

US HIGHER EDUCATION: BURSTING BUBBLE

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I recently talked to a friend whose son is considering going to a prestigious Massachusetts college that opened a new Manhattan branch. Here's the kicker: there's no choice but to live in their dorm, and the total annual bill—tuition plus that mandatory dorm—comes to a whopping \$80,000. That includes a cool \$20,000 just for housing. With the median U.S. household income around \$70,800, can you imagine the stress this might put on more than half of American families? (Irony very much intended!)

That conversation got me thinking—more like raging politely—about the state of our higher education system. My conclusion: we're fast approaching the bubble-burst moment. We've been overdue for it, and it's coming sooner than many expect.

I predict that the system we see today will implode. The timing will depend a lot on whichever administration is in power and, quite frankly, on how long people are willing (or able) to throw absurd amounts of money at a system that's so blatantly inefficient.

Here are the arguments, thoughts, and observations that led me to this not-so-subtle rant.

General Statements and Positions

- **Tuition vs. quality gap.** Let's be real: the difference in the actual teaching between so-called "elite" universities and many solid public universities is nowhere near big enough to justify the enormous gap in tuition. It's ridiculous that private institutions can charge three or four times the tuition rate, claiming it's "worth it."
- **Discrimination based on price tags.** It's fundamentally counterproductive to lock out bright students just because they can't afford these insane costs. Society loses when people with drive and talent are sidelined by tuition bills they can't pay.
- **The "elite" brand is more about status than superior teaching.** Being an "elite" university usually has as much to do with the name on the diploma as it does with the lessons learned in the classroom. It's a promise—sometimes real, sometimes hollow—of joining the upper crust of society (read: power, influence, jobs in government or high-end corporate circles).
- **The illusion of universal "elite" uplift.** It's misleading, frankly, to suggest that if you manage to squeeze into an elite school (and somehow afford it), you're automatically heading straight for the top. Yes, you might rub elbows with wealthier classmates; yes, you might have a brief window to build some good connections. But when the semester ends, the differences resurface, and everyone pretty much goes back to their own social tier. I'm not condemning it—this is an open society, after all—but let's not pretend that most graduates suddenly ascend into the one-percent.

Observations

1. **In-class instruction is outdated.** The old-school model—sitting in a lecture hall every day—has been outpaced by remote learning, AI-assisted teaching, and (soon enough) virtual/augmented reality classrooms. Think about it: a lot of "traditional" lectures could be offered more efficiently online, without sacrificing quality.

2. **The best professors can reach everyone.** If we tapped into modern tech properly, the greatest minds in any field could beam their expertise across the country—no matter if you live in a big city or a tiny rural community. Geography wouldn't limit access to top-quality instruction.
3. **Education could be almost free.** If fewer (but more specialized) professors were educating larger numbers of students online, the overall cost would drop like a rock. Throw in public funds or minimal student fees, and we could slash tuition. Considering we already have over \$1.7 trillion in student loan debt, doesn't it make sense to explore cheaper, more efficient ways?
4. **Bloated administration.** We can't ignore the elephant in the room: a significant chunk of that hefty tuition goes into administrative layers—deans, associate deans, assistant deans, offices that handle everything from “student engagement” to marketing. Under a more streamlined model, much of this bureaucracy wouldn't be necessary, freeing up massive resources that could be spent on actual education.

So yes, in my not-so-humble opinion, the higher education bubble is on the brink of bursting. The question is: are we ready? Are we prepared to watch the current system unravel and, hopefully, rebuild it into something better—something that's accessible, more equitable, and a lot less absurdly expensive? Because that's where we're headed, like it or not.

And honestly, I say: it's about time.