

Loan debts challenge worth of attending any college

I was looking at my college awards statement last week when my eyes came upon that dreaded section — student loans.

As my eyes scanned the paper and began matching the numbers up with their corresponding columns that list the cost per semester, I began to feel a stress that I knew couldn't simply be brushed off and ignored. The anxiety was legitimate because the costs were real.



BY TAYLOR HALLETT
STAFF WRITER

The weight of student loans has increasingly become a heavier burden for students in recent years. Many are questioning whether or not the costs of paying off these student loans outweigh the benefits of getting a college degree in the first place. According to The Huffington Post, the average American college student graduates with a debt from \$23,000 to \$27,000.

How did student loan debt get to be so bad?

"One reason is that the price of both private as well as state universities have been rising much faster than the rate of inflation, increasing the costs to students and their families," says Wesley Cohen, professor of economics and management at Duke University through an email interview. "One reason for this is the tightening of state budgets over the past decade or so."

Is this a cost that we can afford? Aren't we busy enough with the pertinence of our studies, the impact they have on our personal lives and their relevance to society, to be working two or even three menial jobs to be paying off these loans?

In order to find out more about student loan stress on campus, I conducted a poll of 50 Guilford students. I asked, after graduating, do you feel that you may be overwhelmed by the costs of paying off student loans? Sixty-two percent responded yes.

It is no surprise that 81 percent of students in America are asking for more student loan forgiveness programs, according to a recent article by Forbes (comically entitled "Dude, Where's My Student Loan Bailout?"). With the national student loan debt now spilling over a trillion dollars, one can't help but wonder where the government would get the money to create these loan forgiveness programs, especially if the money needed for them could be depending upon students to pay back their loans in the first place.

Has this issue arisen out of student complacency or government irresponsibility? Probably both.

Perhaps complacency isn't the right word, but nescience. Looking back, I now see that naivety is what guided my college selection process. I came to Guilford not thinking about loans but because of the integrated community, the creatively nurturing environment and the insightful and intelligent student body and faculty.

If I am only in college for the chance to hold a diploma in my hand at the end

of the tunnel, my efforts in academia are clearly in vain. They are in vain because the experiences I have had here are clearly contradictory in nature to the experiences I would have in the corporate world — the world that we are being funneled into, that looks first at the credentials and then maybe glances at the actual face behind them. This model creates an atmosphere where more students are only pursuing degrees that are the most profitable; some of our most revered disciplines could bite the dust both in terms of popularity and practicality.

"I'm not taking out that many loans," says Sarah, a CCE senior. "I know I can pay them off, even if it takes a while."

I wish I could say the same for myself. For those of us who are taking out a lot of loans, and are unaware of the balloon of debt that is growing over our heads, it would behoove us to be diligent.

Maybe we should even reconsider the worth of attending college in the first place. I know I am.

Dependents deserve respect too

BY EMILY CURRIE
STAFF WRITER

I am the 47 percent. I am your dependent. You can claim me on your taxes, honey, because you provide healthcare and income to my family. You owe it to me. Darn it, I deserve it.

That is what Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, thinks that people like me believe. I am a Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipient.

"There are 47 percent who are dependent upon government, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them," said Romney to a group of rich donors. In a secret video that has received enormous public outcry since its publication by Mother Jones, an independent news magazine and website, Romney calls people who receive public assistance 'a lost cause'."

Let's get one thing straight: we are not a 'lost cause' as Romney so eloquently put it. We do not believe the government owes us. We contribute to our communities in many positive ways. We should be treated with dignity and respect like everyone else.

Public assistance recipients span a wide array of social situations, ethnicities and demographics. We are working moms, students, elderly, single parents and disabled individuals.

We have dreams, we love our children, we volunteer for charities, we obey the law, we vote and — yes — many of us pay taxes. We are valuable members of the community.

Romney refers to people like me as "those people," as in, "My job is not to worry about those people."

Comments like that remind me of a time when black people were referred to as "those people" and not considered valuable human beings.

"I'll never convince them that they

should take personal responsibility and care for their lives," Romney said.

Never mind the fact that both my children are legally disabled and that I am a college student (which ain't cheap, honey) or that my husband works two jobs and earns just enough for us to barely reach the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

I run a charity called Hannah's Ministry. I collect donations such as food, clothing, household goods and school supplies, and give it to the less fortunate. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas I distribute donated holiday meals to those in need. At Christmas time, I also give donated toys and gifts to needy children. This is my way of contributing to my community and giving back.

I am in college so I can earn a degree and be able to become fully self-sufficient and take better care of my boys. To me, that shouts responsibility. But I guess Mr. Romney wears a different set of eyeglasses.

Romney is campaigning to strengthen the middle class. According to his campaign website, his five-point plan includes energy independence, giving Americans access to better schools and training programs, fair trade, reducing the deficit and supporting small businesses.

These are all things we certainly need to make this country stronger and stay the great country it is. But what about extending a hand to our neighbors?

My mom told me that, when she was growing up, neighbors looked out for one another. There was a strong sense of community. If a family member passed away, neighbors brought food over to their house. If someone was sick, neighbors cleaned their house for them. That era was built on strengthening one another.

We should look back and follow their example. In order to be a good leader, Mr. Romney, first you have to be a good follower.

We, the 47 percent, believe in ourselves and our country. Please, believe in us too.

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