

The National Spelling Bee and other intellectual incongruities

(February 2022)

Here are a few lines of advice for the benefit of organizers of the National Spelling Bee and the providers of exclusive higher education.

About the National Spelling Bee

1. Make sure there is as little bijection as possible between your absurd system of spelling and speech¹;
2. Give your absurd spelling absolute precedence over logical grammar and, if you're French, destroy grammar altogether;
3. Have children compete nationally about the absurd rules;
4. Judge one's intelligence on one's ability to spell according to the absurd rules, never mind grammar;
5. Wonder why your population's verbal and writing skills are so deficient.

About top colleges and universities

1. Admit candidates through competitive examination based on their former level of education and knowledge, for which you have no responsibility whatsoever;
2. For a Master's degree, charge students 3,000 hours at \$100 apiece (\$3,000 an hour for a class of 30) for the right to be examined upon graduation about knowledge which was acquired mostly from material available elsewhere and personal reflection;
3. Remember that because the cost has long been amortized and most of the material is in the public domain anyhow, a number of prestigious universities post their courses online for anyone to study, but no one can get a degree who did not fork out extortion money first;

¹ Keeping in mind that in European languages other than French and English, not only misspelling but also mispronunciation are nearly impossible exploits.

4. Convince yourself and the world that the degree you sold to the graduate for knowledge he acquired on his own and from various sources offers him an unquestionable right to be on top of society;
5. Make sure that no one will be recognized intellectually, who did not buy at high cost a degree from you or some of your peers;
6. Reserve for yourselves the exclusive benefits of your self-proclaimed peerage;
7. As a further incentive, pledge that no amount of future nonsense or erroneous statements could ever strip a graduate of his doctorate or other academic degree.

The purpose of college education?

As far as students are concerned, is college really about the acquisition of knowledge, or is it mostly a mating and celebratory venue located as far as possible from control by one's parents and censors?

A proposed alternative

If degrees were only about knowledge, surely there would be an avenue for students who are so inclined to acquire knowledge on their own and be examined at any point of their choosing after paying some reasonable examination fee.

For example:

1. A Master's dissertation contains usually 15,000 to 20,000 words;
2. Teachers and professors confess they need an average of 20 minutes to mark a 1,250 words assignment;
3. For conservative purposes, we will assume here a very thorough Master's dissertation of 50,000 words;
4. Such 50,000 words dissertation would take the examiner 13.33 hours to mark;
5. For good measure we will apply a safety factor of 200% which takes the marking time to 40 hours, or a week's work;
6. Charge an exorbitant examination fee of \$125 an hour (\$1,000 a day, almost double the average salary of a full tenured professor);
7. Total examination cost will be \$5,000, still quite expensive but saving 98% from current college costs;

8. In fact, most Master's dissertations are less than 20,000 words and would take about 6 hours to mark, at a cost of \$750, representing savings of 99.7%.

College costs analysis

It is reported that colleges in the U.S. receive about \$750 billion a year in revenue. So-called "*private nonprofit*" institutions raise an average \$25,000 per student per year in tuition, plus government contributions, which totals \$37,500 per student per year.

The U.S. student population is 20 million.

It is also reported that 80 million people in the U.S. have at least a bachelor's degree, for a global cost of about \$15 trillion, which represents about 7.5% of a lifetime career income but must be paid in full before a career can even start.

For reference, the total value of real estate in the U.S. is 22 trillion.

Possible remedies

It is reported quite frequently that college education costs and subsequent indebtedness are too much of a burden for degree holders.

In the same reports it is strongly suggested as a remedy that college costs be borne by society at large, although one could wonder what difference such a transfer would mean globally, and one could question the moral appropriateness of having poor taxpayers who will never go to college pay for the degree of more fortunate people who will then use their degree to be their boss and receive higher wages.

However, it can be said that in this day and age of the internet, universities as we have known them for centuries have become not only redundant but also economically inefficient globally and represent an annual diversion of about 4% of gross domestic product.

Solutions can and must be devised to allow for the efficient, affordable, and secure certification of knowledge and skills for all those who care greatly for the acquisition of knowledge from varied sources but are not as much interested in the mating and celebratory opportunities offered by in-person campus life².

² *Particularly at such exorbitant cost, since the savings made on tuition would buy about 600 quality intercourses in the most prestigious of the legal Houses of Lust of the State of Nevada, one for each and every day of class in a four year degree.*

Probable backlash

Although they are promised to lose the fight in the long run, one way or another, universities are quite likely to fiercely resist such progress.