

Free higher education is quick to escalate to be one of the most controversial topics nowadays and various countries hold different viewpoints regarding the cost bearer of higher education. Higher education includes education at polytechnics, universities and colleges, whereas state-funded higher education is defined as education at public colleges or universities funded by the state government (Burrows, 2018). While Chile and Germany advocate public funded higher education, Australia and England stress more on individual contribution from students themselves. In the United States, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders proposed an allocation of \$700 billion to eliminate public colleges' tuition fees (Burke, 2016). While it seems that his proposal provides students greater access to higher education, it may impose negative consequences on student themselves, such as increasing students' dropout rate, and the devaluation of students' degree. Statistics show that the current completion rate of public community colleges is at 38%, which is exactly half of that of private institutions, which boast a completion rate of 76% (Cooper, 2017). This essay seeks to detail the increasing of already high students' dropout rate caused by state-funded higher education in the United States, and I will provide one existing approach to tackle this problem. Additionally, I will suggest one better solution to further ameliorate it.

One major problem that is derived from state-funded higher education is the increasing of existing dropout rate of college students. Cooper (2017) shows that nearly half of the students who study in public colleges fail to graduate, and this is supported by Vedder (2018) who mentions that college dropout rate is at an alarming 47%, which far outnumbers the 27% who graduate and the remaining 26% who are still pursuing their degree. Kurfiss (2018) suggests a possible explanation of this phenomena: students might take free education for granted, and hence, they may put in minimum effort in their studies. According to Norton (2018), when students deal with competitive classes in colleges, students will probably withdraw from those classes, especially when certain colleges do not include withdrawals when calculating the grade-point average. However, this might result in financial burdens and when students do not bear the cost of college education, they might lose motivation to persist, withdraw from classes, and drop out entirely. Furthermore, Half (2019) argues that families who finance their children's education will be more willing to monitor them in their studies. Without that financial incentive, parents tend to be more lenient towards their children and students may not be motivated to commit fully in their studies. Therefore, this shows that state-funded higher education contributes to the increasing of college students' dropout rate due to students' lack of motivation to excel in their studies, permissive parenting, or both.

An existing approach provided by public colleges to address the increasing dropout rate among students is to require students to take remedial courses before receiving state-funded higher education. Also known as developmental courses, remedial courses are courses mandatory for academically unprepared students to bolster their skills in reading, writing, and mathematics (Fusaro, 2007). While remedial classes are aimed to provide a foundation of college-level work for incompetent students, it is possible that these courses might backfire on students themselves. Amselem (2017) reports that more than one-third of university undergraduates are required to take remedial courses, and Mangan (2019) points out the flaw of remedial classes by adding that the completion rate for the remedial mathematics course and the remedial reading course is merely 17 and 29 percent respectively. Moreover, students who took remedial courses in their freshmen year are found to be 74 percent more likely to drop out of college, and those who took remedial courses and completed their tertiary education graduated 11 months later than non-remedial students (Mattison, 2017). Clayton (2018) provides an explanation for the ineffectiveness of remedial classes: majority of colleges rely on standardised exams to determine the placement of students in remedial classes based on a cutoff point, but few information for these exams are available. Therefore, students might risk getting misplaced due to the high error rates of these inaccurate and unreliable placement exams, causing college-ready students to be assigned to remedial classes, and truly underprepared students to enrol in challenging college classes (Clayton, 2018). Additionally, not only remedial classes do not confer college credit, but students also have to pay for them (Mattison, 2017). As a result, students who are in these

classes may drop out due to financial reasons, while academically underprepared students who are in proper college classes may drop out due to incompetency. Therefore, this shows that the solution of boosting college-readiness among students by assigning them to remedial classes could be questionable as these classes may potentially increase dropout rate instead of lowering it.

To further reduce students' dropout rate in public colleges, one improved approach is to set a threshold in the current grade point average (GPA) scoring system in order to permit students to continue receiving state-funded higher education. Instead of attributing students' dropout rate to their inability to cope with tertiary education, public colleges could improve students' performance by motivating them to do well in their studies. According to Franck (2017), research shows that students' scores improved by roughly 5 percent when students are financially motivated, and this financial incentive could be applied to tertiary education. When students have to maintain a certain GPA to continue receiving free tertiary education and incur all expenses when they fail to meet such requirement, students would be constantly aware of the consequences and prompt themselves to excel in their studies constantly. Hence, this approach acts as a reminder to student themselves while lowering dropout rate and shifts the burden of tuition fees away from students simultaneously.

In conclusion, this essay has detailed the increasing dropout rate of students caused by state-funded higher education, and one current approach to address this issue is the placement of students in remedial courses in college. Despite remedial classes' aim to increase students' college-readiness, it is found that these classes may not be very effective due to the lack of clarity in the placement process. One better solution that is described in the essay is to set a threshold in the GPA system of which students may continue to receive state-funded higher education, so students would be regularly aware of their responsibilities and strive to achieve their very best in college.

**1072 words**

## Reference List

Amselem, M.C. (2017). Free Tuition Hurts Students, Taxpayers.

Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/education/commentary/free-tuition-hurts-students-taxpayers>

Burke, J. (2016). Here's Why a Lot of Economists Hate the Idea of Free Public College.

Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.sg/what-are-the-drawbacks-of-free-college-2016-3/?r=US&IR=T>

Burrows, B. (2018). What is The Difference Between a Public and Private University?

Retrieved from <https://www.studyusa.com/en/a/1290/what-is-the-difference-between-a-public-and-private-university>

Cooper, P. (2017). College Completion Rates Are Still Disappointing.

Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/prestoncooper2/2017/12/19/college-completion-rates-are-still-disappointing/#1ad5e8a7263a>

Franck, T. (2017). American Students Try Harder If You Pay Them, Economists Found.

Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/20/money-gets-american-students-to-try-harder.html>

Fusaro, M. (2007). College Remediation: Who Needs It, and Does It Help?

Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/07/07/college-remediation-who-needs-it-and-does-it-help>

Halff, N. (2015). Students, faculty discuss pros, cons of free college education.

Retrieved from <http://www.dailytargum.com/article/2015/11/students-faculty-discuss-pros-and-cons-of-free-college-education>

Kurfiss, D. (2019). Should College Be Free?

Retrieved from <https://www.studentdebtrelief.us/news/should-college-be-free/>

Mangan, K. (2019). The End of the Remedial Course.

Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/Trend19-Remediation-Main>

Mattison, L. (2017). Avoid Remedial Classes in Community College to Save Time & Money.

Retrieved from <https://study.com/blog/avoid-remedial-classes-in-community-college-to-save-time-money.html>

Norton, V. (2018). Why Free College is Not a Good Idea!

Retrieved from <https://nortonnorris.com/free-college-bad-idea/>

Vedder, R (2018). The Case Against Free College Tuition

Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/richardvedder/2018/04/12/the-free-tuition-craze-now-new-jersey/#5a7218b91b2a>