

## Turn Higher Education Model Upside Down!

### Short Term Job-related Training with an Option to Earn a Degree Later is the Solution to Increase Graduation Rate and Reduce College Debt in USA

*By Zafar Khizer*

If you have been following the spate of recent articles on the college debt bubble and if you have read the book “Higher Education: How Colleges are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids – And What We can Do About IT” by Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, you know there is something seriously wrong with our current higher education model.

While most freshmen start college with the intention of earning a degree in four years, statistics show that less than 50% actually do so. Four-year graduation rates in NJ ranged from 90% to as low as 6% [2008 data]. (Heybour, Kelly. “At NJ colleges, freshmen have less than 50 percent chance of graduating in four years” [The Star Ledger](#), Jan 30, 2011). This situation is no different in other states.

Consider these facts for USA: Four-year college grads make 54% more (about a million more during the career life) on average than those who never graduated or have just a high school diploma, yet only a quarter of Americans between 25-34 have a bachelor’s degree. About half of 3m people who enroll in university in America drop out. 50% graduation rate is the 6-year graduation rate, not 4-year.

People who drop out of college or graduate with not-so-in-demand degrees have a huge problem of paying back their educational loans because of the high college tuition that has increased much faster than inflation or family income. Tuition for most private colleges is now a minimum of \$20k to \$40k (in NJ) per year not including room and board. Even an Associate’s degree, that is usually not enough to launch a successful career, costs about \$40-45k. Many people are also graduating with \$80k to \$200k college debt with not-very-helpful (for employment purposes) bachelor’s degrees thus unable to pay the loan back.

Also, 45% of college students make little progress during the first two years of a four-year degree, as mentioned by sociologists Richard Arum of New York University and Josipa Roksa of the University of Virginia in their new book, “Academically Adrift.”



So while higher education or 4-year college degree is the key to success for most people, it has a 50% failure rate. Students drop out of college because of not having a clear direction, class-scheduling difficulties, too long a time to complete the degree and financial considerations among other reasons.

So what is the solution? Being an educator for 20 years for IT training, I cannot offer any solution for academic-oriented degrees such as History or Political Science. But at least for IT or other technology-related degrees, the solution is an upside down higher education model. What it means is that instead of teaching general education courses in the first two years of college, we do the following: a) Enroll only students who have aptitude to succeed in the IT field. This can be accomplished by using an aptitude test; b) Teach students job related skills first within a short time, say 9-12 months, and help them to get certified by the industry organizations to increase their chances of getting a job with higher salaries; c) Students should be able to continue towards their degree by transferring credits and taking online courses while working in the field or after gaining some experience.

This model will improve graduation rate and reduce burden of college debt thus will give a better start in the career life. While this is a good solution for recent high school graduates interested in IT or technology-related courses, it may be the best option for (24-35 year old) adults who want to change a career and simply do not have 6 years to earn a degree while also working to make a living.

It is also good to know that computer jobs such as technical support or network administration that are among the fastest growing jobs in USA according to Labor Dept, are not among those that require a college degree. According to Forbes.com, Network Administration (along with Executive Chefs and Fashion Designers) is one of the Six-Figure Jobs that do not need a college degree (Kneale, Klaus. "Six-figure Jobs you don't need a College Degree for" [Forbes.com](http://Forbes.com) Jan 12, 2009; data based on Network/Data Communications Managers with 8+ years' experience). The reason is that in each of these three professions, you need aptitude or natural ability to succeed more than anything else. Some training and certification (where necessary) can take you to a very high income level and you do not require a college degree.

The last thing I would like to share with young adults who are becoming more confused in the current economic realities, is that for most people, it is better to graduate with little or no debt than graduate with an Ivy or name brand college with a lifetime of debt, as concluded by Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus in their new book.

Contact:

Zafar Khizer, PC AGE Career Institute [zk@pcage.com](mailto:zk@pcage.com) or 201-761-0144

Zafar Khizer is founder and President of PC AGE Career Institute with locations in Jersey City, Edison and Parsippany. He earned a Master's degree in Computer Science from New Jersey Institute of Technology and has written several books on computer networking. Colleges and universities including New York University have used some of his books.