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"Letters"

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that the two groups already differ in other ways that determine lifetime earnings.

Upon graduation, those intending to go on to college are already from more affluent families, have higher HS grades, more educated and influential parents, etc. How much of their higher lifetime earnings can be attributed to going to college vs. these other factors? Who knows.

Robert Spaulding
Yuma, Arizona

To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading Seth Forman's piece on online learning ("Online Learning and Higher Ed's Dark Secret," fall, 2020) but have a different take on it based upon about twenty years of experience teaching managerial economics at Old Dominion University. I have taught up to 500 students in a single class in a single semester. Typically, I have about fifty students "live" in front of me. Between fifty and 150 are located at ODU's Virginia Beach Center and these students pick me up via fully streamed video. Ditto smaller numbers of students at the University's Peninsula and Tri-Cities Centers. Other students stream me at community college locations, some of which are not in Virginia. Some

students are on ships at sea. Many students are at their homes if they have good broadband connections.

My lectures are recorded, and students can access those at their leisure. I have extensive PowerPoint slides that contain the essence of my presentations that students can access as well.

Each week, students have a practical short essay problem to do. The bases for these are real world situations taken from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* and other publications. I have two mid-term exams plus a final; all are essay.

The bottom line, however, is that at the end of each class, I do a multiple regression analysis of student performance. It is a control group analysis since I have a live group of students in front of me as well as the distance students. I must tell you that in twenty years, the analysis has never detected a statistically significant difference between the performances of online students and those who are live in front of me. Factors that matter much more statistically for academic performance in my classes include their SAT/ACT score, how old they are, if they are a military veterans, and others. So, I beg to differ re: the potential of online instruction to work.

Against this, however, it is not inexpensive to pursue the model I have outlined. While I doubt that most institutions and most professors are doing as much as I am, if they do so, then this generates costs. Hence, I do not see major financial economies to be had in online instruction when it is done well. Online instruction will, however, permit a wider range of students to access higher education. This advantage applies especially during COVID times.

James V. Koch
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 author of *Runaway College Costs* (Johns Hopkins, 2020)

Seth Forman responds:

Thanks to Robert Spaulding for his careful reading the article and for commenting. He makes, of course, excellent points and any complete analysis of the college earnings premium would have to control for the factors he mentions. There are, on average, determinative differences between college-goers and high school graduates that reflect on lifetime earnings.

Professor Koch “begs to differ” with my article on distance learning, but I think we are in almost complete agreement. Professor Koch believes online learning is equivalent to in-person classes in terms of academic content, finding no “statistically significant difference between the performances of online students and those who are live in front of me.” I agree, and even go one step further to say “I can attest that my online students on average learn more course material than my in-person students.” But there is a problem with online learning that professor Koch does not acknowledge: namely, it makes college attendance too easy.

My point in the article was that employer preference for college graduates (as opposed to high school graduates or dropouts) stems from the non-cognitive skills (perseverance, sociability, conformity) attending college in-person signals to employers. Completely online learning fails to send employers the same signal because it reduces the sociability, rule-following, and patience required.

It’s not course content that is missing necessarily with online learning. I maintain that online learning fails to provide students the opportunity to demonstrate they can successfully navigate complex social

systems, something they will need in almost all jobs.

Seth Forman
 Managing Editor
Academic Questions

To the Editor:

I was appalled at the lack of historical knowledge on the part of Lauren Weiner in her article “Statues Come Down” in the Fall 2020 issue. Her comments on Nathan Bedford Forrest showed a blind acceptance of the prevailing narrative (that he was a racist).

Bedford did indeed form the Ku Klux Klan and was the first grand wizard, but it was a defensive group against the marauding postwar “reconstructionists” in the south; it was not an anti-black organization. When it turned anti-black he wrote in his General Order Number 1, “Whereas the Order of the KKK is in some localities being perverted from its original honorable and patriotic purposes; And whereas, such a perversion in the Order is in some instances defeating the very objectives of its origin, and is becoming injurious instead of subservient to the public peace and public safety for which it was intended . . . It is therefore ordered and decreed, that the masks and costumes of this order be entirely

abolished and destroyed. And every Grand Cyclops shall assemble the men of his Den and require them to destroy in his presence every article of his mask and costume and at the same time shall destroy his own.”

I expect at such a fine publication as *Academic Questions*, its writers would get their facts straight.

Nicholas B. Gilliam
 Dallas, Texas

Lauren Weiner responds:

Supposedly, according to Nicholas B. Gilliam, the Ku Klux Klan was not an anti-black organization but an anti-Radical Republican one. In fact, it was both, and from its inception. About that inception, Nathan Bedford Forrest—the former Confederate general and the group’s unofficial head—was cagey. To read the Tennessean’s testimony before the U.S. Senate of June 27, 1871 is to encounter an exercise in obfuscation.

Before I consider that, some background. Northern newspapers and journals extensively covered vigilante activities against the freedmen (and against the carpetbaggers, and the Southern Unionists or “scalawags”). The Reconstruction military authorities and the Congress investigated these activities. Allen Guelzo quotes from