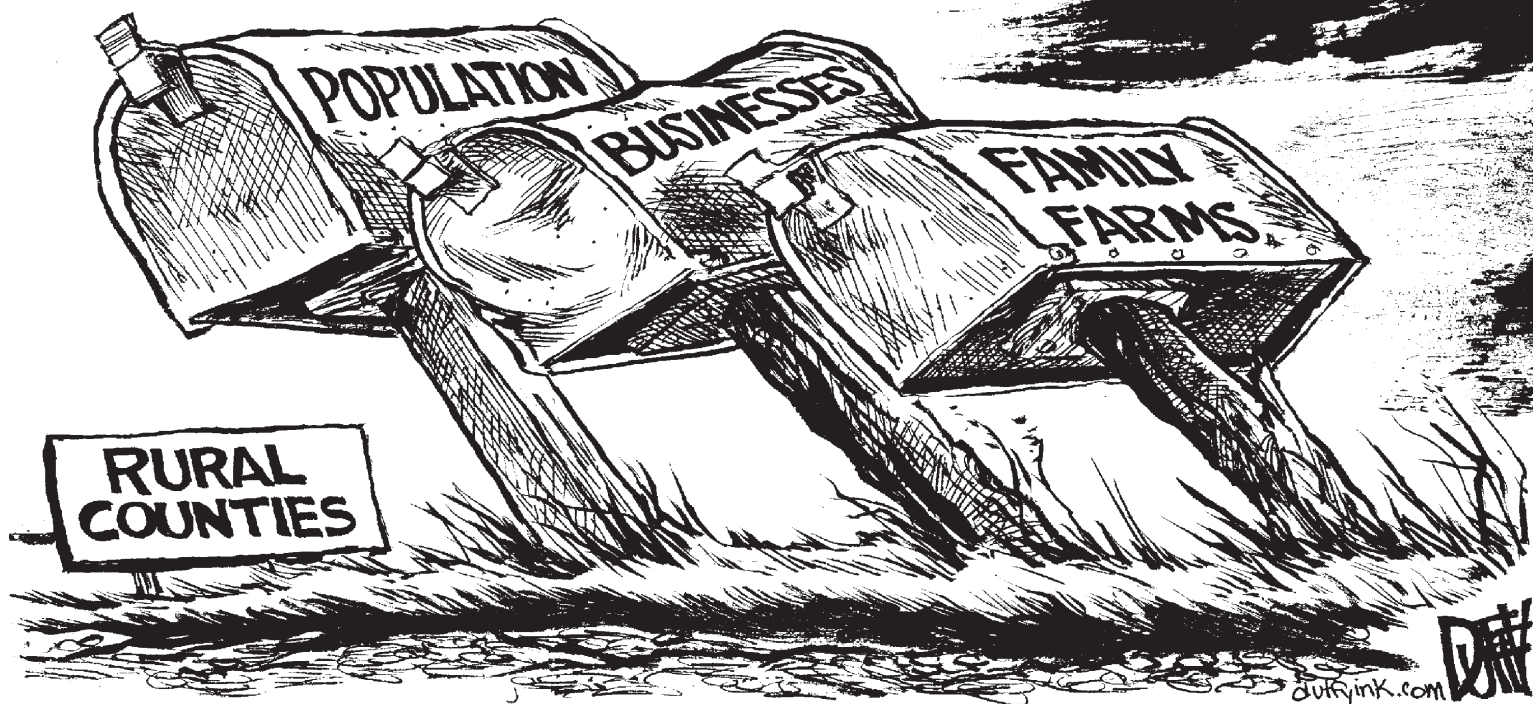
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## IN NEED OF SOME PROPPING UP



### Trip to store gets complicated

My family got lost on the way to the store the other day – most of it, anyway.

I'm not sure why I was surprised, since Cynthia was leading them and her idea of direction is a little challenged. OK, a lot challenged.

She has trouble with "left" and "right," and terms like "east" and "west" just confuse her.

Anyway, we were spending the weekend at the family retreat near Emporia when the girls decided to go in to Council Grove to get diapers and wipes for the grandbaby, which Cynthia had forgotten to stock. I was to go, but the girls decided they wanted to chat.

Now normally, both the daughters, Felicia, the older one, and Lindsay, the little one, can find their way across town or across the continent. But with their mother to lead them, well, they were in trouble.

I tried to give them directions. "Turn right at the dam," I said. "Go east, and when you turn north, just stay on that road to the pavement."

Seemed clear to me. And in a 12-mile grid, surrounded by paved roads that all lead to a town and a store, in a vehicle equipped with a global positioning system device, all carrying cell phones, you'd think it's be hard to get lost. And it is. But three women can spend a bunch of time finding the highway, apparently.

Just what part of "turn right at the dam" they didn't understand I'm not sure. Probably, they



**Steve Haynes**

#### • Along the Sappa

were talking. But they cruised right on past their turn, winding around the lake until the shore road turned south.

Remembering north, they turned around and tried to go that way, but the road they were on, a couple of miles west of the road to town, ends in a "T" intersection. I know this, because later, after hearing their story, I checked the trail of bread crumbs in the GPS in my truck. The little blue line tells all, and you'd better hope the FBI doesn't want to look at yours.

Anyhow, that road led deeper into the Flint Hills pasture country, and the girls were pretty sure by then that it wasn't the way to town. Cynthia was whimpering that roads were not supposed to be that grassy. Then it ended, with the only way out to the south.

About that time, I think, Lindsay realized that she had left her baby daughter with two men – her father and brother – and she might never get out of the pasture country alive, and

how could she have trusted them?

Then the "low-fuel" light blinked on in the truck, and things got serious.

The girls kept on pushing west, having wandered back to a main county road – insofar as they have main county roads in pasture country – and eventually hit the blacktop south of Council Grove. I guess they remembered "north," and if that was the only part of the directions they remembered, it finally got them to the store, a little late but none the worse for the wear.

And they got the diapers and the baby wipes and everyone was happy, pretty much. Even the baby, who had challenged her granddad and uncle, but was clean and none the worse for the wear.

They've all found Council Grove on their own since then, even Cynthia, who claims she is lost if she can't see the elevator in Concordia. But next time, I think I'll just leave them at the lake and go get the darned diapers myself.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

### Is it time for a 'hard 20' at colleges?

Only 20 percent of future U.S. jobs will require a bachelor's degree or higher.

That statement made by state Sen. Steve Abrams during his presentation of a new "funding model" at April's state Board of Education meeting was correct. It matches the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Employment Projections up to 2016. Another 4.2 percent will need a two-year's associate degree, while other U.S. workers will need on-the-job-training, work experience or a vocational certificate.

While only one in five high school graduates will need a college degree, over three in five are starting college. Far fewer finish college in four years or even in six. Why?

The two main reasons appear to be the rising cost of public universities and too many students attending college who are not academically capable of completing college work.

A new study, "Increasing Time to Baccalaureate Degree in the United States," by John Bound, Michael F. Lovenheim and Sarah Turner, was issued this month. The time it takes students to complete a baccalaureate degree has gone up rapidly in the U.S. over the last 30 years. By analyzing long-term data from the National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class of 1972 and the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, they found little increase in time to complete a degree at the large selective universities, but students took much longer at public universities. The problem is mostly among poorer students. There was a substantial increase in the amount of time these students had to work "to meet rising college costs and likely increased time to degree by crowding out time spent on academic pursuits."

If higher tuition costs, which have outstripped inflation, are causing students to work more and slow down their studies, the question becomes: "why are tuition costs so much



**John Richard Schrock**

#### • Education Frontlines

higher?" For every one dollar in tuition paid by the student, Kansas used to add two more. Today, with so many students aspiring to university study, Kansas barely matches student tuition dollar-for-dollar.

The surplus of high-school graduates who are convinced they need to go to college has grown our universities and driven up tuition costs. The underprepared need remedial courses. The unmotivated need a year off. The incapable need alternatives. And many capable students may well fit technical training better.

Sadly, several initiatives across the U.S. are pushing universities to "increase retention" – a codeword that boils down to inflating grades. Others are imposing common course syllabi and testing – No Child Left Behind at the university level. Another plan (Developmental Education Initiative) by six states (Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and Virginia) moves remediation down to the high school level.

No initiative promotes the many good non-college jobs that America needs.

Under the current state money situation, Kansas public schools will take a major hit regardless of the budget adopted. The situation has become a choice between more consolidation or massive consolidation.

But Kansas higher education has a place to cut as well. Currently, Kansas high school students with low ACT scores can still be admitted through admission "windows." A student

with an ACT of 14 has no chance of completing a bona fide baccalaureate degree, nor will many with scores of 16, 17 or 18.

Establishing a "hard-20" ACT requirement for admission to Kansas public universities would go far to both increase retention and decrease costs. The few students excluded but who are college material can study to raise their ACT scores and take the test again.

Perhaps we are a populist state where every parent says, "I pay taxes, so my child has a right to go to a public university." But in hard economic times, taxpayers cannot afford to subsidize nine out of 10 students with low ACT scores in order to save the one out of 10 will rise to complete college work.

When pressure builds up to retain and graduate students who are not capable of doing college-level work, it devalues the everyone else's baccalaureate degrees.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.



### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

