



PF Topic Analysis March 2015

The March topic for Public Forum debaters is **Resolved: In the United States, students should be guaranteed two years of free tuition to a community or technical college.** This will be a fun and challenging topic, due to it being a hot button issue since President Obama proposed it in his State of the Union Address. There will certainly be no shortage of available research and commentary!

This resolution is pretty clearly worded, with few possibilities of different interpretations. So, we won't spend a bunch of time defining words with obvious meanings.

The only two phrases in the resolution that demand any considerations are **"free tuition"** and **"community or technical college."** Neither of these are particularly difficult, either, but it's worth pointing out that "tuition" is defined (by basically any source—take your pick) as "a sum of money charged for teaching or instruction by a school, college, or university." In other words, "tuition" does not include books, living expenses, or other tertiary student needs. This is important, because some free community college proposals do include support for other expenses, but this resolution seems to exclude those costs.

"Community or technical college," according to the [Whitehouse.gov fact sheet](#) on Obama's proposal, "are academic programs that fully transfer to local public four-year colleges and universities, giving students a chance to earn half of the credit they need for a four-year degree, or (2) are occupational



training programs with high graduation rates and that lead to degrees and certificates that are in demand among employers.” Since this topic is clearly lifted directly from the headlines, I would advise sticking with that interpretation.

Now, let’s move on to substance.

Obviously, one of the most important areas of clash on this topic will concern the role of post-high school education in **career success and income mobility**. This topic could accurately be summed up as, “does it work?”

The aff’s warrants for why the program would succeed are fairly intuitive. If a person receives more education, he or she will tend to have more skills, and thus earn more money than people without skills. Many of these arguments will cite data suggesting the jobs of the future will demand the skills students learn in community college and technical programs. Here is **evidence**:

(Randi Weingarten & Sara Goldrick-Rab, head of the American Federation of Teachers & professor of educational policy studies & sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and member of AFT’s higher education policy council, Washington Post, “Teachers’ union: we have seen free community college succeed,” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/02/02/teachers-union-we-have-seen-free-community-college-succeed/>, 2/2/2015)

In the 20th century, we made high school free. We sent a generation of GIs to college. We trained a competitive workforce. These tools gave working families what they needed to climb the ladder of opportunity.



Today, our nation has changed. Our economy has changed. Technology and knowledge move at the speed of light. And working families need more tools. When two out of three jobs require some higher education, we need to aim higher and make college affordable and accessible to all.

Yet, while free public high school has become the expectation, affordable public college is still the exception. State disinvestment and soaring student debt have discouraged many aspiring students from attending college. And while we celebrate the handful of institutions that have cracked the code—making college affordable and accessible while raising student achievement—socio-economic barriers remain.

While there is bipartisan agreement that college costs and rising debt are too high, the next generation of American workers needs more than rhetoric. They need action. President Obama’s proposal to make community college free for all hardworking students is action. If enacted, it could make more students’ dreams of postsecondary education come true, especially those of low- and middle-income students who face financial roadblocks.

More evidence:

(Stanley S. Litow, former deputy chancellor of the new york city schools, Huffington Post, “what the data tells us about ‘free community college,’” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stanley-s-litow/what-the-data-tell-us-about_b_6661942.html, 2/12/2015)

The U.S. made high school mandatory after World War II, and the impact of that policy resulted in America's greatest sustained period of economic growth. Enabling all of our young people to bridge the gap between high school and the academic and workplace skills they need to participate in the global economy -- without burdening them with crushing debt -- is a no brainer. Community college is the new high school now. It's essential that as many barriers as possible are removed and increased attendance enabled. But for this to work, we must focus on completion.

We need partnerships among high schools, colleges and employers to help improve the rigor and relevance of what we teach.



Funding to make college free is important, but we also need to ensure that funding focuses on improving college completion and links to well-paying jobs.

Another way the pro might demonstrate that free community college works is by drawing on **empirical examples**. If similar plans were successful, we may be able to logically conclude that this one would be too. Here is another piece of **evidence**, which uses the example of the GI bill to advance the argument that more free education grows the middle class:

(Jonathan Alter, senior political analyst, The Daily Beast, "The free community college plan is Obama's GI bill," <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/24/the-free-community-college-plan-is-obama-s-gi-bill.html>, 1/24/2015)

Washington Post columnist Robert Samuelson, a longtime critic of what he calls the "college-for-all crusade," argues that most jobs still don't require a college degree or certificate. But Samuelson fails to notice that most good jobs do. And according to a Georgetown University study, by 2020 two thirds of all jobs will require at least some post-secondary training, which few employers are willing to provide (PDF).

Obama's comparison to high school a century ago is an apt one. An industrial economy needed graduates with basic skills, so the idea of free high school (rare in the 19th Century) took root. Now, an information economy requires workers with the critical thinking skills and specialized training that requires 14 years—not 12—of formal education.

With high schools largely out of the vocational education business, the burden for preparing the workforce of the future has fallen to community colleges and the other two-year training and apprentice programs that would also be free under the president's plan. This is true even for occupations that have not



traditionally required a degree. Auto mechanics need IT training to fix today's smart cars. Health care technicians require specialized coursework if they have any hopes of advancing. Warehouse workers must be schooled in logistics to meet their just-in-time delivery schedules.

You would think Republicans might get this—and that they might notice that federal support for higher education hasn't always been a partisan issue. The original GI Bill offered free tuition to servicemen returning from World War II. Passed unanimously under FDR in 1944, the bill was the brainchild of Harry Colmery, a former American Legion commander and former chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Colmery and other backers were interested primarily in helping veterans, but they soon saw that the bill was doing much more. It was propelling the postwar economic boom and the dramatic expansion of the American middle class.

Here is still more **evidence**, this time focusing on the success of Tulsa's free community college program:

(Paul Fain, news editor @ Inside Higher Ed, "Free community college: it works," <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/03/05/tulsa-community-colleges-free-tuition-program-has-paid-while-inspiring-others>, 3/5/2015)

President Obama's free community college proposal has a direct ancestor in a program Tulsa Community College began in 2007. And Tulsa's free-tuition experiment is working, with the college's leaders calling it a "battle-tested" recipe for increasing degree production.

Tulsa Achieves pays for three free years of tuition or 63 free credits, which is enough for an associate degree. The scholarship is open to all high school graduates in Tulsa County, Okla. They must enroll right out of high school, maintain a 2.0 GPA, take a student success course and do 40 hours of community service each year to remain eligible.

The community college hit the ground running in 2007, enrolling 1,350 students in the program's first class.



"We nearly doubled our first-time freshmen," said Lauren Brookey, vice president for external affairs at Tulsa, which enrolls about 20,000 students.

The idea for the scholarship grew out of concerns about the Tulsa region's relatively low numbers of college degree holders. Local business and government leaders worked with the college to create Tulsa Achieves to encourage more students to enroll in college - and to help them graduate. The college also created a textbook trust with private donations to cover book costs for several hundred students.

The goal was to "change the conversation about the value of community college" by using a clear message about free tuition, Brookey said. "There is no excuse in our community not to go to college."

Each year since the program began, roughly 1,500 local students have accepted that offer and taken on the extra responsibilities that come with it. Roughly one in five graduating high school seniors in Tulsa County participates in Tulsa Achieves, according to the college.

Enrollment numbers are up as a result. And Tulsa Achieves students top their peers in measures of academic performance. They have higher GPAs and retention and graduation rates, and are more likely to complete gateway courses.

For example, fully half of the first group of students, which first enrolled in 2007, had earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree or certificate by 2014 -- with 48 percent earning degrees (see chart). Only 32 percent of non-Tulsa Achieves students who entered that year earned a credential in the same period.

The free tuition program's numbers are better than completion rates for community college students nationwide. And subsequent classes of incoming students in Tulsa Achieves are on course for similar completion rates

High numbers of students in Tulsa Achieves transfer to four-year institutions. About 44 percent of the first class transferred, compared to 32 percent of their peers. And 22 percent of the first 1,500 students had earned a bachelor's degree by last fall.

"It's a proven method," said Leigh Goodson, Tulsa Community College's president.



Both sides should keep in mind, though, that neither of these historical examples offers a perfect parallel. Therefore, conclusions drawn from their data may be inaccurate.

Of course, the con will need to argue that free community college does not lead to these positive outcomes. In fact, it may even do the opposite, and worsen poverty and income inequality.

One such argument concerns “**under-matching**,” the phenomenon in which students from low-income households overwhelmingly attend inferior schools, even when they are academically qualified to attend more selective universities. Some people argue that this results in a two-tiered educational system, in which low-income people have little chance of truly “catching up” to their wealthier peers. This **evidence** suggests that free community college would increase under-matching:

(Tomiko Brown-Nagin, Daniel P. S. Paul Professor of Constitutional Law & professor of history at Harvard University, Inside Higher Ed, “the wrong path to higher ed equality,” <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/02/13/ratings-and-free-community-college-are-wrong-way-end-inequality-essay>, 2/13/2015)

But the administration’s chosen means to the praiseworthy end of further expanding college access do not fundamentally challenge inequality in higher education; instead, they reinforce our two-tiered and unequal system. Federal policy instead should encourage academically qualified, lower-income students to matriculate to selective, four-year colleges. A monetary rewards system (a Race to the Top for higher education) or statutory mandates could advance that objective.

The current proposals are inadequate means to the laudable end of increasing access for the disadvantaged for three main reasons. First, money is not enough to ensure the success of low-income and first-generation college students (an often overlooked group that it is good to see included in the administration’s



proposals). A shortage of financial resources is an important part -- but just one dimension -- of the multifaceted challenges that hinder lower-income and first-generation students. These students not only face financial impediments, but also confront social and cultural challenges in higher education. They lack the parental support, social networks and human capital of wealthier students with college-educated parents. Students without family and social connections to the world of higher education often find it difficult to navigate collegiate life.

The majority of such students matriculate to two-year colleges. These campuses are literally and figuratively closer to home. At more selective institutions, the gulf between college and community life is greatest and the commitment to educating Pell Grant-eligible, first-generation students is less robust, judging from enrollment statistics. (Studies show that the most competitive colleges are the least likely to enroll Pell Grant students).

But most community colleges are not equipped to provide the academic and social supports necessary for the success of the capable but needy students drawn to them -- the second flaw in the administration's means to a worthy end. Reams of data have long documented the struggle of community colleges to deliver the quality education and additional support that students need. Teaching staffs at these colleges juggle heavy course loads and are responsible for hundreds of students, many of whom need remedial instruction in basic skills. Graduation rates at community colleges are meager. And, although many students enter community college with plans to transfer to four-year institutions, only one in five actually does.

In effect, there are two vastly different systems of education: one for richer students from college-educated parents and another for poorer students from undereducated families. Richer students overwhelmingly attend the nation's selective colleges and universities, where admissions officials have their pick of applicants.

Poorer, first-generation students overwhelmingly attend community colleges. Even some poorer students who are academically qualified for far more competitive institutions choose community colleges -- a phenomenon called "undermatching."



The administration's proposals will not end these inequities and do not aspire to end them. The community college proposal is instead a concession to the inevitability of a two-tiered, separate and unequal, system and will reinforce the status quo, including undermatching.

Another common neg argument is that community college students are statistically **unlikely to complete any sort of degree**, which means they gain nothing in terms of social mobility. Here is **evidence** that makes this point, and suggests that cost of tuition is not the true barrier to success for the typical community college student:

(Thomas Bailey & Judith Scott-Clayton, director & senior research associate, of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, "The problem with Obama's 'free community college' proposal," Time Magazine, <http://time.com/money/3674033/obama-free-college-plan-problems/>, 1/20/2015)

President Obama's free college plan won't actually raise the number of college graduates without improvements in the way community colleges help students succeed, say two education researchers.

President Obama's ambitious proposal to make community college tuition free would certainly make enrolling in college more affordable. It may also induce students to stay there longer.

However, reducing costs for students on its own is unlikely to significantly increase the number of students who finish degrees. Consider: Of all of the students who enrolled in public community college for the first time in the fall of 2003, only one-quarter earned any kind of certificate or associate's degree within six years. Another 12% earned a bachelor's degree within that six-year period.



If we want to significantly improve educational outcomes, we need to both make college more affordable so more students can enroll, and make the reforms needed to ensure community college students can succeed in their courses, complete their programs, and graduate within a reasonable amount of time.

A good pro answer to this is that free community college mitigates problems with low graduation rates. The warrant is that students—especially low-income students—quickly become trapped in a downward cost spiral, in which they have to balance school with work, which then hurts their grades, which then reduces their eligibility for financial aid and increases their likelihood of dropping out. This **evidence** is great on that point:

(Sara Goldrick-Rab & Nancy Kendall, professors of educational policy studies at UW-Madison, Lumina Foundation, “redefining college affordability: securing america’s future with a free two year college option,” http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/ideas_summit/Redefining_College_Affordability.pdf, April 2014)

While Americans pride themselves on the quality of our postsecondary educational system, a decreasing proportion of students are gaining the skills and knowledge that colleges have to offer. Low wages and the declining value of financial aid mean that an increasing number of students’ college experiences are shaped by a tightrope walk between borrowing and earning enough to pay to attend school, and having enough time and energy to study and do well in school. While in prior generations it was possible to either borrow or work, today many students wrestle with the need to both borrow and work, and still may fall short of needed resources (Kirshstein, 2012). Students from families earning \$25,000 to



\$50,000 a year need to borrow \$7,500 a year in federal loans (the maximum available) and earn at least \$4,500 to \$11,000 a year by working (or borrowing additional PLUS loans if their parent qualifies), in order to enroll each year at a public university (U.S. Department of Education Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2013). Yet engagement in college and the likelihood of degree completion decline with substantial work hours, especially among full-time students, pushing students towards additional borrowing in lieu of work (Darolia, 2014). If they refuse to do so and instead work long hours, their grades can suffer. Due to satisfactory academic progress standards for financial aid, this can in turn compromise their ability to continue to access any kind of federal student aid (including loans), creating a downward spiral of college affordability. Making matters worse, the system penalizes students for working while receiving aid. While unaided students can keep all of their work earnings, aided students run the risk of working their way out of financial aid eligibility even when they have unmet financial need and their earnings amount to less than the grant aid they stand to lose (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). The current system thus provides strong incentives for all students to borrow loans, and stronger incentives for academically weaker students to borrow more, despite their lower odds of degree completion and their higher risk of non-repayment.

Targeting is also an issue for free community college programs that the con may want to bring up. Because the proposal would use limited resources to pay for *everyone's* tuition, not just for those who need it most, it trade-offs with direct support for students who truly could not afford college without substantial aid. Middle-class students might like getting something for free, but they don't truly *need* it. Here is **evidence** on that, arguing that free community college is regressive and a step in the wrong direction:

(Debbie Cochrane, research director @ The Institute for College Access & Success, "Why 'free community college' is a wolf in sheep's clothing," <http://views.ticas.org/?p=1421>, 1/9/2015)

Free tuition plans are giant missed opportunities because they put resources where they are less needed when the need is so great in other areas. As shown in the table below, students in the lower



income categories need far more financial support to bring college within reach. The vast majority of them (92% for the lowest income group) have “unmet need” even after accounting for available grants and what they can afford out-of-pocket. That’s true of just 9% of students in the highest income category: 91% of those students can already afford not just tuition, but their entire cost of attendance. Surely higher income students would appreciate additional resources, but do they need them? Not according to federal needs analysis, and the vast majority of these higher income students already enroll in college and are the most likely to graduate.

In addition to providing resources where they are not needed or needed less, these free-tuition plans are also ticking time-bombs. They signal that tuition is all that matters and flat-out ignore the other costs of attendance that determine whether students can get to campus, whether they’re focused on the material or how to pay for their next meal while in class, and whether they have a place to sleep at night.

Currently, many community college students get help paying for these other costs in addition to tuition. As shown above, the lowest income students’ average grant aid exceeds the amount of the tuition they’re charged by quite a bit: their total grant aid comes to about three times (328%) their tuition charge. On average, students with incomes below the median get grants that cover full tuition, with some resources left to help pay non-tuition costs, including fees, books, transportation, food and housing; students with incomes above the median get grants that cover, on average, about one-third of tuition.

If we prioritize covering tuition costs, treating the other costs of attendance as less important, how long until the grants for lower income students – grants which currently exceed tuition – are cut? This isn’t a fantastical possibility. Limiting certain students’ Pell eligibility to tuition costs was an idea included in a federal appropriations bill not too long ago.

If resources were unlimited, there would be more merit to free tuition arguments. But resources are in fact so limited that the vast majority of low-income students – the students for whom financial aid will make the difference – aren’t getting what they need.

Free tuition proposals are politically popular, but regressive and inefficient. They are a lot like higher education tax benefits, where there is broad and bipartisan agreement that much better targeting is needed. Free tuition



proposals don't just fail to move us forward: they're a step in the wrong direction. We should absolutely do more to encourage students to pursue higher education and make them aware of financial aid, but this is not the way to do it.

This is a great argument because it creates direct offense against the pro's main impacts. If you can win that free community college would actually make things *worse* for low-income Americans, you have successfully turned the majority of pro cases.

The pro can answer the targeting argument by claiming that incentivizing upper- and middle-class students to attend community college is a good thing, because it increases campus diversity and school funding levels. Moreover, if students who would have otherwise attended 4-year universities spend time in community colleges, they will provide good models of academic success for other students. Here is **evidence**:

(Richard D. Kahlenberg, senior fellow at the Century Foundation, The Atlantic, "The genius of Obama's two-year college proposal,"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/01/the-genius-of-obamas-two-year-college-proposal/384429/>, 1/12/2015)

This concern about targeting resources is understandable, but the genius of the Obama proposal lies in its universality. In Tennessee, almost 90 percent of graduating high school seniors have signed up for its new universal community-college program (though officials expect that the actual number of students who will eventually participate will be substantially lower).



These numbers are encouraging for two reasons. First, it suggests that some low-income students may be lured by the simplicity of "free." Although many disadvantaged students may have already attended tuition-free in the past—the maximum Pell Grant amount exceeds the average tuition at community colleges—navigating complicated financial-aid forms has proven notoriously difficult for struggling families. Introducing a bright word that everyone can understand—"free"—is a big step forward and appears to encourage participation.

Second, the high interest suggests some middle-class and wealthy families whose children would have otherwise attended four-year colleges may be giving two-year institutions a second look. While some argue that free tuition for upper- and middle-class students is a waste of resources, in fact it is in everyone's interest to ensure that community colleges are socioeconomically integrated. We have known since *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate educational institutions for black and white—or for poor and rich—are rarely equal.

Today, there is an enormous degree of economic stratification in higher education. According to research by Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl of Georgetown University, wealthy students outnumber poor students at the most selective four-year colleges by 14 to one, while community colleges educate twice as many low-income students as high-income students. Moreover, their research finds that, between 1982 and 2006, the proportion of students from the richest quarter of the population attending community colleges has declined, while those attending from the poorest quarter has increased.

On one level, the fact that community colleges educate a disproportionate number of low-income students is the pride and glory of the sector. But, as a Century Foundation task force on community colleges noted in its 2013 report, "Bridging the Higher Education Divide," economic segregation also severely weakens the two-year sector.

The task force, chaired by Anthony Marx, president of the New York Public Library, and Eduardo Padron, president of Miami Dade College, concluded that the rising economic divide between two- and four-year institutions is bad for



community college students, in part because the paucity of middle-class and upper-middle class students reduces the political capital of two-year campuses. Political scientists have long noted that programs for poor people tend to be poorly funded. And as the community-college student population has grown poorer, so has the ability to garner adequate educational resources.

According to a 2011 Delta Project report, total per-pupil operating expenditures at private research universities was \$66,744 on average and \$36,190 at public research institutions. Meanwhile, it was just \$12,957 at public community colleges. The gap is partly explained by the research mission of universities, but when the research expenses are excluded—and only education and related spending is considered—a considerable gap remains. Private and public research universities spent \$35,596 and \$15,919 per pupil, respectively, while community colleges allocated just \$10,242 per student. Between 1999 and 2009, per-student spending at private research universities jumped by almost \$14,000 and by roughly \$4,200 at public research universities—but community-college spending rose by just \$1.

The Obama plan could help change this dynamic. As Libby Nelson points out in *Vox*, middle-class students are arguably "the biggest winners in Obama's free college plan." Drawing these students in greater numbers to community colleges could strengthen the hand of two-year colleges in state legislatures when it comes time to dividing up the higher education spending pie. Georgia's universal pre-k program "is very popular, championed by liberals and conservatives alike," because everyone benefits, she writes. By analogy, if community colleges were to draw a healthier economic mix of students, they might command a more equitable share of state resources.

In addition, researchers have found that the growing number of low-income and working-class students in community colleges has been associated with reduced educational expectations and a less-rigorous curriculum. Over time, community colleges have focused less on liberal arts courses designed to prepare students to transfer to four-year colleges and more on teaching vocational skills. One scholar found that community colleges often suffer from "low expectations of teachers and lack of support from fellow students for academic work." Researchers have also found important peer effects among college students. As economic segregation rises in community colleges, students are less likely to be surrounded by well-prepared middle-class classmates who model academic success.



Being cut off from financial and peer resources takes a toll on community-college students

today. Research finds that though 81 percent of first-time community-college students enroll in school expecting to transfer to a four-year institution and get a bachelor's degree, just 12 percent end up doing so after six years.

Next, on the question of income mobility, here is a piece of **evidence** for the con that argues that free community college won't help people find good jobs, because those jobs just don't exist. College tuition is therefore the wrong problem entirely:

(Jayson Boyers, vice president and managing director of Division of Continuing Professional Studies (National Online Division) at Champlain College, "Free community college? For Obama's plan to succeed business must be part of the equation," Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2015/02/02/free-community-college-for-obama-plan-to-succeed-business-must-be-part-equation/>, 2/2/2015)

The administration wrongly believes that free community college will automatically provide opportunities that lead to "better jobs, better wages, better benefits" for those on the lower economic rungs. Although it makes for good publicity, this proposal addresses the wrong issue.

Despite Washington's belief that the major obstacle to higher education today is debt, the real problem is that the private sector, the driving force for creating jobs, has been left out of the equation. Obama's proposal does nothing to address the need for industry to provide employment for these students after they complete their courses, if they do so at all.

As the New York Times pointed out, community college is already free for many students, thanks to Pell grants and state aid. While many students are taking advantage of the programs offered, few are completing their education.

The U.S. Department of Education calculates that only 18 percent of students complete their two-year degree within three years, and schools with the best reported rates are reaching only 30 percent to 40 percent.



What we need is a system that focuses on a better outcome. These are real people and families that are suffering, who see no guarantee that their investment in a two-year degree will lead to a better life. We need to eliminate the obstacles and create a path that is clear so that individuals can move up the economic ladder to where the promised results materialize.

The ultimate goal of students is not simply to get an education, but to get the training to be able to secure a high-paying job and a promise of a better future. A higher degree and greater skill set don't automatically translate into employment opportunities.

Government and colleges don't dictate jobs. Business does, yet for some reason it has not been invited to the bargaining table.

The pro might respond that better educating the citizenry will grow the economy and create more jobs—we'll discuss this at length later. Another relevant argument is that evidence shows that associate's degrees increase average lifetime earnings almost as much as bachelor's degrees, but at lower costs. Here is **evidence**:

(Sara Goldrick-Rab & Nancy Kendall, professors of educational policy studies at UW-Madison, Lumina Foundation, "redefining college affordability: securing america's future with a free two year college option,"

http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/ideas_summit/Redefining_College_Affordability.pdf, April 2014)

There are some distinct benefits to investing in the completion of two years of college, and especially associates degrees. Jobs requiring associates degrees pay almost as well as those requiring bachelor's degrees (\$61,000 vs. \$63,000), and pay far better than those requiring some college but no degree (\$44,000) (Sommers & Morisi, 2012). Just in financial terms, the return on



investment for an associates degree is strong; the Brookings Institution estimates it at 20 percent, well above the return on bachelor's degree at 15 percent. Of course this is enhanced by the lower costs of the associates degree, and the lifetime earnings of bachelor's degree recipients remain stronger than those with associates degree. But with large numbers of students starting and never completing bachelor's degrees and the costs of those degrees rising substantially, the difference in those returns may subside (Greenstone & Looney, 2011). Moreover, the odds of success in bachelor's degree completion appear to be enhanced by completing the associates before transfer (Crook, Chellman, & Holod, 2012).

The con also has the option to argue that free community college would backfire by making community colleges worse. A common warrant is that making community college would increase the number of students who want to attend. But many community colleges already have waiting lists and/or lack adequate funding per student. Free community college would exacerbate this problem, increasing the demand of middle-class students (who would have otherwise attended 4-year universities), and thus push out the low-income students for whom community college is the *only* affordable option. Here is **evidence:**

(Joanne Jacobs, The Hechinger Report (a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education), published in US News & World Report, "As he promotes it, some question Obama's free community college idea," <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/02/23/as-he-promotes-it-some-question-obamas-free-community-college-idea>, 2/23/2015)

Although community colleges enroll more high-needs students than four-year universities and colleges, they spend significantly less per student, the American Institutes for Research reports. Just under 40 percent of community college students earn a degree within six years, compared with almost 74 percent at private nonprofit schools and about 63 percent at public universities, according to the National Student Clearinghouse.



Deborah Santiago of Excelencia in Education, a nonprofit that advocates for Latino students, said that while the free-tuition message could have “a powerful impact” on first-generation students, they need more support to complete college. “It costs more for these students, and community colleges have fewer resources.”

The promise of free tuition could make the problem worse by drawing more students to already crowded community college campuses, said Michele Siqueiros, president of The Campaign for College Opportunity.

“If states don't spend more to increase capacity,” community colleges will end up with long waiting lists, Siqueiros said. Affordability doesn't help if a student can't get into the right class or find help figuring out what classes to take, she said.

Starting at a community college lowers a student’s odds of ever earning a bachelor's degree, said Matthew Chingos, research director at the Brown Center on Education Policy. In spite of this, lowering the price “can nudge students to attend lower-quality institutions.”

Not everyone thinks this is a bad idea.

According to research conducted by scholars at Stanford and Harvard, a “vast majority” of lower-income students already go to less-selective colleges than they're qualified to attend. This puts them at a disadvantage, since high achievers are more likely to earn degrees if their classmates are also high achievers.

More evidence:

(Michael B. Horn, co-founder of the Clayton Christensen Institute & executive director of its education program, CNN, “Obama, free community college may not work,” <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/20/opinion/horn-community-college/>, 1/21/2015)



As a result, even if the President's plan passed, it wouldn't help the large number of already-overcrowded community colleges that have waiting lists numbering in the thousands. Tuition is only a small part of the funding needed to educate additional students.

What's more, because of the limited productivity gains possible in the community college model, those costs will continue to rise, which means that tuition will, too. The proposal's \$60 billion price over 10 years is likely to grow with only a questionable return on the investment.

The above card also contains arguments about how growing demand for community college would rapidly increase the program's total cost throughout the future. This brings us to our next important issue to cover: **cost**. Is free community college affordable for the nation as a whole? Can we afford to implement such a program?

The pro can respond that the program is substantially less expensive than other national programs, and that they can be funded without hurting anyone. Here is **evidence**:

(Jonathan Alter, senior political analyst, The Daily Beast, "The free community college plan is Obama's GI bill," <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/24/the-free-community-college-plan-is-obama-s-gi-bill.html>, 1/24/2015)

But these wrinkles can all be ironed out. The more basic arguments against the president's idea don't hold up under inspection. The first is cost: \$60 billion over 10 years. That's not chump change, but it isn't as prohibitive as some of the post-State of the Union commentators suggested. It's less than five percent of what we've spent in the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan. Is restoring the middle class and preparing this country to compete internationally really less important?



More **evidence**:

(From Harrop, political columnist, Real Clear Politics, "free tuition at community college should just be the start,"

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2015/01/27/free_tuition_at_community_college_should_just_be_the_start_125406.html, 1/27/2015)

The crumbling of the once-mighty American middle class has two unstoppable causes, globalization and automation, and one stoppable one, a poorly educated workforce. A high-school diploma no longer guarantees a decent income.

That's something we can fix.

President Obama's proposal for a free community college education is a good start. Two-year colleges are the gateway to more job training or a four-year college degree.

Let's dispense with defeatist talk that we can't afford to educate our people. Obama's plan is to pay for the schooling with higher taxes on America's economic elite. It wouldn't even bother with the upper middle class, just the super-rich.

Do we hate the super-rich? We do not. We can thank them as they contribute more to the country that made their fortunes possible.

Some less visionary Republican leaders have framed the proposal as an income redistribution plan. But the money would be redirected not from the rich to the non-rich but from the very rich to education. A more productive labor force makes the entire country more prosperous.

The pro arguments on cost discussed above are a good start, but they are not very strong without a second piece of the puzzle: winning that the return on the investment exceeds the cost. No matter how much something costs, it is worth it if you get more than your money back. The pro will argue that free



community college grows the economy, helps America compete on the global scale, etc. We will discuss those arguments more later.

The con, on the other hand, can make a pretty strong case that free community college would be wildly expensive. Here is **evidence** that says the Department of Education's own numbers show that the program would cost nearly \$60 billion *in the first year alone*—that's the total figure the Obama administration has projected for 10 years!:

(Paul Mullshine, political columnist, New Jersey Star Ledger, "Free community college? Take a math class,"

http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/02/free_community_college_take_a_math_class_mullshine.html, 2/19/2015)

That has been evident over the past few weeks as Americans have debated President Obama's proposal to make community college as free as our K-12 education system.

Alas, education is expensive, even when it's "free." That point seems to have eluded everyone on both sides of this debate. Most the discussions I've seen on the community-college issue center on questions such as whether we should spend our money on community college or on increased defense spending.

What both sides miss is this key point: We don't have any money to spend.

If you doubt that, look at the deficit in the current federal budget, about \$474 billion. Both parties need to be looking at cutting expenses, not adding them

Now look at the real cost of "free" community college. Here are the numbers, all taken from the federal Department of Education website:



There are about 7.1 million students currently enrolled in two-year colleges in America. The average annual cost per student is about \$7,700. Multiply the former by the latter and you come up with \$54.7 billion.

Now consider that when you make community college free you can expect millions of students to decide to take their first two years of education there rather than pay the cost of a four-year college. That's why I wasn't surprised when I saw that the administration wants to budget \$60 billion for the program.

What surprised me was that the \$60 billion is supposed to fund the program for 10 years, not one. What the heck? A mere \$6 billion is just a fraction of what the cost would be for free community college across America.

Perhaps even more importantly, the con can posit that the cost of free community college will only accelerate indefinitely, as more and more people decide to take advantage of it. That is supported by the card above. Another reason why costs would grow is that 4-year universities would almost certainly set up exchanges with community colleges in order to receive federal funding. This idea is explained by the following **evidence**:

(Paul Mullshine, political columnist, New Jersey Star Ledger, "Free community college? Take a math class,"

http://www.nj.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/02/free_community_college_take_a_math_class_mullshine.html, 2/19/2015)

There's another complication to this plan that I became aware of after I got a call from a guy I know who works in the Rutgers administration. This guy was worried that once the free tuition went into



effect students would stop coming to Rutgers for the first two years, choosing instead to get those years in at their county colleges.

What's more likely, I told him, would be for the colleges and universities to make arrangements that would permit the students to put in the first two years tuition-free on campus by setting up a program that lets them take course there while technically being listed as county college students.

This would be simple. Kean University already has a deal with Ocean County College that permits students there to take Kean courses. Reversing that would be a simple matter. The Obama plan calls for the feds to pay three-quarters of any such student's tuition, so that would be simply too good to pass up.

At that point, even \$60 billion annually would probably not be enough to pay the feds' share. As for \$6 billion, that's an insignificant sum when it comes to education costs on the national level. Look at it this way: The school system in Newark, which is only a medium-sized city, costs a billion dollars a year to run. Obama is promising to make every county college in the country free - for just six times the cost of running the Newark school system.

That would be wonderful if it were possible.

But it's not.



As I already touched on, the pro's best option for dealing with the cost debate is to win that free community college would generate enough benefits to offset the cost. This is much easier if you win not only that free tuition would help poor students reach the middle class, but also that America's economic growth and national success as a whole require increasing education. Here is **evidence**:

If financial aid fails to make college affordable and an increasing number of American families face risky levels of debt and unsustainable financial strains to access a postsecondary education, does this mean that broad access to college is still a goal worth pursuing? Our answer is most decidedly yes. College is not always a salve, nor should it be the only available salve, but a college degree continues to be a key ingredient for advancement in the U.S. People across the country express their desire to attain it. Political, social, and economic leaders have detailed the centrality of higher education to the nation's future: from its role in creating socioeconomic mobility, to its centrality in creating a more perfect social union, to the essential role it plays in assuring our position in the global knowledge economy (Mettler, 2005). At the individual and familial level, having a college degree continues, on average, to be correlated with many positive, non-remunerative outcomes, including greater resilience to economic downturns, better health and well-being, longer lives, and even greater happiness (Meara, Richards, & Cutler, 2008; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008). These correlations suggest far more than individual impacts. They aggregate to more engaged citizens, families more able to withstand shocks and nurture their communities, a stronger and more unified society, and people ready and able to invent, innovate, and push the boundaries of our communal knowledge. Indeed, while current higher education financing models emphasize individual outcomes, we argue, as have an increasing number of social scientists that have examined the effects of increased education and increased inequality on societies (eg. Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, 2006; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010; Stiglitz, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006; Woolf, Johnson, Phillips, & Philipsen, 2007), that social and national outcomes to higher education should drive the next higher education policy and financing framework.



More **evidence**:

(Sara Goldrick-Rab & Nancy Kendall, professors of educational policy studies at UW-Madison, Lumina Foundation, "redefining college affordability: securing america's future with a free two year college option,"

http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/ideas_summit/Redefining_College_Affordability.pdf, April 2014)

A F2CO policy shifts the model of college affordability in at least three important ways. First, it acknowledges the central role that higher education plays in our national wellbeing and in our social fabric. College is not only a private investment in an individual's human capital; it is also our nation's primary mechanism for creating a meritorious socioeconomic system, for encouraging people's development of their full capabilities, and for assuring that our society benefits from everyone's best ideas. It is, as such, an essential public good requiring public investment. Second, a F2CO policy is more fully responsive to all Americans' needs. It responds directly to low- and middle-income students' experiences and college goals in a variety of ways, from their concerns about the consequences of loan-borrowing, to their greater need for stable sources of support, to their experiences in unwelcoming institutions, to their stated preferences for college locations (student surveys indicate that the majority of students are increasingly interested in attending a public college or university in their home state, along with their plans to work at least part-time while in school) (College Board and Art & Science Group, 2012). Third, a F2CO policy creates robust linkages of accountability among students, families, communities, institutions, and government that simply don't exist in the current system. From assuring that students receiving public support are on-track to graduate, to improving college quality, to providing democratic oversight of taxpayer's investment in our future, F2CO addresses the significant distortions caused by the current system.

Even more **evidence**, focused on STEM and global competition:



(Gary May, dean of the college of engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Inside Higher Ed, "A powerful word," <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/02/19/essay-why-plan-offer-free-community-college-deserves-support>, 2/19/2015)

For a large cross section of our country, community colleges represent a way forward. But their role and value transcend a person's ability to get ahead. They're also crucial to America's ability to compete in the world economy.

It is widely accepted that our nation needs to graduate significant numbers of professionals in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields to ensure our future economic competitiveness. The critical role that community colleges play in achieving this goal is less known. The most recently compiled statistics from the National Science Foundation showed that 44 percent of the 126,000 men and women earning 4-year degrees in engineering attended community college at some point. For most, this was their first foray into higher education -- and they continued on. A National Student Clearinghouse Research Center study showed that nearly 75 percent of the students who earned an associate degree and then moved to a four-year college graduated with a bachelor's degree within four years of transferring.

Community college is also a particularly effective pathway for underrepresented minority STEM students. The 2006 National Survey of Recent College Graduates revealed that 64 percent of American Indians, 5 percent of African-Americans and 55 percent of Hispanic engineering B.S. and M.S. degree recipients attended community college before enrolling at a four-year college.

The argument that increasing participation in higher education is key to America's ability to compete in the global marketplace is an important one for the pro. This is also related to what is referred to as the "middle-skills gap": a shortage of people trained in the kinds of skills often taught at community colleges



and trade schools. These include technical jobs in manufacturing, lots of positions in the tech industry, healthcare support staff, etc. Clearly, these are all fields that substantially affect America's economy. Many scholars contend that training middle-skills professionals is critical to avoid a number of economic problems. Here is **evidence**:

(Thomas A. Kochan [George Maverick Bunker Professor of Management at MIT's Sloan School of Management and a codirector of the Institute for Work and Employment Research], David Finegold [senior vice president for lifelong learning and strategic growth at Rutgers University], & Paul Osterman [Nanyang Technological University Professor of Human Resources and Management at MIT's Sloan School.], Harvard Business Review, "who can fix the 'middle skills' gap?", <https://hbr.org/2012/12/who-can-fix-the-middle-skills-gap>, December 2012)

Three and a half years after the Great Recession officially ended, unemployment in the United States remains stubbornly high. Yet many employers still struggle to fill certain types of vacancies, especially for so-called middle-skills jobs—in computer technology, nursing, high-skill manufacturing, and other fields—that require postsecondary technical education and training and, in some cases, college math courses or degrees. Currently in the U.S. about 69 million people work in middle-skills jobs, representing roughly 48% of the labor force.

No aggregate estimate of the shortage of middle-skills workers exists, but the number is expected to grow substantially as more baby boomers retire. The problem is most acute in the utilities and aerospace sectors—50% to 60% of whose workforces are eligible to retire by 2020 or likely to leave for other reasons—but it afflicts other industries as well. Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't publish estimates of job openings by skill category, combining government data on education and training requirements leads labor market experts to estimate that as many as 25 million, or 47%, of all new job openings from 2010 to 2020 will fall into the middle-skills range. (See the exhibit "The Middle-Skills Employment Landscape.") Shortages of workers for these types of jobs are already undermining U.S. competitiveness and causing firms



to shift their operations abroad. Figuring out how to train people to fill those well-paid jobs could help remedy the wage stagnation gripping the country and close the growing gap between high- and low-income households.

More evidence:

(James Besen, economist at Boston University School of Law, Harvard Business Review, “free community college would help fix the skills gap”, <https://hbr.org/2015/01/free-community-college-would-help-fix-the-skills-gap>, 1/12/2015)

Workforce experts see community colleges as essential for providing workers with “middle skills,” especially for jobs that require some post-secondary technical education and/or on-the-job learning (see “Who Can Fix the ‘Middle-Skills’ Gap?”). Currently, 26% of jobs require less than four years of post-secondary training; 16% of jobs require on-the-job training of more than six months. Community colleges provide a wide range of technical training and many of these vocational programs include work-study components at local employers, providing critical job experience.

But the evidence suggests that while demand is growing for middle-skill workers, the U.S. educational system is turning out relatively fewer graduates at this level. This mismatch contributes to employers’ perceptions of a “skills gap”. The chart below shows the educational requirements of the jobs that will be created between 2012 and 2022, compared to the share of diplomas generated over the past decade. While 24% of job openings will require less than four years of post-secondary training, this category only accounts for 21% of the diplomas granted (including both associate degrees and non-degree certificates). By comparison, a larger portion of four-year and graduate degrees are awarded relative to job openings requiring these higher degrees.



New technology at least partly explains the rising relative demand for mid-skill workers.

Historically, new technologies initially demand relatively educated workers, but as they mature and technical knowledge becomes more standardized, demand shifts to mid-skill technical occupations. While many of the first computer programmers were PhD mathematicians, few are today. In healthcare there has been a major shift of jobs from the most highly educated doctors and dentists to mid-skill workers including nurses, dental hygienists, medical assistants and a wide range of health technologists. Over the last two decades, two million mid-skill jobs have been created in health occupations beyond what can be explained by the overall growth of the healthcare sector.

But our educational institutions are not keeping up with this shift. The chart shows that middle skill workers are being undersupplied relative to workers with four-year or graduate degrees. Obama's program might help fix that imbalance, benefiting both employers and employees. Indeed, mid-wage, mid-skill jobs in mature industries have been particularly hard hit by automation, leading to a "polarization" of job opportunities. But new jobs are being created that demand new skills, skills that community colleges can often provide. Free tuition may help bolster economic opportunity for the less privileged.



Even more **evidence**:

(Nicholas Wyman, CEO of the institute for workplace skills and innovation, Quartz Magazine, “a free community college program could get millions of americans into skilled jobs”, <http://qz.com/325442/obamas-free-community-college-program-can-really-land-you-a-high-paying-job/>, 1/13/2015)

The White House confirmed that if all states participate in the program, approximately *nine million students* are likely to benefit each year, with each student saving an average of \$3,800 in tuition fees annually. But as impressive as that figure is, this proposal is about much more than saving nine million college students a couple of thousands of dollars. Aside from helping to ease the heavy burden of student debt that’s gripping our nation, this program has the potential to be one of the most positive and powerful steps in narrowing the ever-growing skills gap in America. Right now, over 9.1 million Americans are unemployed with millions of others underemployed. Yet at the same time, 4.8 million jobs remain unfilled, because there simply isn’t a big enough pool of applicants who possess the right practical, technical, and job-ready skills to do the work companies need.

Free community college could change all that.

While not all the details are yet clear, they so far indicate that participating colleges would have to meet certain academic requirements, *with preference given to degrees in high-demand fields*. And this is what gets at the heart of the promise to close America’s skills gap, ensuring that the millions of students who receive this government assistance will be trained and educated in the skills that add the most value—and will be the most valued—by 21st-century companies. And by this I mean skills that equip them for the jobs of tomorrow; jobs in lucrative and rapidly expanding fields like information technology, computer science, robotics, health care, and advanced manufacturing. And they’ll get to do it at little or no cost.

If widely implemented, not only will this ambitious free community college program expand educational and employment opportunities across the US, it could be the essential ingredient needed to ensure a more prosperous economic future for years to come.

Here’s why:



1. Americans need the right skills to compete on the global stage

Globalization and computer-driven automation are squeezing more and more lower-skill jobs out of the US economy, and things are likely to get tougher in the years ahead. An occupation-oriented associate degree, the type of degree earned at a community or technical college, will enable the next generation of Americans to acquire the knowledge and the skills companies need to stay competitive in our global economy, while at the same time reducing levels of unemployment, particularly the number of jobs lost to off-shoring and outsourcing.

2. Free community college will lower the levels of student loan debt crippling the US economy

Total US student loan debt has reached a record \$1.2 trillion dollars, crippling students, parents and the economy at large. In fact, student loan debt accounts for 6% of America's overall national debt, a higher percentage than credit card debt and second only to mortgage-related debts. The average 4-year college graduate leaving school saddled with \$30,000 in debt, a number that has doubled over the past decade.

And not only are tens of millions of people currently saddled with mountains of outstanding student debt, default rates are at an all-time high; indeed, according to the most recent numbers, one in 10 borrowers default on their loans within the first two years of repayment. Worse yet, it's not just the graduating students who are faced with massive debt, but in many cases parents are also taking—and in many cases defaulting on loans—in a well-meaning effort to support their children's futures.

And the cost of education is skyrocketing: The accumulated cost of college tuition has soared by over 1,000% since the late 1970s. This college debt bubble, as many economists have called it, will only continue to inflate. That is, unless we come up with some ways—like Obama's recent proposal—to incentivize students to pursue a free community college education instead of racking up mountains of debt at a 4-year university or college.

3. Most thriving economies place far more emphasis on vocational education than the US—and that's no coincidence

If you look at the US secondary education system in comparison to the rest of the world, one factor becomes apparent: most economically healthy nations place far more emphasis on vocational education than America. Switzerland, for example, has very low unemployment, particularly among its youth – around 3%, in fact – and a highly trained workforce. This is also true of other northern and central European countries, where vocational education is part of the mainstream education system.



In these countries, vocational education plays an important role in assisting high school students make the transition from high school to the world of work. In Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland, after grade 10, between 40 and 70% of high school students opt for vocational education, which combines both classroom and on-the-job learning over three years. On completion, the students are equipped with a qualification that carries real weight in the labor market, reducing unemployment and under-employment levels of young graduates, and also providing a pathway into even higher levels of education and earnings.

The above card also contains some good analysis about the role massive student loan debt plays in the economy. In the interest of space and time, I will not go into that argument at length in this paper, but you may want to pursue it on your own. The crux of the argument is that the high student loan debt burden most young people are carrying is so great that it hurts their ability to participate in other sectors of the economy, such as the all-important housing market. They simply can't afford it. Moreover, a lack of good-paying jobs means many students default on their debt.

No matter what, make sure you are doing the work to complete the argument. Simply saying "it's good for the economy" isn't very persuasive. You also need to tell your judge *why they should care about that*, and why it's more important than other concerns. For example, you might say that economic growth reduces poverty and suffering, increasing quality of life, and allows for the kind of technological progress we need to survive as a species. Just growth alone is not self-evidently good; *you have to tell your judge why it's good*.

The skills gap argument explained above is persuasive for the pro, but cons can effectively counter it by suggesting that other alternatives exist, which solve the same problems, but without the disadvantages. Because of the internet, it is now possible to educate huge numbers of people in advanced skills with



very little cost. This plan solves the problem of access better, is cheaper, and avoids the problem of driving educational inflation. Here is **evidence**:

(Nicole Goodkind, Yahoo Finance, "President Obama's community college program won't work: College official," <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/president-obama-s-community-college-program-won-t-work--ben-nelson-142206731.html>, 2/12/2015)

Ben Nelson, the founder of the Minerva School, a new hybrid online school that partners with Silicon Valley companies to provide students with tech skills and jobs, believes that this plan is flawed. "We live in a very different world than we did when the community college system was set up," he says. "Community colleges are now primarily providing remedial education because high schools are not doing their job."

Nelson believes that going to community college for a basic education makes more sense than paying up to five times as much to pay for a private education, but he doesn't believe that community college provides specialized, tech-centric education that young people need.

Nelson thinks that adaptive learning software, or massive online open colleges (known as MOOCs) could provide a cheaper, more adaptable alternative to the president's plan. "Rather than saying that Community College should be subsidized which by the way, will immediately inflate costs," says Nelson; "we should be saying that a community college-level education should be free for all Americans." In other words, set standards as to what an American adult should know and be able to do, and then find the best means to get there.

"Singling out one method of delivery for this and then injecting a large amount of money into that will decline the quality of the delivery of that method because it has a non-customer driven financial subsidy and the cost will increase," says Nelson. He points to the increase in costs of traditional four-year programs with the increase in federal financial aid.



This is a smart strategy for the con, because it eliminates the need to win that increasing skills and access to education isn't important. It sets up an easy path to victory for you to suggest a strategy that reaps all of the benefits without most of the costs.

To bolster this, the con can also argue that free community college actively trades off with better ideas. This is good to have in case the pro tries to claim that it would be good for America to pursue both strategies simultaneously. The argument is that community colleges are bad and getting worse, while other emerging alternatives are better, so we should not stifle innovation by funneling more students into the failing community college system. Here's **evidence**:

(Michael B. Horn, co-founder of the Clayton Christensen Institute & executive director of its education program, CNN, "Obama, free community college may not work," <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/20/opinion/horn-community-college/>, 1/21/2015)

Unfortunately, his plan doesn't make the grade. The proposal would not only pile up more debt by further subsidizing runaway college costs, it would also perilously undercut the emergence of more innovative educational programs designed to help students succeed in the workforce.

Offering only a lukewarm pathway to the job market, community colleges are incapable of fulfilling the President's lofty ambitions. Although there are some high-performing community colleges and stellar stories of success for certain students, the overall picture of success at two-year community colleges is dismal.

According to the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, only 22% of students graduate within three years, and 28% graduate within four. More telling, 80% of students say they want a bachelor's degree or higher, and yet only 20% of these students transfer to a four-year institution within five years.



Even for those who earn a community college degree, it often isn't as useful as other options.

Thanks to credential inflation, pursuing a professional certification — which more clearly indicates a person's skills than a degree — often pays off better than an associate's degree, according to Census Bureau data.

The conversation around making community college free also masks a larger problem, which is that community colleges are already heavily subsidized and far less affordable than commonly believed.

As you can see, both sides have ample persuasive arguments and high-quality evidence to choose from. This topic should create many fun and challenging debates, no matter which side you find yourself on.

We are not finished with the basics of debating this topic. You should be ready to build some solid cases!

Of course, it is important to remember that this guide is only meant as an introduction to help you get started. You should use this as a starting-point for your research, and get creative. Don't be afraid to try some new things.

And don't forget that you can always email completed cases to Rachel.Stevens@NCPA.org for a free, confidential case critique! We'll get them back to you, with personalized comments as soon as we can. Most are returned within 3 business days.

Good luck, PFers!



BONUS! Here are links to articles that I didn't get around to cutting that you might want.

PRO

REDUCES ADJUNCT PROFESSOR POVERTY: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/02/02/teachers-union-we-have-seen-free-community-college-succeed>

CON

KILLS SMALL PRIVATE COLLEGES: <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/02/20/the-unexpected-reason-some-in-higher-ed-fear-free-community-college>

EDUCATIONAL INFLATION: <http://thefederalist.com/2015/01/23/free-community-college-will-just-make-high-school-six-years-long/>

"6 REASONS FREE COMM COLLEGE IS A POOR INVESTMENT":
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2015/01/11/six-reasons-why-obamas-free-community-college-is-a-poor-investment/>

"HIDDEN COSTS": <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/1/obama-community-collegeproposaleducation.html>

MORE ON COST: <https://www.aei.org/publication/much-will-free-community-college-cost/>

BAD FOR THE POOR: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/01/20-obama-free-community-college-bad-idea-sotu-butler>

BOTH

LINKS TO FURTHER ARTICLES FOR BOTH SIDES: <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/01/28/free-community-college-obama-tennessee>